

## **Voices of Resistance: Gender, War, and Empowerment in Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age"**

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### **Introduction**

This study is conducted to analyse detailed information of Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age, which is mainly based on gender, war and empowerment. Violence on women and other discrimination related information has been included in this report that helps to gather detailed information regarding this topic. This debut novel of Tahmima Anam highlights the theme of love and duty in the light of violence and gender discrimination. Sequential demonstration of Bangladesh war and its direct connection with domestic violence and other different issues of women including severe discrimination. Postcolonial feminist criticism and theory has been included in this study that gained understanding regarding the war situation and its consequences on women in Bangladesh. Tahmima Anam's novel A Golden Age (2007) is set in the context of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971—a time of thorough social and political transformation that reshapes a nation's identity. Through the story of Rehana Haque, the novel describes how a mother grapples through personal battles in order to ensure the security and future of her children, all the while enacting the overall struggle for Bangladesh. Through the journey of Rehana, Anam has intricately put together themes of gender, war, and empowerment to closely question the emergence of resistance from personal, maternal and political motivations. This report offers detailed information on how Anam gives voice to female resistance and garners the transformation of traditional roles from passive empowerment to a direct negation of the byproducts of war concerning identity and agency.

### **Gender roles and the Feminine Experience of War**

Complex evolution of the role of women during war has been highlighted in this novel of Tahmima Aman. A Golden Age helps to learn about the escalated political tension and its impact on the domestic violence on women. A few recent narratives, such as Tahmima Anam's novel A Golden Age (2007) and Dilruba Z. Ara's Blame, have numerous such references in which the traditional image of women as being a victim of war is eradicated; rather, they become active participants in armed conflict. Rehana is psychologically weak without her husband. She is even afraid to converse with him about her son joining the armed forces. To deter Sohail from going to the war, she takes him to the grave of her husband as well (Miah, 2020). It is Iqbal's appearance that gives strength to Rehana when he is present in the grave. As a widow, she feels that Iqbal could have stopped Sohail from going to war if he were alive. She feels that as a woman, she doesn't have the vision to do what is best for her son. She asks him

casually not to join the battle, but she does not stop him directly. After the independence of Sri Lanka (1948) and Bangladesh (1971) from British rule, two nation-states underwent the transformative effects of civil war in terms of postcolonial national identity, ethnicity, class, caste and religion. Not only individual but also collective identities are located within a range of specific national contexts and these sociocultural categories. The historical circumstances produced significant "material and ideological changes that affected women", whose integration into the national struggles was different from that of the men. This paper is mainly concerned with gendered narratives of collective memory and share in suffering, gender roles mediated by nationalism in the public and private spheres, concepts of femininity (motherhood and widowhood) and masculinity in the national struggle, and the effects of migration and generational dynamics on national identity. A Golden Age and Bone China, in the context of a literary text, point to the illuminating of that "invisible" history and the experiences of the third world woman in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Even though women seem to be a symbol or indicator of political goals, national identity, and bearers of cultural values and traditions, it would be wrong to assume that they can use these assigned roles on their behalf, however (Ranasinha and Ranasinha, 2016). National struggle partially frees women from traditional restraints and allows them to take part in public and political spheres with men that were "disallowed under normal conditions"; yet, it also threatens their role as reproducers through religious, "communal, class and cast" enmities like rape, pregnancy and torture. Gendered parameters also fashion men as the "author and subject of the nation", while women are the nation itself and are supposed to preserve its "purity". In this context, the diasporic narratives of Anam and Tearne explore the concerns of "the production of self and collective consciousness" by recording third world women's life histories. Writing such stories contributes to those communities sharing a particular history by preventing their collective consciousness from being lost. They also promise the "very possibilities of political consciousness and action" for females through telling their stories.

Published over three decades after the foundation of Bangladesh in 1971, Anam's *A Golden Age* represents a women's narrative of collective memory, which brings with it new questions about the reproduction of national identity through partition, women's changing roles in the public and private realms, motherhood and sexuality during the independence and civil wars. The novel is based on the true story of Anam's grandmother, who experiences the war between West and East Pakistan and provides a feminised perspective on national identity and domestic loss with historical and spatial distance (Chew, X.Y. and Asl, 2024). In the narrative, Rehana is described as a young Urdu-speaking widow who is born in the West but lives in the Bengali East. Having lost an appeal in the court for custody and having been forced to send her children to her brother-in-law in the West in 1959, she is reunited with them after all these years. The children, Sohail and Maya, are by this time both politically oriented university students and they gradually get involved in the national struggle. Although Rehana initially does not like to support them, she ultimately gets herself immersed in the battle as a mother seeking to defend her children. Her gradually evolving thoughts and the transformation of her role as a woman contributing to the independence war contradict the idea of a masculinised collective identity and call attention to the importance of private domestic space in reproducing national identity.

## **Role of War as a catalyst of female empowerment**

War acts as a powerful agent that can play a pivotal role in managing the development of women. Active involvement of Rehana in independence struggle from inactive engagement denoted the development of women nature through the concept of war. Along with this, Rehana's journey throughout the Novel is able to provide detailed information regarding the role of war in ensuring women's development (Salma, 2024). Developing political consciousness and personal empowerment of this character has been noticed willingness of Rehana to navigate political danger and other components of war. On the other hand, the involvement of Maya, daughter of Rehana, also provides detailed information regarding empowerment and development of women. This character is also able to highlight youthful idealism and direct political action. In addition, traditional gender constraints and quite resilience related factors are also highlighted efficiently with the involvement of these women in war and managing their role in war consequences as well. Indispensable and multifaceted resistance of women participation in this war situation of Bangladesh has been highlighted efficiently in this report that demonstrates potential empowerment and development of women in war situations. Rehana is over each a caring mother who can forfeit the littlest segment of her life for joy for her youngsters (Iqbal, 2022). Life turned out to be so difficult when she lost her significant other in a mishap and it became horrendous when she lost the care of her youngsters to Faiz against the allegation that she doesn't have the correct ability to give security to her kids. Not at all like different ladies she kept her choice unbroken and under no circumstances provided to the situation. She never for a moment mislaid her desire to restore the care of her children. She follows the situation after her significant other's death, endures the life of widowhood, shields herself from the dangers of being a widow and single ladies in a male centric culture, loses her fortunes yet at the same time keeps on making a superior sanctuary for her youngsters

Anam has moved the place of third world women through her protagonist who has the power of the resistance ambiguous to women of her generation to live alone in a shackled society. The concept of "Single parent", which is advancing in current days due to the ability of opposition of women, is used by Anam in her novel in the context of 1971. In *A Golden Age*, Rehana finds herself isolated from the rest of the world when her husband dies accidentally and encounters some threats mentally and physically. Yet, not like others of her age she is not a lady to surrender. She continues with her efforts to regain the power of her children but the social and world of politics never favors her (Prakash Dwivedi, 2022). Even the legal system also seems difficult for a struggling lady. Nobody is ready to believe that she can provide a better future to her children alone. She tries much to have a better home which would at least resolve her identity crisis alongside her children in that society. She sells her possessions and applies for a loan. However, this is no country for the single woman, she starts getting the bitter reality in the true sense. The Bank work force exploits her initial widowhood and tries to allure her against a bank credit. However, for every circumstance Rehana ends up being bold and strange. She fights alone to regain her straight over her children just like she saves herself alone from the actual danger of the bank representative just with a sharp pen nip. She proves in each

scenario that women don't require sympathy from men; they are bold to fight alone for their survival.

## Conflict of gender power

Masculinity and its vulnerabilities during war is considered as an effective theme of *Thamima anam*. In this novel, the son of Rehana, Sohail portrayed the idealism of young revolutionaries. Along with this, a traditional masculine role has been developed through this character of this novel. In addition, rigid experience of masculine strength and its dominance has been highlighted during the tie of war (Khan, Danish, and Ahmed, 2024). While the allegorical stand-in father calls for barricades to protect the motherland, Rehana, the symbolical mother, feels it is her duty to feed her children, a trope that runs through Hossain's *River of My Blood* as well, and which emphasizes the supporting role of women during the war. She is often described assessing her food supplies, cooking, and feeding people; the refugees who gathered around her home in the wake of Operation Searchlight as well as her neighbors. She feels it is her duty to send "[her] son to war with a full stomach". The military undertones of the word duty make the domestic role of mothers intersect with the idea of supporting the cause. Mothers throughout the novel want to feed their sons, and food also becomes a pretext for them to stay involved. For instance, Joy's mother, Mrs Bashir, brings *morog polao*, her son's favorite dish to Rehana, whom she suspects to be in touch with her sons. The way the food is presented throughout their exchange, carried on a silver tray, makes it seem like an offering to obtain information about her son. However, this nurturing image of mothers is nuanced by the episode of the dinner at Mrs Chowdhuri's house.

Anam draws attention to the forgotten archives that would balance the narrative of nation-making. The novel itself is turned into a platform for producing such archives as it alludes to and thus pays homage to Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a fierce advocate for women's education, and Jahanara Imam, the mother of martyrs, who campaigned to bring war criminals to justice. Mrs Sengupta discusses early on her dream of becoming a writer and refers to Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*, a short story full of matriarchal utopianism. For the introduction to *Gender, Nationalism and Genocide in Bangladesh*, Azra Rashid underscores the need to look at the sites where history is memorialized. Focusing on the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, she discusses the role of *Sultana's Dream* as a feminist text and argues that it was one of the first to be embraced by the nationalist agenda. Mrs Sengupta is inspired by Hossain's literary career (Islam, Rashid and Subhan, 2024). In fact, the first time she meets Rehana, she points out that she is writing a novel. And when she is discovered by Rehana in a shelter camp, unable to utter a single word, Rehana, recalling how she would speak about the book, provides her with a pen and paper, and only then can she begin to speak what had befallen her. Another extremely interesting context at work here is Jahanara Imam's *Of Blood and Fire*. This diary first published in 1986, in Bengali, chronicles the war from the perspective of a mother whose son is a guerrilla. Like Imam, Anam captures the fear felt by war-mothers and the grief that surrounds them. Rehana and Imam are also allegorical mothers embracing political change. Through the juxtaposition of the two women and the tribute that is given to Imam in *The Good*

Muslim to the title "Mother of Martyrs", it is a political power that is women and mothers who speak.

## **Portraying domestic factors as political terrain**

Tahmima Anam displays the home of Rehana as the political arena that can reevaluate the connection between the domestic space and political terrain. Politicisation of Rehana's domestic space can ensure interconnection between different things including politics, gender and other components as well. Anam described the wretched condition of the Bengali cities. She drew the picture of the war-bound situation and an awful emotional confusion in her novel: "At ten o'clock the tanks began to fire. It was the sound of a thousand New Year firecrackers of metal pipes being dragged across a stone road of chillies popping in a smoking pan. 'Ya Allah!' Mrs Chowdhury, a friend and neighbour of Rehana, cried. 'What's happening? ". This devastating war waged by West Pakistani Army reveals the unending civil war movement and its tragic repercussions in East Pakistan. As a good democrat, Rehana shows her sympathy towards the victimized people of war. In every nation making, a national story of the struggle for independence is written and in this story only the grand narratives of the patriarchal nationalists' struggle is portrayed but the suppressed narratives of the women are nowhere written, as if women are nothing to do in such a struggle. At the end, Anam projects Maya as a voice of the nationalist, which speaks and writes for the fight of the women of the nation (Parekh and Kaushal, 2022). She does it through those persuading pieces of articles concerning true stories concerning the plight of women and opens the gates toward making possible for a truth commission to be set, wherein the voices of 'Biranganas' like Piya can be found. In the two novels Anam has masterfully portrayed the energetic participation of the women figures in the construction of the identity of Bangladesh.

## **Conclusion**

Based on this study it is concluded that Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age helps to learn different things regarding the connection of war and women empowerment. Societal role of male and female in several gender discrimination issues related aspects are concluded efficiently in this study. Ability of organisations to cater to the vices and experiences of women has been highlighted potentially in this study. Developing the voice of resistance in the context of war, liberalisation and others are also highlighted efficiently in this study.

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