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AMBIVALENCE OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN THE POSTCOLONIAL HISTORY OF THE SUBCONTINENT: REPERCUSSIONS OF WAR AND REVOLUTION IN THE DOMESTIC SPACE OF BENGAL AS NARRATIVIZED IN TAHMINA ANAM'S *A GOLDEN AGE*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "Nation" is full of ambiguity and complications in postcolonial Indian subcontinent as one finds the schism prominent between the colonial ideology of religious nationalism, and the postcolonial assertion of cultural and linguistic identity. Pakistan, a country born out of the undivided British India in order to cope with the fundamental callings of Islamic identities, collapsed partially within twenty four years of its creation as it did not sympathize across cultural, spatial and linguistic boundaries. The "Muktijuddho" (War of Independence) of Bangladesh is one of the deciding and epoch-making phenomena in the long history of this struggle between demanding identities. The paper gives a brief of the development of the age-old debate on the identity of the Bengali Muslims with a historical overview, and leads on to analyze the testament of time in Tahmina Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007), as the novel captures the events of Bangladesh's struggle for independence from a domestic and private point of view. The work reflects the political and revolutionary ideas of the age, and at the same time, depicts the struggle of a mother to shield her children from the rage of the State by sacrificing her own love.

KEYWORDS: War of Independence, Islamic Faith, Western Colonial Discourses

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of nation and national identity had always played an ambivalent role in the ideological frameworks of the Indian subcontinent. They had vacillated their foci through ages from religion to language to ethnicity. India, being an anthropological museum, has celebrated throughout history her cultural and religious hybridity and polyvalency. The concept of nation, as it is understood today, had been imported by the Europeans, and unquestionably, was a part of the unfinished Enlightenment Project. The prominent schism between the subcontinental idea of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and the White Eurocentric politico-commercial discourse of "Nation" has created lots of complications and confusions in the post-colonial history of the subcontinent.

In the turbulent history of the civil war of East-Pakistan (March to December, 1971) and the creation of Bangladesh we can discern the continuing after-effects of the already-disseminated colonial discourse of religious nationalism at war with the unprecedented postcolonial reclaiming of cultural and linguistic identity on behalf of the Bengalis of East-Pakistan. Pakistan failed because of her general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic differences, which is of course, the basic postcolonial demand. People of East-Pakistan fought against the second

colonization to redefine their Bengali identity from its marginalized status and otherness and exposed the bare limitations of the West-Pakistani "grand-narratives" and "truth claims" concerning their Urdu and Punjabi Islamic culture. This radical questioning of Urdu as the "normalized" Islamic language and superior culture represents the most illustrative example of the postmodern "incredulity towards meta-narratives" that actually took place in postcolonial subcontinent.

Tahmina Anam's *A Golden Age* records the conflicting ideological forces of 1970s East-Bengal and their repercussions on the private domestic sphere in a magnificent way. Her debut novel captures the true essence of the "time" and illuminates the ambiguous shifts between religious and cultural nationalism as they exert their effects on the process of postcolonial nation building.

Focussing on the treacherous shifts in the power dynamics that took place in Bengal throughout the last two centuries, one would notice how the English colonizers had manipulated Hindus and Muslims against each other in order to accomplish colonial benefits. Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' (1835) aimed for the creation of a native servant class who would "mimic" the Britishers "in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect" (Minute on Education) but negate the indigenous voices and cultures. The history of nineteenth century Bengal, precisely of the socio-cultural revolutions that, we call today "Bengal Renaissance" was predominantly the history of Bengali Hindu upper caste people, who through their exposure to the European culture, education and mercantile strategies developed into a rich, educated and dominating class at the end of the century. Contrarily, the Muslims of Bengal, the former rulers, maintained their cultural, religious and political distance from both the English and the newly enlightened Hindu community. The nouveau riche upper class Bengali Hindus contributed a lot in the development of Bengali language, culture, literature and music, while the lower class Hindus and Muslims remained as backward classes because of their suicidal strategies. Interestingly, the important Hindus of Calcutta supported the British during the First Great War of Independence in 1857 because their affluence and prosperity were byproducts of the British colonial rule in India. But surprisingly, after a few decades, the educated enlightened Hindus started to see through the Western colonial discourses and developed within themselves a new and unprecedented patriotism based on Hindu Nationalism. The new-born Hindu patriotism found expression in the Hindu Mela (1867), various patriotic songs eulogizing the glorious past of the Hindus, the foundation of Indian Association by Surendranath Banerjee in 1876, and ultimately in the Indian National Congress (founded in 1885). Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, one of the most famous literary personalities of the era, propagated the discourse of Ultra Hindu Nationalism in his novel *Ananda Math,* where the Muslims are held as enemies and outsiders ("jabans").

The British colonial strategy evolved to a new degree in order to cope with the increasing Hindu nationalism and revolutionary consciousness. The colonizers adopted the infamous "Divide and Rule" policy to negate the Hindu supremacy by empowering and educating the Muslim population. Although the British strategy of making the Bengali Hindus a minority through the partition of Bengal in 1905 ultimately failed in 1912, yet they had succeeded to perpetrate the sense of mutual hatred and division between the two communities, which inevitably led India to suffer the pangs of partition in 1947 following the dictates of the "Two Nation Theory" based on religion.

Debates concerning the language of Bengali Muslims date back to early twentieth century. The feeling of enmity and alienation from the part of the Bengali Hindu writers and the Hindu elements in the language Bengali discouraged the Muslims initially to accept Bengali as their own language and to assert themselves as Bengalis. Although, the census held

in 1872 records that only 1.5% of the Muslim population living in Bengal claimed that their ancestors had come to Bengal from outside. These Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslims used to live in Calcutta and other towns of Bengal and assert themselves as "Ashraf" or aristocrats. But 98% of the Muslims lived in the villages, spoke Bengali, and depended on land and river for their income.

The "Ashrafs" hated the Bengali-speaking rural Muslims as "Atrafs" or lower classes. When the Bengali Muslims began to improve their literary, political and social status, they started to doubt their linguo-cultural identity in comparison with the educated and aristocratic Urdu-speaking non Bengali Muslims. In all the traditional Islamic languages, such as in Urdu, Farsi and Arbi, the religious nuances were dominantly present, whereas Bengali, as a derivative of Sanskrit, and primarily developed in the hands of Hindu scholars and men of letters, predominantly exhibited Hindu overtones. Mollas and Moulavis opposed Bengali as "Kufri Jabaan" (the language of the Kafers) in order to maintain their religious hegemony perpetrated through Arbi, Farsi and Urdu. Yet, the enlightened Muslims of the early twentieth century felt the need to learn Bengali and realized that Bengali was the only medium which could be utilized to fulfill the needs of mass-education.

Maulana Akram, the chairman of Muslim Literary Conference 1918, spoke directly in his speech:

"There are many utopian questions in the world. 'What is the mother-tongue of Bengali Muslims? Urdu or Bengali?' This question is the most utopian among them". (Ghulam Murshid's *Muktijuddha O Tarpor: Ekti Nirdoliyo Itihas.* P. 20)

In 1909, Hamed Ali wrote in the 'Basana' magazine:

"Whether our ancestors were from Arab, Persia, Afghanistan or Tatar; or they were Hindus from this country, we are Bengali now, our mother-tongue is Bengali…What would be more surprising and pathetic if we don't accept this country as our own where we have been living for seven hundred years". (Murshid P. 20)

These debates returned with new impetus in 1940s with the increasing demand for Pakistan. The process and extend of the Islamification of Bengali language became a new issue of concern. It is important to note that this period marks the polarization of Muslim community concerning the character of the language Bengali. Those, who supported the Islamification of Bengali, emphasized their religious identity over the cultural one. On the other hand, the liberals emphasized their linguo-cultural identity.

The novel *A Golden Age* is narrated principally from Rehana's perspective. Her identity can be traced in the contemporary East-Pakistani Bengali middle class milieu. Her caring husband, Iqbal, who had a successful insurance business, dies of heart-attack in front of their house at Dhanmondi, Dhaka. His last words were—"Maf kar do". Rehana's pain of widowhood appears more poignant to us as we come to know how rare is such a responsible and affectionate man in the contemporary East-Pakistani society. Anam narrates:

"Faiz (Rehana's brother in law) had never liked Rehana. It had something to do with Iqbal's devotion to her. Leaving her slippers outside the bathroom door when she went to bathe. Pressing her feet with olive oil. Speaking only in gentle tones. Everyone noticed; Faiz would say, 'Brother, you are spoiling your wife', and Mrs. Choudhury, who lived opposite their house in Dhanmondi, would sigh and declare, 'Your husband is a saint'."(p. 06)

We get a more clear picture when Mrs Choudhury says to Rehana, "At least you had a few good years. My bastard husband left me when I couldn't give him a son."(p. 10). This normalization of patriarchal barbarity is unquestionably a part of the contemporary socio-religious fabric, which interpreted the holy scriptures in its own ways.

Rehana's pains are multiplied a thousand times when, through a court verdict, her children Sohail and Maya are sent to Lahore in the care of Faiz and Parveen. Her losses find expression in her repeated haunting epistolary utterances: "Dear Husband, I lost our children today…Our children are no longer our children." (p. 05). Perhaps, their separation is a metaphor for the sense of alienation and estrangement that the East-Pakistani Bengali people felt under the stepmother-like rule of the Westerners.

To Marzia, Rehana's sister, who urges Rehana repeatedly to migrate to Karachi, all Bengalis are "Bungalis". She refers to them as a servant class. Rehana, whose mother tongue is Urdu, on the other hand, has adopted the lifestyle of the Bengalis so aptly that she cannot accept the Westerners' attitude. In Rehana, we see a perfect amalgamation of the two cultures. She loves the language Urdu, its "double meanings", its "lyrical lilts", yet, she identifies herself as a true Bengali. Anam perhaps portrays the ideal Pakistan in microcosm when she creates Rehana—a perfect assimilation of the two cultures, without the loss of integrity.

From the early days of the creation of Pakistan, the West-Pakistani Urdu-speaking rulers had always tried to enforce Urdu upon the Bengalis as a measure to unify Pakistan as a true Islamic nation. For them, Bengali was a language of the Hindus, the 'Kafers'. Ghulam Murshid, the famous Bangladeshi scholar and writer in his book *Muktijuddha O Tarpor: Ekti Nirdoliyo Itihas* says that as a marriage cannot be happy if only the religion is common, religion could not bring unity between the two wings of Pakistan. In one word, the base of Pakistan itself was weak. There was no strong thread to bind the two parts of Pakistan together. Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared on 21 March 1948 at Dhaka Racecourse Ground that Urdu would be the only national language of Pakistan. Then onwards, Bengali was not used in any of the important government works. The native language was absent in the postal stamps, money order forms, government notices and banknotes. The awkward West-Pakistani proposal that Bengali should be written in Arab characters was also cancelled by Bengali intellectuals. Muhammad Shahidullah, the elderly linguist and deeply religious person strongly advocated in favour of Bengali:

"I would revolt personally if the language Bengali suffers negligence. It would be almost a genocide should a new language be forced upon East-Bengal" (Umar: 1985)

The student campaign in support of Bengali in February 1952 and the brutal police firing which caused several deaths had planted the seed of Pakistan's destruction. The next two decades saw continuous protests and violence. Awami League's massive victory in the 1970 December election strengthened the demand of making Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Significantly, this election was greatly influenced by the Bengali experience of West-Pakistani negligence after the disastrous cyclone of November 1970, which killed at least 50,000 people and attracted the sympathy of the whole world except West-Pakistan. Anam writes:

"But in 1970, when the cyclone hit, it was as though everything came into focus. Rehana remembered the day. Sohail and Maya had returned from the rescue operation: the red in their eyes as they told her how they had waited for the food trucks to come and watched as the water rose and the bodies washed up on the shore; how they had realized, with mounting panic, that food wouldn't come because it had never been sent". (p. 39)

Rehana does not oppose her children's involvement in the politics. Unlike a fearful, helpless widow she does not become an obstacle to their activities, although, since Iqbal's death, the focus and motivation of her life were her children: "Children are the worst reason to marry again" (p. 157). Maya joins the student Communist Party and donates all her clothes to the cyclone victims and begins wearing only white saris. Sohail becomes a powerful student leader and a popular orator. Anam portrays the sentiment of a contemporary Bengali student through the character of Sohail:

"Sohail loved Bengal. He may have inherited his mother's love of Urdu poetry, but it was nothing to the love he had for all things Bengali: the swimming mud of the delta; the translucent, bony river fish; the shocking green palette of the paddy and the open, aching blue of the sky over flat land." (p. 39-40)

Anam's lines immediately remind us of the proposed national song of Bangladesh by Tagore—"Amar sonar Bangla, Ami tomay bhalobasi", which was spontaneously chosen by the protesting masses. This choice unfailingly marks the direction of the revolutionary momentum.

By 1971, conditions deteriorated to such an extent that the Bengalis would not be appeased by anything less than freedom. Yet, Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman, being an experienced politician did not announce it directly in order to avoid military atrocities. Mujib had prepared the masses for the struggle through the last six years. The general Bengali perception of the contemporary scenario becomes clear to us as we hear Sohail conversing with Mr. Sengupta and Sabeer at the anniversary party—

"It's uncertain uncle… It's been two months since Mujib won the election. They should have convened the national assembly by now and made him Prime Minister, but they keep delaying. Some of the students are urging Mujib to take more drastic action…He should declare Independence." (p. 32)

While Sabeer's military-trained mind keeps on questioning: "You think we can make it as our own country?" (p. 33), Sohail's reply is certain:

"If you know anything about the country you would know that Pakistan is bleeding us out. We earn more of the foreign exchange. We grow the rice, we make the jute, and yet we get nothing— no schools, no hospitals, no army. We can't even speak our own bloody language!" (p. 33)

Ironically, M. R. Akhtar Mukul, the famous activist, journalist, writer and narrator of the immensely influential parody programme from Free Bangladesh Radio, "Charompatro" that used to inspire every Bengali during the liberation war, and the minister of Information and Broadcast of the Free Bangladesh Government says in his book *Ami Bijoy Dekhechi* that the sense of deprivation among the East-Pakistani Bengalis was actually a result of two simultaneous processes. As a government strategy, Pakistan after independence stopped all the inter-cultural exchanges between the two wings of Bengal in order to stop the infiltration of Hindu culture from India. At the same time Pakistan organized several educational and cultural tours for the educated Bengalis to West-Pakistani cities as a means of strengthening the sentiment of Islamic brotherhood. But, interestingly, the East-Pakistani Bengalis felt jealous and deprived witnessing the wealth of the West-Pakistan at their expenses. Mukul points out that if the Bengali Muslims were in touch with the conditions of the Bengali Hindus of West Bengal, who lived in great destitute and economic crisis at that time, would not so easily opt for a freedom struggle.

Sohail, according to Mrs. Choudhury, is too busy with his politics and will never make a good husband for Silvi. Rehana has to tackle the situation and save Sohail from further humiliation. Actually, in Rehana we find the picture of a perfect Bengali mother who tries to shield her children from all dangers, but at the same time supports their ideological preoccupations and encourages the blossoming of their free mind. She sells her husband's Vauxhall and all her jewels, some furniture to build the house 'Shona', which she rents to the Senguptas. She later confesses to the wounded Major that she had to steal Mr. T. Ali's wife's jewels also. She takes an extreme risk when she allows Sohail to use Shona as a guerrilla hide-out and bunker to store weapons. The initial conflict within her between her motherhood and patriotism matured ultimately into a consummate reconciliation as she realizes after sheltering the Major:

"not that the act was any less noble, having been done out of love for her son; even so, it was somehow bigger, in this room, and in this tall man's presence, to have done something for the country and not just in the service of the children. Perhaps she really was doing it for the country." (p. 128)

Anam, in this novel, highlights the sense of patriotism that emanates not only from one's political consciousness, but also from his/her love for the family, peers and fellow beings. In her conversation with the wounded Major, Rehana says:

"'I'm not sure I'm a nationalist.' She was thinking of the well-loved volumes of Urdu poetry on her shelf, right next to Koran.

'Well, why are you here, in Dhaka?'

'To take care of you, of course.' She shouldn't have said that. She paused for a beat, checked herself. 'I love it here', she said. 'It's my home, and the home of my children. I would not give it up for anything. Believe me, I've been tested.'

'Then you are a true nationalist'. (p. 163-64).

It is this sense of belonging and the urge to protect and assert their identity that encouraged thousands of Bengali youths, who had never touched a rifle before, to join the freedom struggle. Anam narrativizes the colossal process of centralization of the already marginalized Bengali ethnic identity through a massive post-colonial jolt.

Anam's portrayal of the period records also the atmosphere of mutual hatred between the two races. Everyone must take sides in the situation. Sohail warns Rehana before she goes to the New Market, "Watch out for the butchers, they're Urdu-speaking". (p. 136)

Most of the non-Bengali Bihari muslims of East-Pakistan were against the Bengali cause and supported the West-Pakistan army. Thousands of Bengalis, such as the Rajakars, members of the Al-Badar, Al-Shamas, Shanti committee and Muslim League, who could not support the prospect of a divided Pakistan, collaborated with the West-Pakistani soldiers as spies. They informed the soldiers about the Muktijoddhas, committed several genocides, plundered and destroyed numerous villages and raped hundreds of thousands of girls and women. In fact, it was a Pakistani strategy to kill most of the Bengali men, irrespective of their faith, and to rape their women, so that the next generation would carry West-Pakistani genes making the eastern part of the nation a true Islamic country. Pakistani soldiers did not suffer from any bite of conscience doing these because the Ultra Islamic Nationalistic discourse taught them that this was 'jihad', the holy war for Islam, and the 'Malamal' of jihad, i.e. the looted wealth and women were 'halaal' for them.

We wonder to what level the manipulative interpretation of holy texts can lead men to. In the novel, Maya's dearest friend Sharmeen becomes the representative of these violated women. Many of them were awarded the title "Virangana" after the independence, but they ultimately never found a place in the society. They were held as outcasts by their relatives and acquaintances. Violence against women during the nine months of Bangladesh Liberation war has been chronicled by M. A. Hasan in his book, *Juddha O Nari* (Dhaka: Tamrolipto, 2008).

Hatred against the Hindus was also permeated following the same ideological discourse. In microcosm, Anam presents the religio-cultural conflicts of the time. We witness the two opposing viewpoints of Rehana and Parveen (Rehana's sister in law):

"Parveen grimaced. 'You gave your house to Hindus?'

'They've been my tenants for years,' Rehana said; 'They're like family' (p. 121).

Parveen's words echo the same line of thought that a postcolonial critic identifies in the discourse of "White Man's Burden" when she says—

'I'm talking about the dirty elements of our great nation. The Hindus, the Communists, the separatists! That is why your brother and I are here—it's a great duty, a privilege'. (p. 122) .

Behind Rehana's character, we can decipher the shadow of Begum Jahanara Imam, the great "Shahid Janani"—mother of the martyrs, whose son Rumi along with his friends Badi, Swapan, Alam, Kazi, Harris, Mukhtar, Zia and Anu fought guerrilla warfare against the Pakistani army in the streets of Dhaka. Sohail and his friends—Joy, Aref, Partho and others remind us of those student freedom fighters. Jahanara Imam's memoir, *Ekattorer Dinguli* became immensely popular after the independence. In the novel, Sohail invites Rehana to visit his comrades at Shona by saying:

"'They'll be happy to get your blessings. Some of them haven't seen their own mothers in a long time."' (p. 125)

Rehana felt a flush of pride at being asked. We notice, how in the figure of Rehana, the traditional concept of nation as a mother gets embodied. At the end of the novel Rehana sacrifices her romantic love in order to protect Sohail and Maya as the Major surrenders himself to the raiding Pakistan army as Sohail.

After Sharmeen's death Maya moved to Calcutta to be of some help in the freedom struggle by writing press statements. She also volunteers as a doctor's helper at the Salt Lake refugee camp. Months later, Rehana was sent by Sohail and the Major to Calcutta for her safety as she was being watched by the Pakistanis. At the Salt Lake refugee camp Rehana found her old friend and tenant Mrs. Supriya Sengupta, alone and destitute. War-time horrors had left her completely traumatized and guilt-ridden. After days of Rehana's care and nursing Supriya, yet unable to speak, wrote on her notebook: "I left him and ran into the pond…I didn't think about him, I just ran. They shot him." Supriya's experience points out for us the dehumanizing effect that war imparts on everyone. It not only wounds the body, but also blackens the soul. Her act of abandoning Mithun, her son, perturbs Rehana's spirits. Rehana was hoping that there must had been some other way. She cannot imagine herself being alive after her son's death. War time experiences restructure the mental furniture of the veterans in an irrevocable way.

In the battle of 1971, almost every Bengali, except a very small number, contributed by some way or the other to help the cause. Villagers helped the rebels by giving shelter, food, and supplying important informations about the enemy, whereas, they refused to provide even drinking water to the Pakistani army. We see Rehana and her gin-rummy friends to make blankets for the freedom fighters. Rehana sacrifices all her expensive sarees and replies Mrs. Rahman's discouragement by saying, "Everyone has to make sacrifices, why not me? It's my country too." (p. 106).

During the nine months of the war, India gave shelter to more than nine million refugees, both commoners and important personalities. In fact, the condition of the refugees attracted sympathy of the whole world. *Times* wrote on 28th May 1971 that it would be impossible for India to not to join the war if the pressure of the ever-increasing refugees continue. India had to provide food, medicine and lodging for the refugees. They were provided with government ration cards. Anam narrates how the refugees were sheltered in makeshift shacks, hutments and over-sized cement pipes. M. R. Akhtar Mukul in *Ami Bijoy Dekhechi* narrates his experience as a journalist of the cholera epidemic in the refugee camps of Krishnanagar, which claimed thousands of lives.

Ghulam Murshid points out that India helped Bangladesh not only out of pity and love, she had her own interests also. Formation of a friendly nation in place of East-Pakistan would minimize her expenditures on border security and the threat of attack from the east. India had already fought with Pakistan twice within the eighteen years after the independence. From economic and diplomatic viewpoints also, a divided Pakistan would be much weaker than before.

The new-formed Bangladesh government suffered from several quarrels among its political lobbies. Many of the elected members of the government, such as Khandkar Moshtak, Mijanur Rahaman Choudhury, Sheikh Moni and others raised no-confidence proposal against the Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed. Attempt of assassination had also been made by one of the Mujib Bahini members, who confessed that he was instigated by his leaders to kill Tajuddin.

But apart from all these political and diplomatic complexities, the general attitude of the commoners of West Bengal towards the liberation war was completely different. They sheltered millions of the refugees at their homes and took this war as their own battle. Anam provides a heartfelt incident of the solidarity and bond based on cultural nationalism. The grocer at a Calcutta store offers Rehana "Ten Percent Refugee Discount" the moment he gets to know about her "Joy Bangla" identity. He consoles her emotional outpouring: "Please, don't cry! You want a choc bar? Milon, get my daughter here a choc bar. Don't cry, Ma, don't cry." The universal sense of empathy binds them together in a common thread: "I was a refugee also, in '47. That's why I recognize you." (p. 262).

The colonial rulers, throughout the history, have perpetrated their power and dominance through corporeal punishments and tortures. The 'body' of the colonizer has been seen as a medium through which violence and power can be exercised. In the novel, Sabeer, the rebellious Pakistani officer, the husband of Silvi, exemplifies the West-Pakistani violence. On Sohail's persistent request Rehana persuades Faiz to bring out a release order for Sabeer. Rehana takes immense risk only for Sohail's love: "It has always been Silvi, ever since I can remember." (p. 195). She cannot help welcoming the prospect of some new sacrifice and atonement for her son: "I'm as much a slave to you as you are to her." (p. 195). She narrates her experiences of Mirpur thana and Muslim Bazaar to Maya:

"They made him stare at the sun for hours, days. They burned cigarette holes on his back. They hung him upside down. They made him drink salt water until his lips cracked. And they tore out his fingernails." (p. 248-49).

Maya replies: "He's lucky you came for him. They would have made him dig his own grave and buried him in it." (p. 249). In fact, the West-Pakistanis applied all possible methods of torture during the war. At least three to four thousand people were killed during these nine months.

Anam portraits the basic schism between the political propagandized version of Islamic faith and the liberal concept of religion that guards and comforts the domestic space of a Bengali family. Rehana is a deeply religious lady. She prays every day, at least once, at Maghreb, the most important prayer time of the day. When Sohail leaves home to join the liberation war she recites Aytul Kursi and Surah Yahseen. After Iqbal's death, life: "…the God she prayed to was not a punishing, not a vengeful, brutal God; He was a God of comfort, a God of consolation." (p. 187). Her God gives her strength to send her son to the war front: "This is my duty, she said to herself. Sending my son to war with a full stomach." (p. 96). Instead of telling Maya to be careful when she parts for Calcutta, Rehana says: "Write some good stories" (p. 145). Rehana's concept of faith is contrasted with Silvi's fundamentalist Ultra Islamic ideas. Silvi, like many strong right wing supporters cannot tolerate the prospect of a liberated Bangladesh at the cost of a divided Pakistan. Through these characters Anam successfully points out the ideological differences when the question of priority comes concerning one's religious or cultural identity.

Sohail and Maya represent the new generation of student revolutionaries. At Sohail's book-shelf, *Ghazals of Mirza Ghalib* and *Collected Poetry of Dylan Thomas* sit beside each other. Posters of Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara and Karl Marx hang on the walls of his room. Religious and social convictions cannot stop Sohail from expressing his love for Silvi even after her marriage. Maya is a conscientious communist student. She leads a simple life, commands the girls drill at Dhaka University, and joins all the protest campaigns. Contrasted with their secular consciousness, the bare falsity of West-Pakistani discourse of religious nationalism lays exposed.

In a colonial power structure, language acts as a weapon of discrimination and subjugation. But, the same weapon, in the hands of the colonized, can betray the colonizer's interest. When, Colonel Jabeen raids Rehana's home and threats Maya, Rehana's perfect, native Urdu startles the Colonel and garners some respect. At least, Rehana succeeds to save Maya from being violated.

Rehana's motherly instincts stands large over her romantic love in the novel: "…about her children. How far she would go. Anywhere. Any distance. That was the secret. The shameless, hungry secret." (p. 304). The major sacrifices his life to save Sohail once again and pays his debts to Rehana. Anam makes us wonder how deep inside the core of human psychology war can penetrate and exert influences.

Bengali nationalism was regional and language based, not religion oriented. The West-Pakistani exploitation and domination in 1950s and 60s reduced the level of communal hatred and suspicion between Bengali Muslims and Hindus. After independence, the sovereign nation of Bangladesh was formed as an outcome of a secular, democratic, cultural and patriotic revolution. The ethos of Liberalism were high in the air as the people witnessed Pakistani brutality and genocide on one hand, and the sympathy and support from the Indian people on the other. But, the failure of Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman to provide the nation with a transparent and well-constructed government led Bangladesh to mere anarchy. Absence of the proper enforcement of law and order encouraged people to act as they wish. The economic recession and inflation of 1974, the great famine which claimed at least 27,000 lives, black marketing, natural calamities, smuggling, corruption, feuds among major political figures in order to obtain power, and various other

causes can be pointed out to which led ultimately to public disillusionment. Sheikh Mujib was murdered in 1975. Bangladesh was renamed as 'Islamic Republic of Bangladesh'. Religious communalism returned to Bangladesh with great force along with the pervading sense of hatred and fear against India, and was fanned by the disseminating concept of Religious Imperialism campaigned by the Middle-East countries after the rise of "Petro-Dollar" following their war with Israel in 1973. Anam in her second novel, *The Good Muslim* portrays the several dilemmas and conflicting forces that hindered and manipulated the growth of Bangladesh as a free nation. Sohail, the idealist revolutionary freedom fighter, returns after the independence as a charismatic religious preacher and distances himself from Rehana and Maya. Anam shows how the treacherous shifts of religious and cultural ideologies can breach or make walls inside the private domestic space in a postcolonial world of confusion and polyvalency. She successfully examines the conflicts between cultural liberalism and religious fundamentalism in the process of postcolonial nation building through the homely clashes of opinions and sibling rivalry.

Tahmina Anam's debut novel, *A Golden Age,* was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award and the Costa First Novel Prize, and was the winner of the 2008 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book. It was translated into twenty four languages. The topic and the area have immense possibilities of research.

CONCLUSIONS

Relevance of the chosen topic is reflected in the recent political crisis of Bangladesh where a Nationalist (cultural) group of students kept on demanding punishments for the "traitor" collaborators who helped the Pakistani Army and allegedly looted, murdered and raped common Bengali people during the 1971 war. Interestingly, these same collaborators are hailed by the fundamentalists as the good servants of Islam and protectors of united Pakistan, therefore, Nationalists (religious obviously, and constitutional also if we consider the turmoil of 1971 as an internal matter of Pakistan, a sovereign nation). Allegiance and nomenclature depend on the readers' discretion and point of view.

Religious and Cultural nationalism also form the ideological basis for the two Bangladeshi national political parties, BNP and Awami League respectively; whereas the Jamat, an Islamic fundamentalist group helps BNP and tries to negate the secular Bengali nationalistic forces which ally the Awamis.

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