



Exploring Motherhood and Feminine Nationality during the Liberation War of Bangladesh: A Contrastive Analysis of Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Selina Hossain's *River of My Blood*

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Abstract

At times of war and national crisis, mothers take on a unique role where they are defaulted as the caregivers of society. However, there is evidence to prove that nationality itself is gendered, and feminine nationality imposes the role of the caregiver mother onto the mothers of society. This paper tries to explore 'motherhood' against the backdrop of the Liberation War of Bangladesh and the imposition of the feminine national identity onto the protagonists of two novels: Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Selina Hossain's *River of My Blood*. The research aims to demonstrate the exploration of the feminine identity, especially the maternal identity, in times of national crisis. The research is qualitative and uses textual and content analysis. The war imposes a set role of nationalism on the females, which proves to be a traumatic experience. The research recognises how nationalism is used as a ploy to create an identity in females, which subjugates them as the caregivers of the nation. The different approaches of the two protagonists are explored: where Rehana weaves her individuality by navigating the feminine national identity, and Boori succumbs to it and therefore suffers.

Keywords: Motherhood, Maternal identity, Nationality, Feminine nationality, Liberation war of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Selina Hossain's, *River of My Blood* (1976, trans. 2016) and Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) both showcase female experiences during the tumultuous period of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. The narrative of the novels focusses on the national, gendered, maternal, and feminine identities of these females, among others. Both the writers of these

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novels tie in the experiences of the female protagonists, Boori and Rehana, to the nationalist struggles of the country. While both the characters mother their respective children; they also take on the roles of surrogate mothers for a country deeply distressed by war and bloodshed.

River of My Blood (2016) follows the story of Boori, born in a lower-class village called Haldi. She hopscoches into adulthood, marries an older relative, faces the initial stigma of being childless, and then gives birth to a physically challenged boy. Yet, on another level, Boori's private wounds reflect the national traumas, as her East Pakistan village is swept by the Liberation War. On the other hand, *A Golden Age* (2007) follows the protagonist Rehana, who struggles to keep her family safe against the backdrop of a country on the brink of war. In the meantime, Rehana struggles to cope with the death of her husband, the custody of her children, and her wavering nationalism as her children get more involved in the war.

Boori and Rehana are the perfect prototype for the 'war mother' symbolism. That is, they are taken as the caregivers of a nation that is inflicted in a national crisis, aka the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. They are expected to not only send off their children in war but to heal and nurture the others who are fighting in the war. For example, Rehana has to share her domestic sphere with an inflicted soldier in the conflict and take care of them. Similarly, Boori is powerless against military conflict and has to sacrifice her dumb son in the efforts of the war.

In both cases, the two women have to adhere to a narrative that is already set for them. Since a lot of the activities on the war front are controlled by men, they have, therefore, set the identities that women have to adhere to during times of conflict, especially in the case of mothers. Often the narrative of the mother is attached to that of pain, suffering and more importantly, sacrifice. The opportunity to create one's own identity is lost during national crises for a woman. The set role of the 'sacrificial mother' is steeped in patriarchal ideals, which violate women's identities and defile their domestic spheres. Boori observes this sacrificial role religiously, which causes her to lose a fundamental chunk of her identity. On the other hand, Rehana subtly fights against the set role to create a pathway for herself and weave her narrative of heroism. The striking difference between the fates of Rehana and Boori is a significant indication that the role set by patriarchy for mothers during war is not one of heroism, but rather it is a ploy to use them as scapegoats during times of crisis.

There are several feminist research on both the novel *A Golden Age* and *River of My Blood* exploring the identities of women in relation to the political, social, and gender disparities in a war-scarred patriarchal society. Like, Thottam (2008) called *A Golden Age* a 'testimony' (p. 5) by explaining how the author illustrates the experiences of the protagonists to magnify the political and social upheaval surrounding the country at times of crisis. Rabbani and Chaudhury (2018) drew a contrastive study between the female protagonists of the two novels to show how the characters grappled with the political, sexual and social imbalances in a war-torn country. They identified that both the female protagonists exhibited a 'passive resistance' and thus embodied the experience of the oppressed. According to Khan (2008), *River of My Blood* showcased female oppression against structural dominance both inside and outside the family environment. Miah (2020) noted how the themes of love and duty for women, clashed together in the backdrop of the 1971 liberation war in the novel *A Golden Age*. Attention was drawn to Rehana's motherhood, illustrating her involvement in war activities through her mother-like helping of the Guerillas. Lauret-Taft (2020) drew parallels between Rehana's body and that of the fertile land of Bangladesh; noting how the character of Rehana becomes a voice of anticipation, as she provides for her children and by extension her country as well. Through her 'motherly' resistance, Rehana was able to reclaim her body through her femininity. Haque (2023) found that *River of My Blood* forms a kind of subaltern voice, alternate vision of motherhood and identity as a self-reliant individual.

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In a postcolonial country like Bangladesh, numerous fractured and ambivalent identities are intermingled. On the other hand, being a female within this fractured social structure creates a much more complex identity in itself. The several intersectional identities that are created in a female living within the social orders are worth exploring. The protagonists in *A Golden Age* and *River of My Blood* are highly complex characters that have identities that transcend simply being a woman. A general feminist study of the two characters would not be able to account for the full range of their complex identities. Therefore, there is a need for an intersectional feminist study of the protagonists of the two novels. The two select texts of the research portray motherhood in its motley of identity, against the backdrop of a national crisis. Usually, at times of national urgency, feminine voices are subjugated, and the general narrative is created based on a patriarchal voice. But it is equally important to highlight voices in the margins of society and their individual experiences and contributions during the war. The research highlights a different form of nationality called feminine nationality, and how the female protagonists navigate their role of motherhood against its existence. Research such as this sheds more light on the unsung voices of Bengali subcontinental women, who are often kept under the veil of subjugation.

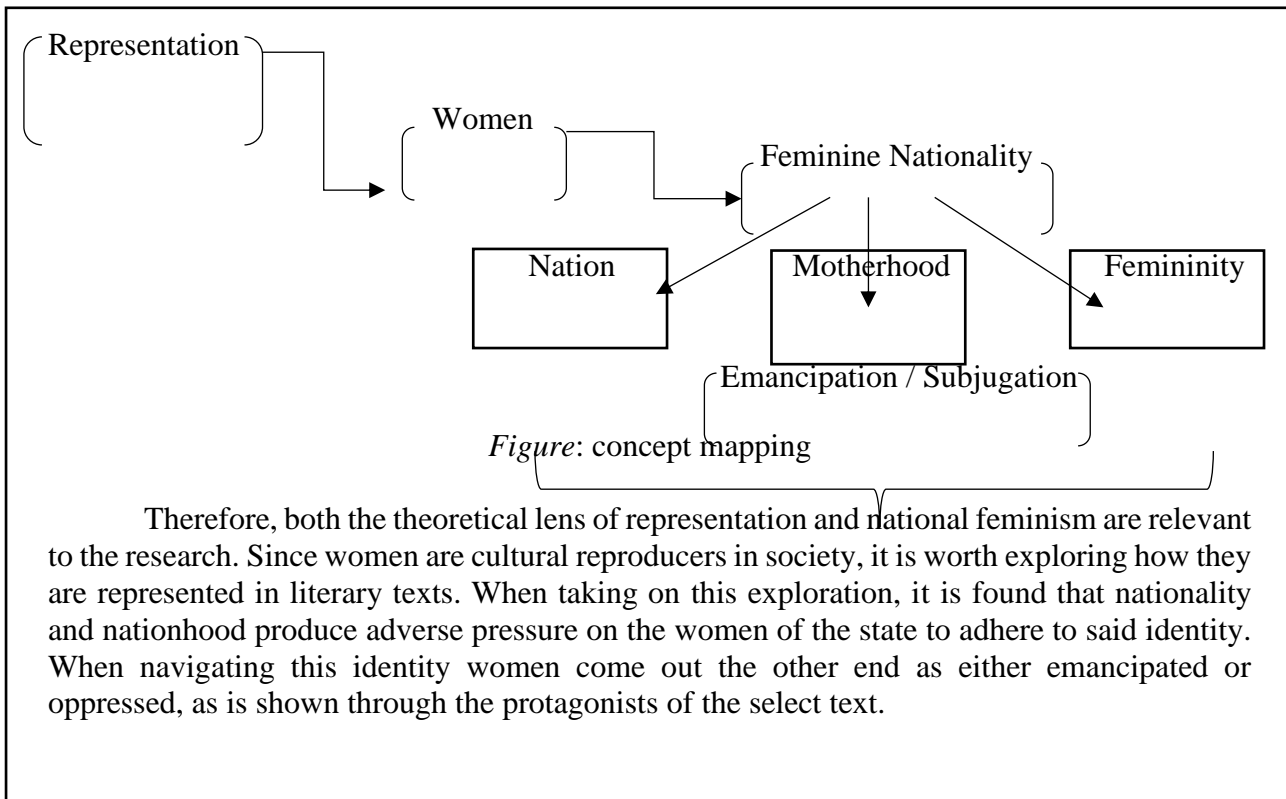
Literature is a representational tool through which the ethos of an age and its culture can be expressed vividly. It is important to study literature critically because it has a lasting impact on society's image of itself. Stuart Hall (1997) shows the link between language and the signifying practices that make up culture. Hall propounds that it is "the participants" that give "meaning to people, objects, and events" (p. 3). Therefore, while analysing literary texts, it is necessary to remember that it is a cultural production that helps create meaning in society through the tool of representation. Stuart Hall's representation theory is relevant because when subcontinental women voice their opinions, it helps create a new set of meanings in their culture. As Hall states how we represent something is how we give them meaning (p. 3). Therefore, the politics of representation is to be considered when analysing a piece of a literary text. Also, the said literary texts will have an impact on the culture of the said society through the creation of meaning.

Using the representation theory of Stuart Hall in the two select texts, a broader feminist study is carried out in the research. Feminist theory analyses the prevalent gender roles as they are represented in cultural forms such as film, advertisement, and literature. It is an approach that focuses on how women are represented in the said cultural form and whether or not it is accurate in the given social conditions. (Nayar, 2009, p. 83). It is a movement as well as a theoretical framework which have persisted on several waves.

In national feminism, the relationship between the nation-state and women inside the nation is explored. Several topics such as war and motherhood, women's agency during national crisis, using women as caregivers of a nation etc. are explored under the umbrella of national feminism. An old "trope" of society is to equate "the nation with the mother" (Nayar, 2009, p. 105). Feminists see this as a problematic representation because it imposes an unfair set role onto the women of society.

Cynthia Enloe looks deeply into the relationship between the nation-state and females. According to her, women's decisions taken in the context of nationalism have serious implications for "ethnic transformation and national mobilization" (Enloe, 2004, p. 103). She goes even as far as to state that nationality is a masculine construct (Nayar, 2009, p. 106). This kind of framework shines a light on the identity of feminine nationality, which differs greatly in relation to the masculine construct of nationality.

Nira Yuval-Davis in her *Gender and Nation* (1997) has provided one of the most substantial critiques of national feminism. She propounds that, women “...reproduce nations, biologically, culturally, and symbolically.” (p. 2). She places women in the place of “cultural reproducers” (Nayar, 2009, p. 106). This means that women are always at the forefront of the creation of meaning within a said society. They bear the burden of producing and carrying culture on their backs. This is why, the nation and state intervene in the identity of women so vigorously, because they are intertwined with the creation of meaning in that state. Yuval-Davis calls women both the ‘biological’ and the ‘cultural’ reproducers (Nayar, 2009, p. 106).



Nationalism: A Feminised Perspective on War

Women during times of war and national crisis take on a very interesting identity, which is unlikely to transpire during normal circumstances. ‘Motherland’, as the name suggests, has a connection to women and land. Women during wartime are given the authority of caregivers, and their sanctity is connected to the nationalistic preservation of the motherland. However, within this so-called glorified role of the mother of a nation, she is violated, silenced and forced to endure dangerous sacrifices. The way a nation propagates nationalism during times of war and crisis is different for males and females, but often the national cause is painfully focused on the masculine trials and tribulations. *A Golden Age* and *River of My Blood* showcase a feminized perspective on war, which is different from a masculine viewpoint. Therefore, the intersectional overlap of a female’s nationalism in a patriarchal setting is worth exploring.

Historically, the great wars have always been uber-focused on a very masculine narrative. However, it is often forgotten and misjudged how vital of a role females play during times of national crisis. Apart from participation in the militant and healing department, females often uphold the domestic sphere and serve as a backbone and nurturer to a diseased nation. There is a striking lack of narrative from the feminine perspective and what transpires on their sides. Moreover, the structure of a nation in the name of nationalism often exploits

females and uses them as scapegoats during war. Nationalism is thrust upon the females, and they are expected to act as caregivers to the nation. Feminist writer and critic Cynthia Enloe identifies nationalism as a 'masculine construct' and says that women rarely acquire power 'within the state structure' (Nayar, 2009, p. 106). We see snippets of this toxic display of nationality in the novels *A Golden Age* and *River of My Blood* as the females have to sacrifice gravely for the nation. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee (1993) argues that while recounting history from conventional political archives, the autonomous nationalist struggle of women is not found. Chatterjee proposes that this history is less found in the political realm, which is external, and more so found in the "inner" space of middle-class homes (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 137). The female protagonists' roles as mothers are intimately connected to their national identities, their children being manipulated in a variety of ways by the nation. Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović in "War, Nationalism and Mothers" talks about this connection –

During wartime, women's bodies — as soldier production units — become sites of political contention...Nationalism demands that women bear and care for sons who they will sacrifice for the "defence" and "self-determination" of their nation. Ironically, as many women who lost sons in the war point out, it is precisely in the role of mother that women suffer the most — directly contradicting the supposed veneration of motherhood that characterizes nationalistic societies. (Ristanovic, 1996, p. 360).

In the seminal text of feminist nationalism, *A Great Way to Fly: Nationalism, the State, and the Varieties of Third-World Feminism*, Geraldine Heng (2004) recounts how feminism in third-world countries is almost always arising as a result of some nationalist consequence. The researcher goes on to say that women's issues have often always been anchored by nationalist imaginary (Heng, 2004). Thus, 'motherland'; 'mother-tongue', which are very much nationalist inventions, are named as such. Women's issues are treated as 'ideological and political resource' in third-world countries and the state is a 'fiscal beneficiary' of this exploitation of women (Heng, 2004, p. 862).

On the other hand, wars allow space for females to participate in activities that are otherwise closed to them during normal times. In an interview with George Liston Seay, Anam identifies Rehana as a "reluctant revolutionary" who has been thrust into an extraordinary circumstance due to the war (Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2013). In an interview with *BBC Bangla* and *The Daily Star*, Selina Hossain mentions the act of sacrifice that Boori goes through as her form of revolutionary activity in a nationalist struggle (BBC Bangla, 2014).

Both Rehana and Boori, encapsulated within their respective domestic spheres, are allowed an area to venture into extremely heroic and unlikely situations. Therefore, the two novels authorise a feminised perspective on war and how their individual feminised identity stands amongst the raging chaos of war and nationalism. It moves away from a patriarchal notion of nationalism which uses females as scapegoats at the expense of the nation while also highlighting the several violations that were inflicted on them. However, while one character, Rehana, is allowed to flourish in this narrative; the other, Boori, suffers because of it.

Rehana: The Reluctant Revolutionary

Rehana wants to maintain a spatial distance from the national crisis which has engulfed the entire country. She is more associative with the domestic realm, and a symbolic indication of the patriarchal notion of 'the angel of the house.' But as foreseen, the national crisis keeps knocking at Rehana's door and her highly political children engulf her within this national identity. In hindsight, Rehana does not share the enthusiasm of a glorified national

consciousness, often having to battle it in order to protect her children. Her identity as a mother both guides and hampers her national identity. Moreover, because Rehana is of an ambiguous national identity, this also creates a grey image of where she is to be placed. As we see, her family comes from Calcutta, her sisters live in Pakistan, and she has an affinity for fluent Urdu and Urdu poems. In relation, her children have a much more straight-forward heritage and enjoy a more direct relation to the national crisis. By navigating amid this complex national identity, Rehana creates an identity for herself, by displaying heroic splendours and suffering grand sacrifices.

Rehana's symbolic connection to her nation is connected to her identity as a mother. The mother is often seen as a caretaker for a damaged nation, and, therefore, she is either exploited or domesticated. Kapur (2018) talks about this connection between the nation and females. She states how in order to 'break the backbone of the honour and prestige of a country' that women are violated (p. 4). At the very wake of the narrative, we see how Rehana's children - who are her most prized possessions - are taken away from her because it is too turbulent to keep them in a fractured nation. Faiz, Rehana's brother-in-law, says, "It's not safe here...martial law, strikes, people on the streets...that is why my wife, and I want to take the children to Lahore." (Anam, 2012, p. 5). This taking away of her children is symbolic of how nationalism was a shaky ground for Rehana at the onset. This is also reflective of the greater span of the entire country, and how their basic rights and honour were stripped. Through Rehana's loss of her children to Pakistan, her offspring and torchbearer, the greater crisis at the hand of the Bangladeshi nation is foreshadowed. Her gender is a great gaping hole through which she was exploited, and it has a direct connection to her nationality - "I was mute, and in my silence, he saw my hesitation." (Anam, 2012, p.7).

Throughout the narrative, her children's nationalism is contrasted with her own. Rehana only reluctantly rents out her house to the revolutionaries because she is afraid of losing her children to the nation all over again. She has internalized the role of the motherhood myth as demonstrated by Betty Friedan in her book, *The Feminine Mystique* (2010) - "Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers...they had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home." (Friedan, 2010, p.18). It is also notable that the burden of nationalism was thrust on her - without giving her autonomy against it. More than from a place of rapport, she was more disillusioned with the idea of losing her children to war, and thus reluctantly held on to her shaky national identity. Anam (2010) writes,

She did not have the proper trappings of a nationalist...They were hard, precise words and did not capture Rehana's ambiguous feelings about the country she had adopted...Rehana did not have the exactness to become a true revolutionary...while the children would remain fixed at the centre of her life, she would gradually fade out of theirs. (p. 47).

Moreover, Mitra (2020) says that Rehana's 'nascent political consciousness' does not take the form of a 'combative militant mother' (p. 92). That over-reaching political consciousness does not stain her immediately like it does to her children.

The domestic sphere that Rehana tries to protect so aggressively is invaded by her son Sohail who uses his mother's house as a base camp for revolutionaries. What is interesting is that this act of 'violation' of Rehana's private space does not stem from the enemy forces, but rather from her very own 'male' son. It is repeatedly showcased in the novel how her private sphere is a place of safe haven for her. She builds her house 'Shona' and in the meanwhile rents it out and uses the money to win custody over her children. The domestic realm of "Shona" is a literal product of her blood, sweat and tears. After her domestic space is violated, Rehana

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tries to cope vehemently by making elaborate meals, pickles, shopping, dusting etc. She cannot stay away from her home space - which is why she never leaves East Pakistan despite the chaos and how she cannot stay away for long in the base camp in Calcutta with Maya. Her home "Shona" is her homeland, almost more than the land of East Pakistan itself. Anam mentions in an interview that she named the house 'Shona' because of the golden crop of Bangladesh, jute (Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2013). This fertile ground of Rehana has been defiled by the intervention of history.

Her highly political and nationalist children thus provide a shadowy contrast to Rehana's nationalism. She says in regards to Sohail, as the Major thanks her for "Giv[ing] up her house", "He was probably thinking she had done it out of some sense of duty...she wished it had been so...to have done something for the country and not just in the service of her children." (Anam, 2010, p.111). On the other hand, Maya severely questions her nationalist sentiments, in a blind devotion to her nation - "Why did you bother to bring us back [from Lahore]? You have no feelings for this place...Where is he [Sohail] now? Probably dead, killed by one of your Pak soldiers!" (Anam, 2010, p.89). This dialogue alone is a sharp indication of how nationalist endeavours interfere with personal spaces. The generational distance between Rehana and Maya causes a disparity because of the intervention of history and the nation.

As the narrative proceeds, we see a slight detachment of Rehana from her children. Within the atypical background of the war, Rehana slowly creates an identity for herself. We do not find an explicit mention of war activities in the novel, rather it is the story of a singular mother, the reluctant revolutionary, and how she comes to terms with her national identity. The detachment of Rehana from her children takes place when they both move away from 'Shona' - Maya goes off to Calcutta after the brutal rape of her friend to become a writer and Sohail moves away to fight in the war. Rehana is then confined in the closed quarters of her home with the Major, another revolutionary figure, albeit an injured one. Kapur calls the Major 'an embodiment of Bangladesh' with whom Rehana builds a bond and connection (Kapur, 2018, p.7). After she is reunited with her children again, there is a slight change in her attitude towards them. Gone is the incessant infatuation, and out comes a sense of disillusionment.

"...she treated Maya and Sohail as though they were there to collect an old debt...a yawning, cyclic, inexhaustible need. Whether the need was theirs or hers, she could not say." (Anam, 2010, p.131)."

[To Sohail], "What have you been doing all these months? Fighting a war or throwing sand at Silvi's window?" (Anam, 2010, p.169).

"Rehana couldn't wait to get rid of her [Maya]; she could stop pretending to be interested and run back to the tent." (Anam, 2010, p.222).

There is a change in the nature of her motherhood, which is intimately connected to her national identity. She contemplates, "I am a mother. But now she was something else - a mother, yes, but not just of children. Mother of a different sort." (Anam, 2010, p.140). This transformation in her approach to motherhood showcases the hypocrisy of nationalism, and how the false veneration that 'war mothers' are ascribed by the nation-state. Cohn (2018) mentions how women take on new empowered roles during wartime (1-2). And Kapur says that Rehana carries the image of 'A New Woman' in the war narrative - a widow who is not shattered by the preconceived notions of society (p. 9).

It is also notable to mention the politicization of religion, which is very affixed to the Liberation War. West Pakistan used religion as a legitimizing mission to massacre Bangladesh's population, deeming them to be impure of fundamental Islamic beliefs. Bangla

was called the language of the non-Muslims, while Urdu was a pure Islamic representative language. The nationalism in the Liberation War had an intimate connection to one's religion. The Islamic religion was used as a soiled backdrop for severe war crimes. In the strikingly different cultures of Pakistan and Bangladesh, religion remained their only unifying factor which was abused as a pawn of nationalism.

In *A Golden Age*, this downward view of Bengali Muslims in opposition to Pakistani Muslims is echoed throughout. Rehana's children are taken away from her with a justification that "she had not taught them the proper lessons about Jannat and the afterlife" (Anam, 2010, p. 5). In relation to Tikka Khan's soldiers, it says, "they were told they were saving Pakistan, and Islam, maybe even the Almighty himself, from the depravity of the Bengalis." (Anam, 2010, p. 129). Or the conversation that Parveen has with Rehana, "I'm talking about the dirty elements of our great nation. The Hindus, the Communists, the separatists!" (Anam, 2010, p. 106).

The protagonist symbolically stands as a staunch figure against Pakistan's sentiment of religious fundamentalism. In the first instant, she rents out her house to Hindus, the Sengupta's. Even in the wake of national chaos, she refuses to discriminate against them - "They've been my tenants for years...they're like family" (Anam, 2010, p. 106). At the party that she hosts in her house, she consumes alcohol. She also leads a prayer group in her house, "Rehana was pleased...though she knew she really shouldn't; women weren't supposed to lead the prayer." (Anam, 2010, p. 112). Moreover, she has sexual relations with the Major out of wedlock during the month of Ramadan. However, she is not shown as a secularist character, but rather as a character who has a deep affinity with religion. Zinia Mitra (2020) writes in this context, "In Anam's allegorical narrative, Rehana's fluid religiosity exceeds the ideological limits set by West Pakistan." (p. 91). Without going into debates regarding the purity of religion, Rehana's character is placed in the grey area of religious devotion - which is in opposition to the nationalist tactic of Islamic fundamentalism set by Pakistan. Her being, therefore, is a defilement of this religious/nationalist sentiment.

Therefore, Rehana's national identity is intimately connected to her role as a mother. Through her disillusionment with that role, she was able to create a much more empowered identity for herself. She is an indication of how the domestic realm of females is their land and ground of existence and how nationalism and war defile that ground. Her ambiguous approach to nationalism creates a new space for females who are trapped in the gendered structure of the nation. Finally, her fluid religious approach stands as a protest of the greater nation against the tactic of religious fundamentalism used by Pakistan to hold control over the nation of Bangladesh.

Boori: The Sacrificial Scapegoat

Boori's sense of nationalism is very conventional. She comes from a lower-class family, who resides in the village of Haldi situated around Jessore, surrounded by roaring nature. Because of the location of Boori, away from the political scene of the capital city, we see disillusionment with the whole concept of war in her head. Moreover, because of her gender, she is further kept away from the ins-and-outs of war. Boori is showcased as a mother for the whole nation, a metaphor commonly used in works of fiction. To further the symbolism is her literal sacrifice of her son Rais to protect two freedom fighters. However, despite this controversial 'heroic' act of the protagonist, we leave her in a state of fragmentation. Boori's ultimate end serves as a testament to the dangers of the national imposition of motherhood. The self-sacrificial act of Boori is her method of vicariously living through her son and experiencing the valiance that comes from fighting in a war. However, this act of valour as propagated by the nation leaves Boori completely shattered and violated.

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From her very childhood, we see a revolutionary in Boori - she is wild and untamed, "She dreamed she had wings to fly, and she flew and flew fearlessly. No one could match her indomitable spirit." (Hossain, 2016, p. 5). But because of her gender, she could never transcend into the world of adventure, which she believed to be outside the boundary of her village. Therefore, from her standpoint, Boori pursued adventures that were out of her reach. One of the ways she intends to do so is through birthing a son, "She no longer wished to fly away from her cage to infinity. She wished to be a mother." (Hossain, 2016, p. 40). However, she has complications in conceiving a child at all, which is another roadblock to her quest for adventure and fulfilment. Moreover, her son comes out as disabled, and she is forced to put her vision on hold once again. Boori always carried the image of a heroic male figure in her mind, equating Jalil to it, "To her Jalil was a hero, the ever-flowing spring of Jannat lifting her from the temporal world into a realm of heavenly ecstasy." (Hossain, 2016, p. 76). She wanted to see herself in that image of a hero, which was cut short because of her gender. What we thus find is that Boori had the seeds of revolution, which is why she readily slipped into the role of a 'war mother.'

In the case of a nationalistic lens, Boori internalises the role of the 'mother of the nation.' She wants to desperately take part in the nationalistic struggle, not out of patriotism per se, but because of her thirst for adventure and heroism, "No one bothered to ask her help. Was she unfit to play her part in the war?" (Hossain, 2016, p. 96). But she is always denied any knowledge of the war, always being patronized by the male member of her family, "No one filled her in on what was going on, as if she had nothing to do with the national problem." (Hossain, 2016, p. 97). But Boori wanted desperately to be involved in the war, the nationalist spirit had engulfed her. There are two degrees of separation which she has with the war, one was that she was a woman and denied access to proper knowledge of the war, and the other was that she was a lower-class woman living away from Dhaka. Because of this separation, Boori inhales the titbits of nationalistic slogans that were thrown around her.

Boori's act of sacrifice was a vicarious instant. In the longing for a dedication or cause towards her country, she lived through her son. The disabled boy Rais is not all that different from Boori herself. Her gender disabled her from taking an active part in the war. Moreover, Rais's disability also hampered her from the title of the mother of a freedom fighter. She fulfilled two very gaping unfulfilled desires in her life through the sacrifice of her son, Rais - she sacrificed gravely for her country, and she enabled her son to be a heroic figure. This act of sacrificing one's son to the nation is a very common nationalistic standpoint. Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović (1996) writes in this regard,

Nationalism demands that women bear and care for sons who they will sacrifice for the "defence" and "self-determination" of their nation. Ironically, as many women who lost sons in the war point out, it is precisely in the role of mother that women suffer the most — directly contradicting the supposed veneration of motherhood that characterizes nationalistic societies. (p. 360).

As demonstrated by Nikolić-Ristanović (1996), we see how this act of sacrifice shatters Boori. In the whole scheme of nationalism, where she was not even granted full permission, her status as a nationalist figure stays questionable. Rais's muteness is another striking symbol of a loss of language. Boori feels saddened and a little contentious about Rais never calling her a mother, "You never called me 'maa', Rais, the soil of Haldi will take you to her breast." (Hossain, 2016, p. 190). The protagonist has a great connection to her surrounding nature, where she feels the most at home. Rais's inability to articulate language amidst a country torn by a war surrounding the mother tongue is very symbolic. In Boori's mind, the sacrifice of Rais was the

only way he could have paid respect to his country. Moreover, it was also a symbolic sacrifice of her inability to speak in a nation, since Rais is a by-product that stemmed from Boori herself. Rubaiyat Hossain (2011) writes,

The identification of mothers as the nation draws a parallel between the mother's endless endurance and the national resilience to survive against the odds. The mother is also viewed as the singular entity who at all times, and under all circumstances denies letting go of the glorified memories of those sons who shed blood and died in 1971. (p. 112).

This sentiment of the 'nation mother' is Boori's only chance at any hope of heroism or involvement in the war activities. The structure of the society has placed Boori conveniently into this one role only, leaving every other option closed. Her disabled son stands as a strong symbol of why this nationalistic role is so detrimental to mothers. Her dumb and mute son proves to be a symbol of Boori's autonomy. Even with the full faculty of speech, her voice is often silenced - she is not consulted by any of the male members of her family and is not given proper knowledge of the war. So, her position in society is not all that different from her disabled child. And in the end, they both suffer, one with their life and the other with immense tragedy.

In the protagonists' struggles of the select texts, two different explorations of motherhood and femininity are shown. It is also worth mentioning that the two protagonists come from two different economic backgrounds, Rehana being solvent: while Boori being from a lower-class village setting. Their economic backdrops also hamper their accessibility to knowledge and emancipation. The economic background of the protagonists has to be taken into account while discussing the contrastive approaches to their feminine national identity. Rehana is reluctant to the set national role that the state has granted her. Her children, who slip comfortably into their set roles; criticise her because of her reluctance. As mentioned above, Rehana is unwilling to accept the role of the caregiver of society. She is also from an ambiguous national setting since her extended family has ties to West Pakistan. She creates and navigates a space and identity for herself where she becomes the mother she wants to be. Rehana is always a caregiver for her children and the state, but she does so in her own accord. Because of the identity that she is able to create, essentially her definition of feminine nationality, Rehana receives emancipation.

On the other hand, Boori is from a lower-income household with less access to education. The idea of a set national identity is imposed upon her by her society- that of the sacrificial mother. She loses her zeal for life and her outspoken wild nature as soon as she gets married. Moreover, when she attains motherhood and creates a disabled son who is unable to compete at the war front, she is torn into pieces. This shows the negative side-effects of the feminine national identity. She has no agency of her own in this set identity and can only resort to sacrifice and pain from giving up her son to the war-front. Therefore, Boori is subjugated in society because of succumbing to the set role of motherhood given by the state.

When comparing the two protagonists, it is easy to see the dangers that lie in conforming to the frigid identity lines that nationalism perpetuates. It also demonstrates the differences that can arise in the case of economic disparity between two mothers with similar situations. In the end, it can be withdrawn that a unique set of identities needs to be created by females instead of conforming to any set national idea of the mother. Otherwise, mothers will be reduced down to the sacrificial lamb, forever subjugated and side-lined into the margins.

Therefore, with due analysis of two different kinds of feminine national identity, the

nuances of the intersectional relationship between female and nation are explored. The research finds that the nation imposes certain identities on females during times of national crisis which are extremely sacrificial for them. Moreover, the research finds two complex national identities – one of a reluctant revolutionary and another of a war mother. It concludes that both these identities are very oppressive to a female and nationalism is used as propaganda to benefit the nation at the cost of a mother's sacrifice.

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