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THEMES OF IDENTITY AND SELF-DISCOVERY IN NOVELS IN BANGLADESH AFTER THE
LIBERATION WAR OF 1971

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ABSTRACT

The literature of Bangladesh may be divided into three phases: first phase 1947-1957, second phase 1958-1970 and third phase from 1971 onward. The most of the literature is written in Bengali language and then translated in English. First phase extended from pre-partition days to the pre-Ayub period. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, the people of the eastern region realized the absurdity of a state based on religion. The decision to make Urdu the sole state language of the country caused Bengalis to protest, culminating in the Language Movement of 1952. This awareness of their linguistic rights laid the foundation for the first phase of Bangladeshi literature. In the second phase the literary and cultural activities in Pakistan and especially in East Pakistan were thwarted following the promulgation of martial law by the army chief Ayub Khan in 1958. The liberation war of 1971 and the independence of Bangladesh mark the third phase of the literature of this region. The fiction of this phase records the saga of the liberation war, the hellish face of the war, the dream of a free and egalitarian Bangladesh and thereafter the realization of independence.

Key-words: Identity, self-discovery, liberation, Independence, existence, hegemony

Hasnat Abdul Hai's novel *The Whale* (1981) depicts the instability and socio-political scenario of the years following independence. It portrays quite faithfully how the people of the coastal union Kazalpur win in their struggle against evil forces. Almost an identical picture is portrayed in his novel *The Master* (1986). Bashir al-Helal's *The Last Drinking Vessel* (1986) is also a fine portrayal of conflicts and questions of existence in post-independence rural Bangladesh. A more optimistic view of rural life is found in Haripada Dutta's *Conflagration in the North-East* (1986) and *Birth Ceremony in the Black Hole* (1987).

A large section of the patriotic middle class who took part in the liberation war got frustrated at the country's economic, social and political conditions. The multifarious problems in the life of the middle class are depicted in Rashid Karim's *Love is a Red Rose* (1978) and *A Tale of an Ordinary Man* (1981). Rizia Rahman's *Blood Words* (1978), on the other hand, paints the dark picture of an urban slum of sex workers. Her *For a Flower* (1986) presents a freedom fighter's face wearing the scars of defeat. Some other similar books are Shawkat Ali's *Waiting* (1985), Bashir Al-Helal's *The Black Hilsha* (1979). Razia Khan's novel *O! Eternal Life* (1983) narrates the biography of a liberated woman. A number of novels were inspired by the anthropological, historical, and cultural heritage of the land. Among these novels are Shawkat Ali's *The Commoners in the Twilight* (1984) based on history and heritage is a unique addition to fiction. Rizia Rahman's *Bangla is from*

'Bong' (1978) and *Now and Eternity* (1984) encompasses the long span of anthropological, geographical, social and cultural life of the Bengalis.

The assessment and analysis of the critical political situation that prevailed in post-liberation Bangladesh resulting from political instability, militarism, theological overtones and the rehabilitation of war criminals prompted the writing of a number of novels. The individual and collective dreams and political aspirations of the people of the sixties form the basis for Shawkat Ali's trilogy *The Days of Southward Way* (1985), *The Flow of Time in a Bird's Nest* (1986) and *The Day Before, the Night Before* (1986). The mass uprising of the people in the sixties is the theme of Akhteruzzaman Elias's novel *The Solder in an Attic* (1986). Anwar Pasha's autobiographical *Rifles, Bread and Women* (1973) is based on the liberation war.

Anwar Pasha in his *Rifles, Bread, Women* (1973), deals with the Liberation War and its impact on the society. There are many characters, through which Pasha shows the actual life of people in social scenario. Each Character is struggling for the self-identity, tries to live in the uncertain society conditions. There are lot of bombings, lootings and mass destruction prepared by Pakistan Army. But the Bangladeshi society bravely fought for their self-identity.

The Sweet from the Bitterest (1978) is a very worthy production of Dilara Hashem. It deals with the Sara Alias Sayera, young women with uncommon qualities. It is also known as a milestone of feministic literature of Bangladeshi writings. It is a first work in Bangladesh which deals with the human identity of women. She does not come for any special prejudice and bondage for women folk. She smokes and takes liquor as her protest against the dominating male community. After all these also Sara is a good lover and mother. She challenged the male dominancy but never left her womanhood.

The Commoners in the Twilight (1984) is a novel by Shawkat Ali deals with the journey of Shyamango. Shyamango is an artist and tries to establish his artistic talent in society. Not getting response from the people, decided to go back home. But he has been offered a work under Lord Sudhimitra for a temple. But the total situation went upside down and they didn't let him work keeping pace with his imagination. So again he decided to march back to Gauda to find himself as an artist. But lastly he failed to discover himself. Ahmed Sofa's *A Circle of Fire* (1990) deals with the issue of partition through the characters of Daniel and his lover-friend Tayeba. Sofa discusses the struggle for identity in the Kolkata after Liberation War.

The Ruffian (1993) is a significant novel by Moinul Ahsan Saber in which he has illuminated the liberation spirit through an ordinary character. The protagonist of the novel, Kobej, is a muscleman by profession. Kobej, an illiterate village man turns gradually into a brave freedom fighter. The story of the novel opens in June 1971 with the news of arriving of the Pakistan Army. It creates a tumult among the society. And two powerful persons Akmol and Romjan came together from long period of opposition. But they worked for their self benefit not for society. Kobej is a gangster, criminal and several time jailed for his guilt. But this time his good soul wake-up and protested against the brutal activities of the military. By this Kobej became a freedom fighter.

Taslima Nasrin's *Shame* (1993) is a banned novel in Bangladesh. It deals with the struggle of Hindus as minority in Bangladesh. It portrays the story of Dutta family and presents evils in the Muslim society. After demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India on 6 December, 1992, in Bangladesh communal riots increased to heights. In this situation a Hindu family, Dutta family has to struggle for their existence in the Bangladesh. The family feels and faces the heat of communal hatred in every walk of life. And they have to save themselves in the riots.

In twenty-first century, we have large number of English novels in Bangladesh. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) deals with the themes of identity and self-realization so widely and bravely. Ali defined the character of Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant in London. Because of frustration she was mentally broke down; but after getting recovered from that she regains her independence.

Like a Diamond in the Sky (2010) is a debut novel by Shazia Omar. It deals with a brave description of drug addiction in modern Bangladesh. The protagonist of the novel, Deen struggles to find himself. Deen is a smart, intelligent and he cared deeply about the future of Bangladesh. But due to some major incidents in his life he moved to drug addiction and ruined his life. After meeting the heroine, Maria he tries to find himself, wants to be a good person. His change of heart for love made him better person.

Freedom's Mother (2012) is an English translation of Anisul Hoque's Bengali novel *Maa*. The novel portrays the story of Shafia, mother of Azad. Being cheated by her wealthy husband, Shafia leaves her husband with the small child. She determines to raise Azad on her own without her husband's support. But Azad often goes to his father's house to take money and spend lavishly. By the time of Liberation War of Bangladesh, Azad was a graduate from University of Dhaka. But he was captured by Pakistani Army and tortured brutally. Shafia does not lose hopes and carries on searching for him. In the later part of the novel Shafia struggles to survive on her own without taking helps from others. And at the end she dies in extreme poverty but did not return to her cheater husband.

Mohsin Habib's *Sign of Roots* (2012) also deals with the theme of struggle of Hindus in Bangladesh as in Taslima Nasrin's *Shame*. The plot of the novel revolves around the general election of 2001 in Bangladesh. After the election Hindus of Bangladesh became victims of the brutalities carried out by fanatical Muslims. Habib describes struggles of two Hindu families that of Hemen Ganguly and Akhil Poddhar. Both the families are not ready to leave Bangladesh as it is their mother land and tries to find their existence in Bangladesh as minority. But after the election of 2001, they failed and Akhil's wife and daughter got raped by some followers of the BNP Jamatt alliance. This occurrence reminds Akhil and Hemen that Bangladesh is not their land. They failed to find their existence in Bangladesh.¹⁴

The Black Coat (2013) is a controversial historical novel by Bangladeshi-Canadian author Neamat Imam. It deals with the life of journalist, Khaleque Biswas and his protégée Nur Hussain. After losing his job Khaleque, trains Nur only to turn him into a fake Sheikh Mujib and by this they settled their life earning money utilizing the blind nationalistic fever of their countrymen during the Bangladesh Famine.

In this way most of the Bangladeshi novels after the Liberation War deals with the realities in the life of Bangladeshi people and the most dominant problem in the Bangladeshi society was discovering the self. Hence most of the novelists discussed themes of identity and self-discovery through their novels.

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