Article

Conceptualising 'Idealism' and 'Identity' in Bangladeshi Writing in English: A Reading of Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim*

Maharshi Dayanand University
Research Journal ARTS
2021, Vol. 20 (1) pp.31-44
ISSN 0972-706X

http://www.mdu.ac.in/Journals/about.html

Munira Salim
Lecturer and Head, Department of English, Stewart Science College (Affiliated to Utkal University) Cuttack, Odisha

Abstract

The Liberation War of 1971 is a landmark, not only in the political history of Bangladesh, but also in the socio-cultural life of the people as it resulted in the transformation of the identity of the nation. Balancing the story of the nascent nation against that of a fractured family, Tahmima Anam's second novel *The Good Muslim* (2011) teases out the question, as to how it feels to its denizens when 'Liberty' is questioned by individual idealism. Focussing on the metamorphosis taking place on the identity and cultural issues of the 'Bengali' Muslim youths who joined the War of Liberation, as depicted Anam, this proposed paper is an attempt to look beyond the violence and traumas of the War of Independence and to explore those identities for an understanding of the values of the new nation. The paper would attempt to locate through Maya and Sohail Haque, (the two major characters of the narrative) the doctrines of Islam that gets entwined with their Bengali origin. The paper would probe into the psychological depths of the characters and trace the degree of individual transformations contributing to the identity of the 'Good' Muslim'.

Keywords: Liberation War, Identity, Language, Radicalism, Transformations.

Corresponding author:
Munira Salim, Lecturer and Head, Department of English, Stewart Science College (Affiliated to Utkal University) Cuttack, Odisha

Introduction

Postmodern fiction as a distinguished genre of literary articulation has been able to substantially address issues and perspectives under newer and broader lights. Themes such as war, victory, death and loss, trauma of war-all have found place in literary articulations from pre-colonial times. But, the sub-genre of postcolonial post-war fiction gained momentum mainly during the postmodern period, bringing along multiple issues. In the Western context, the horrors of World War II and the aftermaths of the holocaust formed the basic plot of post-war fiction writing. To reiterate upon some such novels, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1947) stand as apt examples from the Western perspective.

In the similar vein, postmodernism and postcolonial post-war issues started to be contextualized in the eastern continent of Asia. The devastating atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the end of World War II, but it initiated a literary renaissance in the history of Japanese literature. The historical fiction *Black Rain* (1966) by Ibuse Masuji is a substantial example.

Literature and Civil War

But literature depicting the violence and trauma of 'civil' war is a rather unique phenomenon. There are quite sufficient postcolonial post-war (in the sense of civil war) literary articulations in Nigeria after the Biafra (1967-1970), in South Africa after the movement of Apartheid (1912-1992), in Sri Lanka during the LTTE days (1976-2009). From such collision of historical consciousness with the art of fiction writing, evolved creative giants, one among them being the Nobel Laureate from South Africa, Nandine Gordimer (Nobel prize winner in 1991 for literature). The convention into which Gordimer puts the concept of anti-apartheid movement blending along her literary knack, makes Stephen Clingman (1992) remark: "Coming as it did with the apparent ending of apartheid, it was another kind of vindication of the triumph of art over oppression, of the ethics of writing in the context of evil, of baring the truths of the present and imagining alternative futures" (pp. ix-x).

To discuss the Nigerian civil war literature, Nwahunanya in his editorial remark of the book *A Harvest from Tragedy* (1997) quite emphatically states the remarkable capability of war literature upon the war affected society:

> In its re-creation and interpretation of history Nigerian war literature has enriched the existing body of historical writing from Africa, especially historical fiction. In this way the writers have made literature continue to function as the mirror of society and criticizing its pitfalls, the war literature also serves as a compass for social redirection. (p. 14)

Subsequently, the Liberation War of 1971in present day Bangladesh captured the attention of literary artists to articulate civil war-literature through the genre of fiction writing. However, after a serious interrogation on the resources available on 'Bangladeshi writing in English', it was found that the materials were quite inadequate. Author's[i] personal search in the libraries of different universities of Dhaka, for 'Bangladeshi writing in English', especially on the issues revolving around the Liberation War was found quantitatively less. Few writings that did catch the attention of the author in those libraries were: the novels *Black Ice*, (originally written in Bengali as *Kalo Borof* by Mahumudul Haque, published in the year 1977, was later translated into English by Mahmud Rahman and was published in 2012) and *Green Fire* by Shahidul Alam, published in 2010, and a collection of short stories called *Fault Lines: Stories of 1971* by Niaz Zaman, published in 2017.

Bangladeshi Writing in English: Nature, Scope and Influence of The Civil War

Narrowing in to the scope of the paper, the basic thrust is to implore the contribution of 'Bangladeshi Writing in English' in conceptualising 'civil war' and how far is it successful in extricating the idea of the South-Asian history in progress. Also, the paper would encapsulate the affect of war upon a nation (here Bangladesh), which stands as the 'dystopia' where the individual identity of the common denizens are put to question. For this, Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim* (2011) will be taken into consideration. This novel, the second in a trilogy authored by Anam would basically help to configure the spectrum of perspectives involved in the nascent nation after the nine-month civil war.

The moral rupture that was caused due to political unrest in the nation which finally divided Pakistan, may be mainly due to Pakistan's election of 1970. The nation witnessed a huge electoral success of the Awami League which prioritized the formation of the government in East Pakistan and initiated the conflict with West Pakistan. Hence, their army started entering the eastern province and the *muktibahini*[ii] also began to mobilize. The fierce war that broke out between the two wings of Pakistan came to be popularly known as the Liberation War. For the detailed cause of the retaliation, Yasmin Saikia (2011) extends a better insight:

> The disproportionate allocation of resources in favour of West Pakistan; the political ambition of the West Pakistani elite; the rabid demands of political Islam in the public sphere accompanied by further marginalization of minority communities, such as the Hindus in East Pakistan; the ethnic tensions between the Bengalis and the Punjabis; and the interference and support of India motivating the Bengalis to secede from Pakistan are factors that lie at the heart of the clashes leading to the outbreak of wars. (p. 4).

The material as well as the non-material loss cost high upon each and every inmate of the state. The postmodern critics speak volubly and substantially on this aftermath of war. Saikia's observation of the postmodern, post-war perspective specifies the present context: "Also, at times the sheer power of violence is such that it can devastate survivors' ability to speak, according to Holocaust scholars" (Felman and Agamben cited in Saikia, p. 8). Taking this postmodern stand, this article will raise multifaceted issues that lead to the complexities in re-moulding the identities of the war victims and survivors.

The post-war socio-political reminiscences could better be traced in *The Good Muslim*, by paying especial emphasis on Anam's debut novel *A Golden Age* (2007). The basic focus of *A Golden Age* incorporates the contribution of the common citizens in the creation of Bangladesh, while *The Good Muslim* centres on the aftermaths of 1971. Both the novels are third person narratives and the traumas of the civil war have been captured mainly from the perspectives of women. In case of *A Golden Age* the narration centres around Rehana Haque and in *The Good Muslim*, the sequel to the former sets Rehana's daughter Maya as the major character in the story. Thus, Anam's basic focus of the novel remains, from the insider's perspective (by taking women at the centre stage), while the major bulk of the post-war novels generally portray 'men' at the centre-stage. Anam specialises in providing insights by replicating traumas of war on the war bitten 'heroines' of the nation.

However, what is lacking in Anam's work is the detailed presentation of the scenario of the Liberation War. It is probably due to the lack of first-hand experience on Anam's side, that the reader has to assume many events and incidents related to the war. On the absence of reality of the war-situation, Jannat Ara Shifa (2015) has a reasonable understanding: "The protagonist of the novel Mrs Rehana Haque is based on her grandmother's life in 1971. As the author herself had not been born during the 1971 war, she had to rely on the oral story from her grandmother and also on some basic research on the war" (p. 36). Therefore, Anam in this context becomes the interlocutor, trying to fill the historical abyss of the war aftermaths in the social as well as in the political realms. In the process of this fictionalising of history, she might be trying to emphasise the fractures in the representations of the events and traumas of the time. Antony Easthope (1998, 2001) while discussing the postmodern perspectives, comes close to the situational ambiguity of Anam, as far as the complexities of representation is concerned: "What now appears to be lost is any critical distance on culture and the social formation which would allow collective action for change; the fear is that 'we are submerged' as it becomes ever more difficult to represent our present to ourselves" (p. 23).

Paradoxically, this lack of war insight on the part of Anam provides ample scope for the

readers and critics to expand their boundaries of imagination regarding the effects of war and its aftermath, hence making Bangladeshi Writing in English more intriguing. Secondly, by portraying women as the chief actors on stage, the basic perspective is to remain rooted at the ground level and make an intense interrogation towards the formation of those identities that are entrapped in the politics of war, in a new born nation that brings in new religio-political mayhem. The character portrayal of Rehana Haque, mother of Maya and Sohail Haque substantiates the issue of socio-cultural displacement of a widow, who has to bear all the odds in face of war turmoil, in order to safeguard her children from all kinds of external (social) as well as internal (familial) threats. The political division of East (Bangladesh) and West Pakistan becomes symbolic for Rehana in her personal life, when she legally loses the custody of her kids after her husband's death. Her poverty and helplessness forces her to give her kids away to their paternal uncle, Faiz to Lahore (capital of divided Pakistan). However, after few years she wrests her kids back home from her childless brother and sister-in-law's guardianship who being childless, "looked hungrily at the children" (*A Golden Age*, p. 16).

War Insight and Pyshological Dimesion in Tahmima Anam's Perspective

This event gives critical insight to identify the psychological displacements in the characters of Maya and Sohail Haque in *The Good Muslim*. In *A Golden Age*, 'Lahore' was the metaphoric exile for Maya and Sohail, while Rehana had to fight all odds and restore them back to (Dhaka) their paternal land. This strange feeling of restoration gets back upon Maya and Sohail in *The Good Muslim* when they fight against the dictatorial leadership of Pakistan (West) and help restore liberty and peace to Bangladesh (East Pakistan) after the Liberation War in 1972. Secondly, 'Lahore' the political capital of the divided Pakistan (where the two were taken away), stands as a symbol of tyranny and social injustice for them, against which they find a cause to fight. Hence, Maya and Sohail stand as the quintessence of the youth, victimised by the socio-political chaos of war.

The Good Muslim, moves forth to foreground the hopes and aspirations of the two children of Rehana regarding the liberated identity of their new born nation, and it intensely replicates futuristic notions of the 'Golden Age' on the young minds. However, this futuristic notion of the 'Golden Age' dwindles just a decade after they returned from war. They don't find their nation as they had dreamt of after the liberation. Maya's observation of Dhaka after she returns from Rajshahi after twelve years indicates the dwindling of expectation that the youth of the time had:

> But, as she stepped out of the station at Dhaka, she saw that everything was loud and crude, as though someone had reached over and raised the volume. It smelled of people and garbage and soot. She saw how tall everything had grown - some buildings

> reached five or six storeys - and how her rickshaw-puller struggled to weave through the thicket of cars on Mirpur Road, horns blaring impatiently. (*The Good Muslim*, p. 13)

The participation of youth during the political unrest is quite substantially depicted by Anam. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2013) records the same story:

> Youthful dissidence, involving students and non-students alike, is a world-wide phenomenon. It is shaped in every instance by local conditions, but nonetheless there are striking similarities....Student protest is visible, highly vocal, increasingly militant and feared by many to be interconnected world-wide...Student Power is no longer a chimera (Original emphasis; qtd in "The Turning Point", p.15).

Srinath Raghavan, in this context acknowledges the role of students in initialising the uprising in Pakistan and further declares the 1968 tumult as "the most successful of all revolts in that momentous year" (p. 15).

However, the depiction of the great historical event in *The Good Muslim* doesn't stagnate to identify the people involved. It goes way ahead, that is twelve years after the historical civil war. Perhaps the same reason instigates Anam not to maintain chronology in narrating the events. She introduces the plot depicting the year 1984, when Maya has returned to Dhaka from Rajshahi after 12 years, a flashback takes the reader back to 1972, one year after Bangladesh wrested its liberation from Pakistan. Anam does this probably to set the consequences of war explicit and perhaps to decipher the short and long term traumas the warriors underwent. This short, as well as long term trauma is explicit in the depiction of Sohail's changed attitude towards life. The same Sohail, whose energy and zest for life were evident in *A Golden Age*, gets strangely transformed after his return from the frontier and he seems to have created a cocoon of seclusion, under the garb of religious fundamentalism.

Maya on the other hand clings on to her secular ideologies. Reading Maya's character intensely, reveals that she inwardly struggles hard to keep her secular and Marxist ideologies intact, and rejects any belief that seems to threat her conviction. The sudden Islamisation of the Bengali Muslims, inwardly disturbs her secular convictions. She is completely nonplussed to find how in the post war communities, social hypocrisy and political ignorance has deeply seeped in, where people, at the party organised by her friends, are found drinking 'whisky' (prohibited in Islam) and exclaiming in between, words like *'Innalillah', 'Alhamdulillah', 'Yalla'*, etc. Maya is further disgusted to know that no one in the party is actually interested to speak or even remember the 'old days'.

Indeed, Maya's character is quintessential of the many women who fought hand-in-hand

with men to liberate themselves from the tyrannies of the Western wing of Pakistan. Abantee Harun (2005) substantiates the multiple roles played by the 'war heroines' thus: "

> Their forms of protest were typical and marked with cultural symbols. They also took active part in the processions of Martyr Day, in the student movements of 1965 and 1969. In the turbulent days of March 1971, women were pro-active in the protests, processions, and meetings, donation for the victims and in organizing people of the country. In the Liberation War, they contributed to the war in different ways. Many of them fought directly against the Pakistan Army (Pak Army) along with their co-male fighters; many provided substantial support, which is nevertheless considered secondary, rather than an essential part of the war (pp. 103-04).

Maya, like many other women, found solidarity with the cause, and in her own way joined the struggle. Being practically decisive, she opts her career as a doctor. Her humanitarian ideologies and preference to remain at the ground level makes her admit: "'I was a year away from finishing. I completed the internship at Rajshahi Medical. Then I just became a simple country doctor. But that's what people need out there, someone to help them deliver babies'" (*TGM* 51). She joins the liberation war as 'the crusading doctor', aborting babies of the rape victims and also trying to rehabilitate them from the aftermaths of such traumas.

Secularism Verses Fundamentalism: The Tug of War

The major threat that continued to overshadow the common people of the nation even after its liberty from Pakistan, was its changing religio-political ideologies. In 1971, Bangladesh was declared as a secular state, but under the martial law of Hussain Mohammed Ershad starting from 1982-90, Islamic fundamentalism grew and finally in 1988 the nation was declared as the Islamic nation. A report in a web newsletter called Global Security.org states that:

> Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad assumed power in a bloodless coup in March 1982. Like his predecessors, Ershad suspended the constitution and - citing pervasive corruption, ineffectual government, and economic mismanagement - declared martial law. The following year, Ershad assumed the presiding, retaining his postions as army chief and CMLA (Chief Martial Law Administrator)... in June 1988, a controversial constitutional amendment making Islam Bangladesh's state religion (Original emphasis; "Hussain Mohammed Ershad, 1982-90").

This tug-of-war of the secular verses the religious resulted in the formation of the axis that divided the ideologies of the then Bangladeshi identities. The same religio-political tumult seems to lay heavy upon the characters etched out by Anam. Further, in the novel, Maya's return to Dhaka after 12 years, happens to be the year 1984, i.e. two years after the

ascendance of the Martial Law Administrator, President Ershad and quite often Maya addresses Ershad as 'the dictator'.

However, quite diligently, Anam tries to blur the boundaries of fundamentalism. She does this by sketching the identity of Rehana. The 'in-betweeness' in Rehana's character makes her an epitome of a 'Good Muslim', and abiding both the religious and secular duties in a 'matter of course' way unlike Sohail, who quite influenced by the religious uprising, preferred joining to *Ijtemas*[iii] and changing his attire, just to comply with his guilt consciousness and hope for redemption. On the other hand, Rehana is found (in both the narratives), following religious obligations as a part of her daily duties. She is quite often found spreading the rug and doing her timely *Salah*, as is the daily and casual practice of any Muslim. But unlike Sohail, she doesn't turn to God in the hope of redemption, particularly. For her, prayer is a means of spiritual contentment and inner bliss. The lines following, justifies her identity as a believer from a different line than that of Sohail's:

> She prayed every day, at least once, at Magreb, the most important prayer-time of the day. When Iqbal died, she had used the prayer to give her something to do, something that didn't immediately remind her of the cruel hand she'd just been dealt, and she was unashamed about the solace it had given her. Life had punished her enough; the God she prayed to was not a punishing, not a vengeful, brutal God; He was a God of comfort, a God of consolation. She accepted the relief with entitlement, with confidence, and in turn she demanded very little from Him - no absolution, no change of destiny. She knew, from experience, that this could not be achieved. (*A Golden Age*, pp. 162-63)

She is a stern believer in the protective power of *Aytul Kursi*[iv], in fact Rehana was the one who read out verses from the Quran in order to relinquish the traumatised war-returned Sohail. Apart from her religious convictions, she was also quite into the shoes of the contemporary revolutions, as she's an amalgamation of a Muslim identity belonging to South Asia (Bangladesh). Hence, she depicts a common Bengali woman, who despite being a Muslim, doesn't choose to wear a *hijab*, and prefers working outside and even watching American TV shows like *Magnum* and *P.I.* For Rehana, religion is an integrated part of her identity, yet she has her part of secular beliefs too. Her deep friendship with the Sengupta's (her Hindu tenants) is a case in point. Her convictions and life style quite appropriately fits in the contemporary commonly practised secularism, as well as religion. This statement could be well justified by Sufia M. Uddin's notion (2006): "The secular does not merely represent an absence of the religious in the public sphere but rather constitutes a move to transcend the differences of religious group identity in the public sphere, which happens in a number of ways and to different degrees globally" (p. 12).

Language and Identity Politics

Language plays a crucial role in the formation of identity of a person. But Bangladesh has always been in confusion regarding its major lingua franca. Before it was separated from India, the majority of the Bangladeshi spoke Bengali, but after its separation, Urdu was imposed as their official language. This language discrepancy also brought resistance among the Bangladeshis, which further instigated them to revolt against the Pakistani domination. Interestingly in *The Good Muslim*, Rehana is found to be an ambiguous amelioration of three geo-political domains, namely: 'India', 'Pakistan' and 'Bangladesh'. Hence, she is the queer exemplary of "language", "ethnicity" and "adaptability". Precisely, she is the best example of multi-cultural identities that played their own parts in her life to mould her character so as to face the situations in the way she did as a young widow in times of social and political turbulence. Although she lives in Dhaka (as found in both the narratives), as it is her husband's place, it is not 'hers'. She is a native of Calcutta. Her sisters, as she is found reflecting, are in Karachi and her brother and sister-in-law in Lahore. The war that has torn her apart from her sisters is best depicted in the following way: "She imagined the letter she would write. Dear sisters, she would say. Our countries are at war; yours and mine. We are on different sides now. I am making pickles for the war effort. You see how much I belong here and not to you" (*A Golden Age*, p. 104).

The politics involved in the first language of the people living in Bangladesh is quite pertinent in case of Rehana. She is found to be originally a speaker of 'Urdu' with Bengali as her second language. The discrepancy with regard to language, as one of the basic factors incorporating the formation of identity is best depicted through Rehana's assumptions:

> She spoke, with fluency, the Urdu of the enemy. She was unable to pretend, as she saw so many others doing, that she could replace her mixed tongue with a pure Bengali one, so that the Muslim salutation, *As-Salaam Alaikum* was replaced by the neutral *Adaab*, or even *Nomoshkar*, the Hindu greeting. Rehana's tongue was too confused for these changes. She could not give up her love of Urdu, its lyrical lilts, its double meanings, its furrowed beat (*A Golden Age*, p. 47).

Though one of the major perspectives of the narrative dedicates to the friction caused by the secular and the religious. Anam's central idea is perhaps not to objectify the 'Good Muslim' or the 'Bad Muslim'. Rather, she is trying to project Bangladesh as the central geographical entity that fought against its left wing, predominantly on the basis of 'language' and 'ethnic' discrepancy, but after it gained liberty, faltered to upkeep the social ideologies intact, as it had, before liberation.

War and its reminiscences bring in multiple damages. It traumatises its denizens to such an extent that the vision of social rehabilitation and adaptability is blurred. In this respect,

Sohail stands as a distinguished example. The killing that he witnessed as the guerrilla during the war, makes him so much guilt conscious that makes him wonder: "I've dodged so many bullets that now I'm immune?" (*The Good Muslim*, p. 67) He happens to be one of the most talented speakers during his college days, he was in fact, "Twice the All-Pakistan Debating Champion" (p. 78), but quite ironically his wit and intelligence became the cause to lead him to the war, "The event that led him to become president of his university hall, and the object of much speculation among the girls, and eventually a protestor on the streets, shouting through a megaphone against the army. It was the day that led him, finally to the war" (p. 79). On the contrary, the same Sohail and his smart ways become quite ambiguously altered after he returns from war. Once loud and clear man now prefers few words to speak. Rehana and Maya could quickly identify, the change in him after he returns from war: "It didn't take them long to see that he had fallen into himself - become a man of few and exact words, fastidious" (p. 66).

Postcolonial identity and the troubled gender

The characters that Anam is displaying, whether it is of Sohail or Maya or Rehana, obliquely fall under the postcolonial ideology, where 'identity' and the issues of its representation is considered to be of prime importance. Considering the postcolonial perspectives of the present narrative, Christin Hoene (2015)aptly quotes Ajit Maan:

> [a]n essential component of post-colonial identity is preliminary deconstruction of what one has been taught about who one is. Post-colonial agency is exercised by undermining traditional identity constructions and processes of self-representation. The post-colonial may engage in subversive identity performances or parodies of the Master voice. The method of the post-colonial subject is performative re-association across borders, languages, and conceptual systems. (p. 103)

The incident that completely shuts Sohail in his secluded life is his affair with Piya, one of the war-victims during the time. She had been captivated, raped and then her hair being shaved off. Being physically and mentally devastated, Piya turned down Sohail's proposal for marriage, as she was feeling herself incapable of starting life anew due to pregnancy. Maya and Rehana had met Piya earlier in Women's Rehabilitation Centre, and witnessed Piya's plight at the clinic. Rehana points out Piya's condition: "'She wanted she wanted to get rid of it. She was afraid of the operation, she wasn't sure....And you know, a few days later, she was gone. She disappeared'" (*The Good Muslim*, p. 141).

The uneasy silence that prevailed after the war is best depicted by the characters, mainly of Sohail (as the man who returned from the war) and from Piya (as the woman who was a rape victim, during the war). This uneasy silence is quite substantially justified by Saikia (2011): "The troublesome memories that produce unease and even a sense of guilt do not

become a part of the 'truth collection' (p. 4). Maya expected a detailed account from Sohail after he returns from the war, but Sohail seems quite lost with his own self: "Those first weeks Maya waited every evening for him to tell her about the war, hoping he would begin his story as soon as Ammoo had said goodnight and taken the lamp away, telling them both not to stay up too late." (*The Good Muslim* p. 66) But Maya waited and waited for Sohail to open up, but his silence made her understand that "...he had no intention of telling her anything, that he was going to keep it all to himself and parse it out over the years, and in the meantime it would lie between them, silent and angry" (p. 67). Piya on the other hand, hesitates to speak anything when Sohail insists her to forget everything and start life anew: "She grew silent, but they could hear her breathing, as though the words were struggling to get out of her and she was struggling to keep them in" (p. 76).

Subsequently, through the character of Piya, Anam tries to address some of the feminist issues that involved during the war. She shows her serious concern towards the issue of dislocation of feminine identities caused as the aftermath of the war. She lays especial emphasis on the plight of many such women like Piya, who suffered intolerably in the name of the liberation against tyranny, and in this case Piya could be considered as a case study in the narrative.Anam, thus points out: "Some had been raped in their villages, in front of their husbands and fathers, others kidnapped and held in the army barracks for the duration of the war" (p. 69). The Father of The Nation (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) declared them 'war heroines', but they found no place in society or even at their homes. Moreover, despite the fact that the rape victims were declared the 'war heroines' Saikia (2011) informs that only a couple of them got proper recognition, which marginalised the contribution of women in the war:

> Only two women thus far have been recognised as muktijoudhas - Taranum Bibi and Dr.Sitara Begum. The countless other women who fought, supported, and actively facilitated the war are unsung heroes whose silence and inability to claim their place in the annals of Bangladesh's history is a telling reminder of the marginalisation of women during and after the liberation of Bangladesh (p. xix).

The stigma that they received even after the war seems equally unbearable for them as they were not allowed to enter their homes after being raped. Their circumstance is overwhelming enough to obliterate their existential norms. Many of these even left their nation, married and migrated to Pakistan with the Pakistani soldiers, oblivious of the consequences of migrating to the newly divided side of the nation. When insisted by the volunteers to stay back, they vent out their anger thus: "One Stepped forward. 'They said they don't want us (family members). Where are we supposed to go? What do we eat?'....Another woman spoke up. 'We don't want to be heroines. We are ashamed. We

want to leave our shame behind, start again' (*The Good Muslim* pp. 69-70).

The true identity of A 'Good Muslim'

What may be considered as one of the charms of Anam's narration in *The Good Muslim* is how she tackles the multi-dimensional and psycho-social dynamics of identity amongst the common people of the nation, particularly those who belong to South Asia, where religious dogmas as well as secular doctrines play apparently parallel roles. The insights that the war brought to the victims as well as to the witnesses may provide a clear understanding of the fractures culminating to the humanitarian ethos, where religious fanaticism and political motives undermine the basic notion of humanity. Despite the instinctual political trappings, human beings are especially possessed with the unique power of rehabilitation and social adaptability, where after any personal or social mayhem human beings prefer to rest in peace and hope. Anam brings a climax to *The Good Muslim*, where in a congregation, the war victims are made to speak about the past events, so that they overcome their long-standing traumas of the violence of the War. Anam even points out the contribution of the historical writer, Jahanara Imam, who at this congregation is vociferously demanding restitution from the war criminals and justice to the victims.

Hence, preservation of human rights is the duty of every individual. Peaceful sustenance is the fundamental right of an individual and a breach of it in any respect may prove hazardous to the whole nation, as is the case represented in this essay. Therefore, it is the responsibility at the individualistic level to preserve the right of others so that a harmonious existence of all could be possible.

Conclusion

Connecting the Liberation War with the concept of human rights would not only be suggestive of the closure of the disturbing aftermaths of the war, but also would be connotative of the (re)forming of one's identity to a higher order, irrespective of any diversity relating to class, gender, race, etc., and paying concern to whatever is kind, caring, loving, gentle, forgiving, cooperative and fair attitude: the attributes which, in the present context, would define the identity, in its true sense of a 'Good' Muslim.

Notes

[i] Author (Munira Salim) had been to Dhaka to present paper in the 8th Belta International Conference, held from 12-14 January, 2018. Her visit to Bangladesh enabled her to access different libraries of Dhaka, particularly the central libraries of the Dhaka University and the Independent University of Bangladesh respectively. For this opportunity, she owes her debt to Prof Harunur Khan (President of Belta) for inviting her to the Conference. She acknowledges Prof. Towhid Bin Muzzaffar, Head, Department of English,

Independent University of Bangladesh for helping her relay her research in its proper way. She also has her great obligation towards Mr. Muhammad Hossam Haider Chowdhury, Librarian, Independent University of Bangladesh and Prof Zabed Ahmed , department of Information Science and Library Management, University of Dhaka, in helping her access their respectable libraries, collect invaluable ideas and materials and to work hand-in-hand with her in order to help achieve success in the area of research in 'Bangladeshi Writing in English'.

[ii] The Mukti Bahini, translates as 'Freedom Fighters', or liberation army, also known as the Bangladesh Forces. It is a popular Bengali term which refers to the guerilla resistance movement formed by the Bangladeshi military and civilians during the War of Liberation that transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971.

[iii] Ijtema is an Islamic congregation. It is an essential part of the Tablighi Jamaat around the world as it plays a significant role on the lives of Muslims.

[iv] Aytul Kursi is one of the most revered verses of the Holy Quran. It appears as the 255th ayat of Surah Baqarah. The reason why it is given the protective power is because, in this verse, the Almighty Allah has elaborately defined His might and glory. It is believed that continuous recitation would bring a person into the direct protection of Allah.

Work cited

Anam, T. (2007). *A Golden Age*. John Murray Publishers.

Anam, T. (2011). *The Good Muslim*. Great Britain: Canongate Books.

Chambers, C. (2011). *British Muslim Fictions: Interview with Contemporary Writers*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chinyere, N., ed. (1997). *A Harvest from Tragedy: Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Civil War Literature*. Oweri: Springfield.

Clingman, S. (1992). *The Novels of Nandine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. (2nd Ed.). The United States of America: University of Massachusetts Press.

Easthope, A. (1998, 2001). "Postmodernism and Critical and Cultural Theory". *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Stuart Sim. London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

"Hussain Mohammed Ershad, 1982-90." https://globalsecurity.org/military/world/bangladesh/pres-ershad.htm.Last modified 05.05.12.

Harun, A. (2005). "Gender and Nationalism: Reconstructing Women's Role." *Gender and Nationalism: Reconstructing Women's Role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh*.

Bangladesh. Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs.

Hoene, C. (2015). "Performing 'Englishness'". *Music and Identity in Postcolonial British South-Asian Literature*. New York. Taylor & Francis.

Raghavan, S. (2013). "The Turning Point." 1971: *A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*. England: Harvard University Press.

Saika, Y. (2011). "The Told and Untold Stories of 1971".*Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. Pakistan: Oxford University Press.

Shifa, J. A. (2015). *Construction of Womanhood: Reading Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), The God of Small Things (1997), A Golden Age (2007) and The Good Muslim (2011)*.

Bangladesh: Thesis submitted to the Brac University.

Uddin, S. M. (2006). *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation*. The United States of America: The University of North Carolina Press.