

Original Research Article

Searching for Identity in the Writings of Bangladeshi Muslim Women Writers

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ABSTRACT

This research depicts the significance of Bangladeshi women writing with articulates their identity and struggle for equality. This faded positive change creates a convenient platform for young women as well as changes the world's stereotypical male point of view. Also, Bangladeshi women writers have focused on the exasperation history, globally women's condition and marked women's foregrounded lightly touched their untold history. Furthermore, this article argues that the Bangladeshi diaspora identity crisis as a major issue of the globe. Interestingly, there are many different types of identity such as national identity, ethnic identity, communal identity, gender identity and so on. In these types of identities, we are going to focus on the gender identity which challenges women discrimination. The gender inequality has started from their birth time. We have trapped in a male disoriented dominating the world where we can see disquieting gender inequality in every field and in every country of the world. Remarkably, this research engages to the Bangladeshi Muslim women's representation as other women. As we can see that very few research works have focused on the positive disoblige aspect and to deny divisive ideas leads our interest to write this paper. It has been seen that today's long gap of the discrepancy fills a gap to know how women encourage us to talk about our vague memory of women's dividends contribution and disparity in society and literature.

1. Introduction

Humans have been migrating or dispersing since ancient times for food and essential needs of life. As time changes the needs of humans have also been changed. For a better life and a good job, he moves from his own country to a developed country; it is generally known as one aspect of 'diaspora.' The postcolonial diaspora has led with the majority of Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan population. The main factor of the diaspora is 'identity issue' which brings callous in their life. However, the people who left home and have settled in abroad, they and their second and third generations always get confused in duality for their identity. As their parents abide them with home culture, thus, it's difficult to ablate. More recently, this identity crisis creates more exasperate struggle; especially, for women as an impuissant. In the anthropocentric world's eyes allude as women are weak creatures and inferior than supremacists of men; they have been excluded since ages. Antagonising, women must face social, economic and political challenges due to gender appalling. Bangladesh is not an exception to this type of disequilibrium.

The disembodied male perspective, women cannot abstain from household works. Many women feel acanthesthesia, they denied and cleave a disenable male view. Through their intellect, strength and literature contribution, they have proven their

strength. Some Muslim women writers got the courage and tried to change this disallowed traditional thinking through their writings and who were in politics and social work. To commensurate, they understand the exigency of literate all women. They established schools for women and encouraged girls and people to get an education. However, the earlier Bangladeshi Muslim women writers' hard work and courage are remarkable and this divulgement the patriarchal view. At the present time, many Bangladeshi women writers inspired by their works, in which the writers have raised marginal voices through writings. This has been reflected in women's writings where they involve themselves in women's development.

2. Literature Review

Cohen (1997) writes,

"For instance, identifies a range of "common features" which are typically held by diasporas in the contemporary world. Key among these are the following. First, members of a diaspora (and/or their ancestors) have been dispersed from their original homeland. This dispersion was either involuntary (resulting from forced displacement) or voluntary (arising from a search for employment, attempts to maximize trade, or the aim to colonize other lands and peoples)" (Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 1).

Originally, the term 'Diaspora' mentions the scattering of Jews after their exile from Babylon in the 6th century B.C. In Greek, the term Diaspora means 'scatter' or 'dispersion'. The term 'Classical Diaspora' used by Cohen in 1997 with reference to the Jews. In addition, this term was originally used with the only three groups whose populations were dispersed in classical times and those three groups were: a) the Greeks, b) Jews and c) the Armenians. Since ancient times, the term diaspora used as the means of describing the Jewish experience and their Jewish settlement outside of the homeland. Historically, humans have been migrating approximately two million years ago as an individual or in a group. There is no particular definition for the 'diaspora.' As the term is dynamic and changing from time to time. In short, we can say that the diaspora means a person, who born in his homeland and settle in the host land because of any reason. Still, he has the feeling of attachment for his homeland.

3. Methodology

What is mean by diaspora? How Bangladeshi diaspora has impacted women's life? What is the role of women in the diaspora? What is their similar or dissimilar issue to the other world's diaspora? What is the contribution of women and the initiative to raise their voice against gender discrimination? To find the answers to these, we must visit the historical threats of Bangladesh and its diaspora; as we could see that in history, very less contribution and mention of women diaspora. But, the dehumanising behaviour has minimised in a large scale.

Afterward, the paper also weaved around to explore women's contribution to the literature which has been negotiated and had been projected in the stygian. The shift of this change needs to highlight as a positive side of diaspora, to come out from the suppressed and the stereotypical gender hierarchical structure. Shutting once voice definitely one day a louder sound will tell the suppressed history of once own. This sensibility brings out our attention from postcolonial to colonial history, negotiation with diaspora, the subaltern voice of women and identity suspicion. All lay in contemporary Bangladesh. The societal change and women's writing participation refuse to supremacist of male power which is extremely troublous.

DIASPORA: TODAY'S BANGLADESH

Diaspora is not merely a migration but a delayer; it includes reasons such as social, economic, religion, food, slave trade, human trafficking, deportation, war refugees, forced displacement, and voluntary migration. Due to self-interest, economic or political interest, the diaspora dispersed people from one place to another place to fulfill their needs and interest. Many other structures and reasons are responsible for today's diaspora. Suppose today's deject reason of diaspora is COVID-19 pandemic. Many migrant students and labourers and daily wage workers are willing to go their homes due to deleterious COVID-19. The situation is amok, many students are caught in the host country due to no landing any flight.

Generally, the term diaspora represents the dark side of the migration that is 'forced exile.' The two common examples of forced exile are 1. 'War' and 2. 'Partition.' Kosinski and Elahi write, "Withdrawal of the British from India and the division of the letter into India and Pakistan was associated with a massive transfer of population estimated at 14.5 million between 1947-1951" (Kosinski & Elahi, 1985, 4-5). The migration of large groups from one geographical area to another is called the 'Mass Migration'. At Present in the modern world, people migrate to a developed country for a better job, good life and

facilities. After migrating to the first or second world countries, migrants try to settle there. It does not mean that they totally disconnect connectivity with their homeland. After their settlement also they have a feeling of attachment to their homeland.

Their second generation always finds themselves 'in-between.' In addition, the main deliberating issue is that they always get confused regarding their identity. They question to, a) What is their real identity? b) Which country to be considered as their homeland? And, c) The most important question for their next generation is that to which tradition and culture they have to follow? The one disambiguates where they born and the one they have settled in the host land. All this dispensed behaviour, their acceptableness is an absolutely incomplete hyphenated identity (accruing home and host identities) as it seems absorbable to abdicate any identity. The adaxial identities can be as Indo-American, British-Bengali, Indo-African, British-Indian, British- Pakistani etc. These articulatory identities do not appease to append many people; the young generation abstruse thus, adverse to the culture and identity. This amorphous identity distinct them from both worlds; here, they feel no particular annex feeling. This apathetic is apocryphal for them.

Commonly, we use the general word for the diaspora to migration. Now, people have become aware of the difference between migration and diaspora. If we try to make a list of different types of diaspora in the world, it will be a long list of dispersion such as Jews diaspora, Asian Diaspora, African Diaspora, European Diaspora, Indian Diaspora, American Diaspora, Gulf Diaspora, Australian Diaspora, Bangladeshi Diaspora and so on. The largest diaspora is from Bangladesh. We cannot disaffirm to the people of originally belongs to Bangladesh have moved abroad for a better life and escape to poverty. The most common reason for moving abroad is the economic reason and Bangladesh is the most densely populated countries in the world. According to UNICEF, "The largest Bangladeshi diaspora in Saudi Arabia with a population of over 1 million" (UNICEF. Migration Profiles, 2013, 2; The Bangladeshi Diaspora). The U.K has the largest Bangladeshi diaspora than Western Worlds. The reason for the largest diasporas in the U.K is a historical tie between these two countries. Currently, many Bangladeshi Bengali are migrating to the U.K. (as there was a British colony in the 19th century). At the behest of East India Company, Sylheti cooks were the first Bangladeshis to arrive in the U.K. For many years, the population was small and mostly male dominant disgorge. During the early years of immigration, the intermarriage system was very common. As a result, the population of immigrants was quickly increased. However, the British Bengali community was living with the disgruntled situation for several decades.

Kibria writes,

"The enslavement of the Bangladeshi migrants, most of the migrants were the labourers who were employed in the formal labour market often works just a few years or a week based at low wages. The primary destinations for Bangladeshi migrants have been the Arab Gulf states. However, to include a wider range of countries like Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore and South Korea. For less-skilled Bangladeshi workers, the high costs of arranging employment abroad may encourage them to overstay their work visas; once they migrated. Under these conditions, less-skilled workers from Bangladesh is at an increased risk of forced labor, exploitation and abuse; even human trafficking in their destination countries. Some find themselves in situations of forced labor or debt bondage where they face restrictions on their movements, non-payment of wages, threats and physical or sexual abuse" (Kibria 2011).

They mainly adducted to move towards London, major industrial hubs in the Midlands and the North. On the other side, in the East Asian countries (such as South Korea and particularly Asia), Bangladeshis are common as a cheap and foreign labour source. The Bangladeshi community is often taken advantage of due to their economic and socio-political reasons. Many countries have been mercilessly taken advantage of Bangladeshi economic migrants and their desperation (The Bangladeshi Diaspora).

THE ROLE OF BANGLADESHI WOMEN IN DIASPORA AND WRITINGS

Bangladeshi English Literature is referred to as Bangladeshi Writing in English. Begum Rokaiya and Rabindranath Tagore are early prominent Bengali writers in English literature. Modern writers of Bangladeshi diaspora are—Tahmima Anam, Monica Ali, and Naemat Imam. The older generation writers include Razia Khan Amin (1936-2011), Kaisar Haq (born in 1951) and Feroz Ahmad-ud-din (born in 1950). The list of younger generation writers is too large to enumerate.

Geoffrey Samuel writes in regard to the identity of 'Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim,'

“Bangladeshi identity was now defined by two negatives; the rejection of united India in 1947 and the rejection of united Pakistan in 1971. Henceforward, by default, Bangladeshi identity was based around a shared Bengali Muslim identity, but this left open which of the two components, Bengali or Muslim, was the most significant. This has remained a contested issue up to the present day” (Samuel 2012, 147).

The creation of Bangladesh based on the Bengali language. It is the main reason for Bangladesh independent, we find a slow tradition of English writing. The English has entailed importance in the writing, education, employment sectors. In the early 1990s, English medium school began to grow rapidly in Dhaka as well as in other cities in the country. Simultaneously, many English dailies published the original English works in weekly instalment. In 2011, Dhaka launched The Hay Festival of Literary and Arts. It contributed remarkably to the present Bangladeshi English literary scene. The midst of elements, the involvement of the English medium schools, colleges, and universities are marvellous and unforgettable.

The contribution of English medium school is an English medium school students, Dhaka. Manal Mohamed (born in 1986) published 'Life in Bosnia;' this was her first work written in English; at this time her age was just eight years old. Almost in all major enthusiastic Bangladeshi English dailies, fiction and non-fiction work appear and she won many prizes in the writing competition. Her short story “Sotto Voat” is published in Routledge's Wasafiri gave her great success. 'A Recluse in Rain' and *New Age Short Stories* (2006) works won the award. The greatest prominent diaspora writers are Adib Khan (born in 1949), Muhammad Abdul Bari (born in 1953), Dilruba. Z. Ara (born in 1957), Mahmud Rahman (born in 1964), Husna Parvin Ahmed (born in 1964), Monica Ali (born in 1967), Nirad Sayed Manzurul Islam (born in 1953), Nemat Imam (born in 1971), Sanchita Islam (born in 1973), Rekha Waheed (born in 1975), Tehmina Anam (born in 1975), Kia Abdullah (born in 1982) and many more.

As a woman, they face many ental difficulties throughout their life. Dishearteningly, we live in a male-dominant world, where women's freedom entombs and think that the duty of women is to take care of her family and to do only household work. Bangladesh was also not exceptional from this stereotypical thought. However, the disconcerting condition of Bangladeshi women in 1980 was inferior in every field, whether it was education, economic performance, health or nutrition matter of men. Most of the women played their traditional role as a housewife. The women were not more literate than men due to patriarchal society women and girls do not get the rights of the freedom movement as equal espousal. The gender dizziness of inequality has been steadily improving in Bangladesh; in particular education and employment sectors.

According to the Human Development Report (2019, 2) Bangladesh was ranked 135 out of 189 countries and territories. Cultural and traditional elements influence women's lives and can be seen as how women treat in Bangladesh. Once a girl marries, she becomes the property of her husband's family. The family's responsibility limit her opportunities for schooling, career and to make her dependant. In Bangladesh, the incidents of domestic violence are widespread and common. Though, domestic violence is not seen as a serious crime because all other people try to cover up as a family matter. Doddering cases, despite domestic violence, acid throwing, physical and psychological torture, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape-related violence, trafficking, forced prostitution, coerced suicide and murder reports are rapidly increasing. Against this violence very less espousal and estop of estate rights also.

Entrancing the movement of equal rights for women in Bangladesh started long before its independence. Feminists of Bangladesh want gender equal rights through social and political reservations and revolutions. The Bangladesh Constitution states in Article 28, “Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life” (Anam, 2014). The women's condition has been changed over the past few centuries. Begum Rokeya contributed her best to minimise the gender gap form the Bangladeshi society.

On 9 December, Bangladesh celebrates Rokeya Day. Every year to commemorate her works and legacy. The government also gives Rokeya Padak award to Bangladeshi women's exceptional achievement. Rokeya was against discrimination and inequality between men and women. She believed women should have the right to education. We can see her enwrap feminist thoughts in her major work “Matichur” (A Strong of Sweet Pearls, 1904 and 1922), is a collection of essays. Her science fiction novella *Sultana's Dream* depicts Maryland ruled by women. She expressed difficulties faced by Bengali wives in 'Padmarag' (Essence of *The Lotus*, 1924) and in 'Abrodhbhasini' (The confined Women, 1931). Her eruptions of extremist behaviour of veil/purdah that forced to badly effect the women. She wrote numbers of genres, short stories, novels, essays, poems and satirical writing. For women education, she founded an organization, 'Muslim Women Association' in 1916. After husband's death, she established 'Sakhawat Memorial Girl's High School'. Rokeya founded 'Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam'

(Islamic Women Association). Google also celebrated her birthday on 9 December 2017 by making google doodle (Dhaka Tribune, 2017).

Begum Rokeya is considered as a pioneer of “Women's Liberation in South Asia”. She was a feminist thinker and writer, through her writings, she emphasized on women's education and gender equality. She was also a political activist and social worker. ‘She established the first school aimed primarily at Bengali Muslim girls in Kolkata. She founded the Muslim Women's Association in 1916. This association fought for women's education and employment. She was busy in debates and conferences regarding the advancement of women until her death’ (Perkins et al. 2019) Begum Rokeya inspired many young generation female authors including Tehmima Anam, Sufiya Kamal and others. Tehmima Anam is a diasporic writer, her novel *The Good Muslim* is a sequel to her novel *A Golden Age*. One of the major factors of diaspora writers feel nostalgia and a fragile thread of relation with home and host. We can see this nostalgic feeling in every diasporic writers’ writing.

Anam’s both novels are based on the situation before and after the Bangladesh Independence war. The personal experience of her family in Bangladesh Independence War had inspired her to write the first novel. Her grandmother told the story of harboring freedom fighters and how they hide the guns and weapons in the family garden. In ‘*A Golden Age*’, she describes the struggle of women through the character of Rehana Haque. The novel revolves around Rehana, who is a widowed mother. She fights against the Bangladesh Liberation War to save children from the war effects. The novel opens with the death of her husband and how she loses the regains her children's custody. There is a description of the starting of war, where she again struggles. Outside of being a mother, she struggles to grabble identity. Her sense of nationalism fits into that identity. In the end, on 16 December 1971 Bangladesh gained independence.

In *The Good Muslim*, Anam describes the story a decade after the war (from 1984 to the post 13 years). This is a sequel thus, the story focuses on Rehana's two children—Maya and Sohail. The story is presented the point of view of Maya. Maya is essentially a non-believer whereas Sohail is a religious guy. Islam is his now main focus of life and he becomes an outstanding teacher and preacher. As a preacher, he travels to spread the message of Islam. Maya is a doctor and helps traumatized women algogenic from the war victims as well as performing abortions for many who were raped. She then spends most of the time as a medic in a village. She returns home at the death of her brother's wife and goes into the past and forward steadily blocks the gap. Maya and Sohail's different life tracks create tension between two and their mother Rehana. Sohail has a son, Zaid who plays an important role. Direly, in the novel there are some difficult topics like child abuse, torture and health issues (cancer) are included. There was a goal during the civil war and those differing opinions could work together. Then, the war is over and taken different perceptions. Maya understands the male-dominant mind-set during her doctor service. As a result, she finds brother's relief in religion exorbitantly difficult. It is a story about faith and family shadowed by the war. The political and religious elements are not neglected. The story attracts to know Maya's struggle to find a new way of loving her brother.

MEMOIR: UNDER EUROPEAN SKIES

“Memoir derives from the French word ‘Memoire’ which means ‘Memory’ or ‘Reminiscence’” (Literary Devices). It is rarely used in literature. In the memoir, it is a specific theme or about part of someone's life. However, “the stories with proper narrative shape, focus, subject matter and involving reflection on some particular event or place. The memory is used as a subgenre of an autobiography” (Literary Devices). The main difference between a memoir and an autobiography, the memoir is the centralized and more specific storytelling of the experience of someone's life while an autobiography covers the whole life of a person. It also includes detail repine with childhood, family history, education, career, and so on. The memoir is focused on an important event that occurred at a specific time and place.

Bangladeshi writer Pratiti Shirin (Assistant Professor of Dhaka University, Bangladesh) writes a memoir entitled *Under European Skies*. This memoir tells a story about the plenteous real experiences of her life in the UK. In this memoir, Pratiti Shirin beautifully describes a journey from Bangladesh to London. She writes about her one-year journey of doing a Commonwealth Masters in the U.K. She shares a nostalgic and alarum feeling of her homeland, Bangladesh. Disillusioned about life, she lives physically in host land U.K. Dispassionately, most of the time she thinks about Bangladesh and her family. She describes many incidences of how she uncomfortably lives alone in the London University room being disconnected from her family, relatives and the memory of old friends.

Many times, it is difficult to manage terrible weather and high costs of living in London. The plumblessly different lifestyles in Bangladesh and London disconcerted her. She explains in a memoir that in London, a couple can express their love publicly, whereas in Bangladesh even husband and wife cannot hold each other's hands. She talks about the different types of education systems in London. She writes about her trips to ten European countries other than London and how her passport has been stolen in Barcelona. She makes new friends in the U.K. She belongs to a conservative, poor and male-dominant country and lives in a totally opposite country where she can express her feelings. But she always attaches herself to her homeland and misses it everywhere in London. This one-year journey changes her. She is not the same person as before. All these mould experiences her into a new person.

We can see more struggle in Muslim writer's writings after the attack 9/11. After the attack, the Muslim's struggle starts with their religious identity. For a long time in literature, Muslim characters have been connected to the negative image. The influence of 9/11, we can see in the writings of female writers, such as Monica Ali, Tehmima Anam, Fadia Faquir, Samina Ali and Kia Abdullah. They included the 9/11 incident in their works as a plot device and to simply reflect character development. The writers focus on the nocuous reality of post 9/11 on the world's Muslim identity in the west. After 9/11 in the U.S.A, the Bangladeshi diaspora read much like a thesis, it is derived from which hampers the flow of the narrative. In literary work, they share the aftermath of post 9/11 experience. Life has completely changed for both Muslim male and female.

4. Results

Identity is not a mere word, but it delineates recognition in society. Through our national identity, we are known as Indian, British, American, African, Bangladeshi and so on. Majorly, gender identity creates more discrimination among marginal and majority groups. Because of male and female discrimination, women do not get their rights and not treated well at home, office and society. The society sees women inferior in the competition between men and deludes women's contribution. People think women are weak but in reality, all difficulties and demurrable discrimination make her strong. To open the ensile information, some women adjudicate to fight against demonic discrimination and gender inequality through their strength, intellect and education. Education plays an important role in women's liberation. Women without knowledge of education and their rights become puppet's hands.

5. Conclusion

Literature plays an important role in search of identity. It gives the voice to people, who wants freedom and becomes a mirror of the society. Identity and its crisis are the main issues for diaspora writers and especially for Muslim women writers. The Muslim woman writer gives their immense contribution (for ex: Rokeya Sakhawat). Rokeya delves into the advancement of women. She tried to take out women in front of society, from behind their veil. Through her writings, she said that women have also the same rights in every field just the same as men. Most people engraft that there would be nothing interesting in the literary works of women writers. The modern Bangladeshi Muslim Women's figures are like Monica Ali, Tehmima Anam, Nasreen Jahan, Taslima Nasreen, Dilara Hashem and many more. They are estrum to too many young women to teach them how to break the dominant ethmoid. They write amazing literary works and have slapped on the demeaning traditional mentality of the society for women. We can't deny the reality that even in the modern world women have to struggle and fight for their identity. Since earlier times, women have been trying to raise their voice against exasperated social, political and traditional issues.

To mention some future research areas, this paper can be extended to the research areas like anthropological, historical and economical perspectives to measure the women's contribution to the development. However, it can also be extended to the journey of Muslim asylum women and their struggle. The immigrant voices of Muslim women and narratives can be reported in the structure of interviews or as a memoir.

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