Voicing the Nation in a Foreign Tongue: Neo-Poetic Trends in Contemporary Bangladeshi English Poetry

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Abstract

This study dives into the fresh trends of modern Bangladeshi poets who write in English—think Razia Khan, Kaiser Haq, Shamsad Mortuza, and Rumana Siddiqui. These writers aren't just using English for the sake of it; they're flipping the script, turning the old colonizer's language into a tool for telling their own stories, fighting back, and connecting with the world. Each poet brings their own flavor. Razia Khan's poetry starts out heavy, dealing with the horrors of the Liberation War, but then she shifts gears, getting personal and digging deep into motherhood and what it means to be a woman. Kaiser Haq is the witty one—he mixes up

personal and national stories, cracks jokes, and uses a casual, everyday tone to tackle big themes like identity and the messiness of postcolonial life. Shamsad Mortuza gets experimental, playing with form and references from everywhere to take on issues like dehumanization and the weirdness of digital culture. Rumana Siddiqui, meanwhile, shines a light on women's struggles and strength, always looking at things through a feminist lens. What ties them all together? They're all about resistance, identity, and calling out the social and political realities of Bangladesh today. Their poems are packed with irony, cultural mashups, and a real sense of what it means to be Bangladeshi in a global world. Even though English isn't their mother tongue, they've made it their own—remixing it to fit their stories and experiences. This research shows that Bangladeshi poets writing in English aren't just translating their thoughts; they're transforming the language itself. Their work is a goldmine of cultural expression and political commentary, blending the personal and the collective, the traditional and the modern. By breaking down barriers and mixing influences, these poets are making sure the world hears the real Bangladeshi story, loud and clear.

Keywords: Bangladeshi Anglophone Poetic Trend, Third World Feminism, Pre/Poscolonility, Resistance literature.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary tradition, writers from former colonies are making renewed efforts to tackle issues such as marginality, hegemony, identity, existential crisis, and social exclusion, all outcomes of a fragmented postcolonial reality. These writers not only focus on the post-colonial period but also examine the impact of modernity on the lives of native women who are doubly oppressed by the intertwined structures of patriarchy and colonialism. Several Bengali writers and poets in Bangladesh choose to showcase their literary talents in English. This study aims to delve into the literary dimensions of resistance and the socio-political

conditions of contemporary Bangladesh, utilizing these concepts as a tools to preserve the authenticity of modern Bangladeshi writings in English.

Razia Khan, Kaiser Haq, Shamsad Mortuza and Rumana Siddique are four emerging contemporary Bangladeshi English poets who have used different concepts and themes based on the contemporary socio-political situation of Bangladesh through English language. Exploring their poems solely from a one-dimensional perspective is not even close enough to understand their works. To understand the thematic and stylistic trends, a more holistic study needs to be done. This study sets off exploring the poetry of prominent Bangladeshi English-language poets like Kaiser Haq, Razia Khan, Shamsad Mortuza, and Rumana Siddique. The research goes beyond one-dimensional perspectives to explore the themes and styles of these poems, exploring neo chain of thoughts.

Although Bangladesh boasts from a notable number of emerging poets who write in English, their creative works have unfortunately received scant attention from local readers and researchers. Most studies have focused narrowly on individual poets or specific works, which is insufficient to grasp the broader trends of English poetry in the country. There is no holistic approach to understand the overall thematic trends of these English poems that develops as representative or voice of its own people in the global platform. This paper seeks to fill this gap by doing a comprehensive study on these four prominent poets' selected poems.

2. Poetry as a Symbol of Resistance

Literary works often serve as reflections of their nations and act as symbolic resistance against colonizers. Authors illustrate the lives of a freshly reformed nation and the obstacles it faced along the way using a variety of genres. directly observes the nature of resistant communities. This means that rather than hiding our terrible past events, we should freely address it, as this may be the only way to overcome it. Resistance literature has played a crucial

role worldwide in interpreting 'Third World Literature[1]'. Such literature is now compelling a re-evaluation of how socio-political issues are addressed through 'literature' and 'literary studies.' Postcolonial writers use Resistance Literature to highlight the experiences of the oppressed and their achievements following independence. In the context of Bangladesh, this literature can be divided into two phases: 'before freedom' and 'after freedom'.

In *Argus Under Anaesthesia* , Razia Khan paints a resemblance of Guernica[2] of the atrocity committed against the Bengali people by the Pakistani military during Bangladesh's liberation war of 1971 (Khan 1976). She documents the agony of her nation's massacres, committed by the occupying forces under General Yahya Khan. The titular poem, *Argus Under Anaesthesia,* is divided into five sections. The journey of the refugees from Bangladesh to India in 1971 is covered in the first two sections, whereas the third section depicts the response of a female Parliamentaria's reaction to Yahya Khan's actions in Bangladesh after returning to her home country, England from Pakistan. The fourth section portrays a daydream experienced by Yahya Khan. The fifth section returns from England and Pakistan to Bangladesh. The poem attempts to reconstruct the concept of a 'Waste Land[3]'. The mention of "Flowering March", "a voluptuous politico", "a rose for you and a rose for me / As we dance to the waltz", and themes of roses and resurrection are clear and powerful. The brutality of the Pakistani military is vividly depicted, as the poet describes, "The sense of loss of violated wives, mothers, / Sisters, butchered babies. / Worst the burden of survival in a den" (Khan 17-19). The poem's ability to reflect the hard reality behind its sardonic tones is remarkable. While the first poem exposes the barbarity of the Pakistani military and the exodus of Bangladeshis fleeing to save their lives, the second poem, "God in the Goblet", resonates with the theme of an exile's return. Khan ultimately sheds the mythic facade and charges her verses with the songs of Bangladesh's

[1]The Third World Literature is the literature produced by writers from postcolonial countries.
[2] Guernica is a gigantic oil painting painted in 1937 by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso.
[3] A modern poem by T. S. Eliot

freedom fighters. She combines traditional lyricism with sharp innuendoes to depict a newly born, traumatized nation, as she writes,

Golden Bengal...This year

As a tragic spring descends over

The morning leaves of the red gulmohr? (Khan 1-5).

Another prominent poet, Kaiser Haq's three poems: *Dateline, Dhaka, 25 March 2006, Crackdown,* and *Bangladesh '71* effectively capture the horrific recalls of war. The straightforward yet powerful conclusion of *Dateline, Dhaka* clearly recalls those horrible times:

It was precisely

Half a biblical time ago

Though on this day once again

It feels like it was yesterday. (Haq 39-42)

To explore Haq's poetry, *Your Excellency* serves as a notable example of his resistance themes. Originally from *The Logopathic Reviewer's Song* (2002) and later included in *Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems* (2017), the poem critiques dictatorship and rejects conforming to the 'official' notion of a poet at the time. Haq composed it in response to General Ershad, who fancied himself a poet and hosted 'poetry festivals as grand displays, despite lacking genuine poetic discipline. Haq shows his mark of respect ironically by rejecting his warm invitation. In Haq's poem "Published in the Streets of Dhaka", the speaker declares: "I was born and live here", an assertion of "staying" in Bangladesh that reflects Haq's positionality which is blended with his cosmopolitan approach, that connects Bangladesh's history with other nations' histories, highlighting both similarities and differences in resistance literature. Through his playful tone, Haq addresses serious issues with poetic justice, fostering a shared understanding across different histories of struggle.

Haq's poem 'Six Shared Seasons' acts as a cultural protest against the 1947 division. It reflects on the political tensions that now divide the once-unified South Asian subcontinent. The poem highlights the harsh political realities of South Asia, where nations that once shared the same geography, environment, and natural beauty are now divided by barbed wire fences. Haq poignantly expresses this division in the lines:

That barbed wire,
watchtower and searchlight
keep neighbors apart, (Haq 6-8).

Before the partition in 1947, the South Asian countries were united as one nation, sharing common cultural traits like food habits, seasons, rivers, animals, and birds. Despite these shared elements, the current reality is that traveling between these nations now involves lengthy visa processes. Haq captures this scenario in his poem:

Families picnic
willy-nilly, as they wait
in visa queues, (Haq 12-14).

Following the liberation of East Pakistan, or today's Bangladesh, from West Pakistan, the Bangladeshi people's fight for freedom and justice was virtually removed from Pakistani history texts. Writing about Bangladesh's history and culture in English offers a platform for the world to learn about the country's national crises, injustice, and sacrifice. Haq's poem 'A to Z, Azad' explores how the pain and frustration of the Bangladeshi people have deepened over time as they struggled to achieve the independence for which they battled in the Liberation War of 1971. For various reasons, the most significant losses faced by the Bangladeshi people have been the denial of human rights, basic necessities, and freedom of expression. These injustices have been ignored by the oppressors, leaving the Bangladeshi community marginalized and oppressed. In'A to Z, Azad', Haq poignantly reflects on these losses, writing,

"Something is dying in us, and we watch in bewilderment," and "it was perhaps the best thing in us.". These lines highlight the widening gap between the oppressors and the Bangladeshi people. As a victimized society, Bangladeshis often hesitate to unleash their potential due to fear of rejection and the resulting despair. While Haq is well-known as a postcolonial poet, it is also vital to see him as a resistant social reformer. He reflects on the consequences of Bangladesh's liberation: in his poem 'A to Z, Azad' :

True, we won a war-
Or at least a Victory Day
But more than what we won is
At stake in battles that rage
Around us everyday. (Haq 13-17)

Kaiser Haq writes the poem on Humayan Azad and registers his solidarity with writers who are audacious enough to speak out and uphold his kinship with writers everywhere who use poetry to protest against tyranny and force of evil (Alam 2015).

3. Deep Exploration of Human Psyche

There is always a native element in the poetry of Bangladesh's modern English poets; they are inspired by little insights, sudden realizations of the significance of typical scenarios, trivial obstacles, or simply conflicting concepts that arise in the mind. This section typically focuses on poems that highlight the trivial things that people use in everyday life, those things that people barely think about their significance, but they are inseparably connected to life and has a profound effect on life.

3.1 Lament on the De-humanization and Compartmentalization of Modern Life

Shamsad Mortuza's first published poetry *Barkode* (Mortuza 2013*)* is popularly known for its wit and humor, but provides a profound reflection on the dehumanization and compartmentalization of life in the modern age. The poems in this collection are mostly brief

lyrical pieces that explore a wide range of topics, drawing from sharp observations of life and personal experiences to more contemplative reflections on people, attitudes, and cultures. His poems are largely diverse from contemporary issues with political consciousness to everyday trivial issues. such as the poems *The Vacuum Cleaner*, *Safety Pin*, *The Bottle*, and *Snakes and Ladders*. Mortuza uses these trivial things to convey his deep understanding of the human psyche. The poem *I Don't Feel Anything Anymore* is both a sorrow and a protest against modern life's paralysis and dehumanisation. It critiques how submission to video games, internet addiction, and the realm of simulation and cyber reality is erasing our connection to the real world. The poem opens with the lines:

I don't feel anything anymore
Anger, frustration, hatred
Love, fear, jealousy —
Nothing touches me anymore!
Maybe it does touch my cyber avatar, (Mortuza 85)

The poem unveils the harsh reality of virtual world, where everyone is a protester but for show-off; the violence, the crimes that do not matter anymore, the things that matter are how many likes they get and how many shares they do. Everyday something brutal happens, the virtual world is taken by storm on that matter, but the next day they forget all about it and start gossiping about something else as if it never happened. Mortuza captures the numbing effect of digital culture, where emotions are dulled, and human suffering becomes a spectacle for consumption. The verse "Nothing touches me anymore!" highlights the alienation in a hyper-connected yet emotionally disconnected world.

4891, or 1984 Revisited is another poem by Mortuza that expresses social concern and consciousness. It is about "the whistle blower Mr. Edward Snowden". *Even Hydra Headed Monster Has But One Shoulder*, is a sarcastic poem that focuses on how salespeople in

television advertisements constantly urge viewers to buy and continue buying. Mortuza always finds a weird but effective title for his thoughts in mind. The omnivorous capitalism is entitled as,

Even hydra headed monster has but one shoulder

Just like capitalism with many faces. (Mortuza 15-16)

The poem concludes with a clever twist, as the poet recognizes that the TV remote used to summon these "spirits" before his eyes can just as easily banish them with the press of another button on the same device.

In "*Para Diced for the Cents of a Woman"*, Mortuza poignantly critiques the exploitation of Bangladeshi garment workers. He describes the de-humanized condition of living of the low-class garment workers in the lines:

Eve snakes through the city,

the ant colony,

the termite colony,

the concrete jungle, (Mortuza 36-39)

Again, with lines like "Eve weaves. Eve weeps" Mortuza illustrates the dehumanizing labor conditions faced by women, who are reduced to mere tools in the global supply chain. The poem juxtaposes the Western idealization of femininity with the harsh realities of economic survival, symbolizing the fragmentation and compartmentalization of human identity under capitalism. Mortuza's work thus resonates deeply with the struggles of modern life in Bangladesh, reflecting both local and global challenges. This nuanced critique of modernity, from the erosion of individuality to the exploitation inherent in global capitalism, is a key theme in Mortuza's work, making his poetry both a powerful social commentary and a reflection of contemporary Bangladeshi consciousness.

3.2 Nature as an Expression of the Human Mind

Nature has always been the main source of poetic figure in the South Asian literature from the beginning of poetry writing. Nature always provides what is 'true' and 'natural'. But the Indian sub-continental view of nature, which in most part differs from the Western view, is characterized by dualism. Nature here is a protector and a destroyer, both physical and divine.

Razia Khan's view of nature, characteristic of many Bangladeshi poets, is inherently dualistic. Nature is depicted as both a compassionate friend and a sympathetic companion in human suffering, while simultaneously being indifferent, a harsh adversary, and even a potential threat. Nevertheless, a deeper insight into her psyche throws up that the friendship between man and nature is stronger than the enmity. The largest part of her nature imagery presents nature as a sympathizer who changes mood and color according to the changes of human conditions. In her war poems nature becomes laden with sorrow at the torture and death of the people:

The lull left by sudden
Departures lay heavy over the fields.
The mourning corn
Bent with grief, impossible phantasmagoria
Haunting the eyes
Of deserted dogs and cattle; (Khan 24-29)

Land now appears like "proud trees struck down/By lightning ..." its crimson "lotuses and oleander" have deserted it. The "soothing south-breeze" that used to ripple among the mango-groves is suspended. What remains are the "vultures' in the sky" and "festival of tears" on the ground.

In *Fragrance*, Khan blends traditional natural imagery with introspective themes of memory, love, and loss, using scent as a metaphor for the lingering past. While the use of

natural imagery aligns with earlier poetic trends, the focus on memory and the subjective experience of scent marks a shift toward a more introspective and personal exploration. The fragrance becomes a metaphor for the lingering presence of the past in the present, a common theme in modern poetry. This marks a shift toward a more personal exploration of human experience.

Similarly, in *The Senile Citizen*, she combines elements of nature with the struggles of aging and identity, portraying the nostalgia, loss, and resilience of an elderly person. Here, Khan blends elements of nature with the personal, as the aging citizen grapples with their fading connection to the world around them. This work represents a middle ground in Khan's thematic transition, where traditional motifs like nature and time are intertwined with the more modern, personal concerns of aging and self-identity.

In her love poems, nature also mirrors human emotions. In *Semblance of Spring*, a garden image reflects her feelings of frustration in love. Razia Khan sees nature as both hostile and enchanting, friendly and graceful. According to the poet, nature is both heavenly and earthly. In other words, Razia Khan's poetry portrays nature as both physical and spiritual, alluring yet harsh, and friendly but oppressive- showing a realistic view of its many facets.

3.3 A Mother's Dilemma

Razia Khan's English poems reflect a transition in poetic themes, from traditional subjects like nature and the Liberation War to the complexities of modern motherhood and personal dilemmas. In her earlier works, she often used natural imagery to evoke cultural and national identity, reflecting the collective consciousness of post-Liberation Bangladesh. As her poetry evolved, Khan shifted to exploring the personal and psychological aspects of life, especially the experiences of modern women.

Razia Khan's poem *My Daughter's Boyfriend* explores a parent's emotional struggle as their child's affections shift from them to a lover. The poet reflects on the love and care she

gave her daughter, feeling heartbroken as a stranger now seems to take her away. The poem begins with the speaker experiencing unsettling feelings, prompted by the sound of knocks on the door that suggest something bad might happen. When she opens the door, her daughter's boyfriend enters, oblivious to her presence:

Through the frame; that eyeless

Face, unaware of me, excludes

Me from every consideration. (Khan 3-5)

Each visit from the boyfriend brings discomfort, making her feel that her daughter no longer belongs to her, preferring the company of her lover:

The flesh of my flesh is now to be

Nothing to me any longer. (Khan 6-7)

The poet compares her daughter to a beautiful flower, surrounded by a fragrance, only to be easily taken away by a careless hand in front of her:

To be snatched of my branches

By a thoughtless hand. (Khan 15-16)

Thus, Khan delves into the emotional challenges of a modern mother, moving away from collective narratives to focus on intimate family dynamics, such as concern and protectiveness.

4. Giving Voice to the Unheard

In postcolonial theory, the term 'subaltern', originating from Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci, refers to people or social groups excluded from the dominant power structures of the West and its colonies. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group began writing history from the perspective of the colonized, giving a voice to those marginalized in society rather than the social and economic elites. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1995), postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak argues that intellectuals can represent the voices of the marginalised, without altering their voices.

In his poem *Ode on the Lungi*, Kaiser Haq makes an effort to give voice to these people who are marginalized in society, politics, and the economy despite their humble lungi outfits The poem highlights how the lungi, as a symbol of the subaltern, stands against the persistent attack of aggressive modernity and globalization, which continually promote or impose Western and capitalist society. In an recent interview Haq said " "Ode on the Lungi" zooms in on issues like "the subaltern speaking." This is the second longest poem I have written. Of course, in the new volume, there is "Ode on the Sari" as well"[4]. However, its tone is a bit different, and it equates the South Asian female identity with the sari as a traditional and ethnic wear. As the poem starts, the poet makes it clear that he is not "complaining about the jacket and tie" as that has certain demands as well as necessities from place to place. His aim is to demolish the discrepancy in "the spirit of a game" which is more like "a hunger game" to fight for existence when he says,

I'm talking of

Something more fundamental. (Haq 31-32)

He is more like acting as an insurgent while he says,

Not even you, Grandpa Walt,

Laureate of democracy,

Will make it in. (Haq 50-52)

Haq calls upon Walt Whitman, the famous American poet known for his democratic ideals, to consider wearing a lungi instead of Western clothing for a White House visit. However, it's doubtful that Whitman, a symbol of democracy, would opt for a lungi over a kilt—the kilt being representative of Western culture, while the lungi symbolizes the non-white marginalized

[4] *(View of "The Creative Journey Is All About Conquering New Frontiers":* In Conversation With Kaiser Haq, n.d)

groups. This suggestion carries subversive undertones, acting as a form of resistance. In the middle section of this poem Haq proclaims the issue for which he becomes an activist:

It’s all too depressing.

But I won’t leave it at that.

The situation is desperate.

Something needs to be done.

I’ve decided not to

Take it lying down.

The next time someone insinuates

That I live in an Ivory Tower

I’ll proudly proclaim

I AM A LUNGI ACTIVIST! (Haq 90-99)

It's noteworthy that young men in Dhaka, dressed in various styles of lungis, organized a lungi parade in protest against the Baridhara Society’s ban on lungi-clad rickshaw pullers in their upscale neighborhood. The Baridhara Society, along with other posh areas like Gulshan and Banani, enforced this ban, highlighting the social divide. Even the poet was surprised to see how the words of his poem inspired this real-world action (Haq 2013). The critical point here is that these lungi-clad individuals are marginalized not just by outsiders but by their own elite countrymen—the so-called “brown sahibs” who replicate colonial attitudes. Although decolonization rid the colonies of their white rulers, these societies are still dominated by local elites who maintain similar power dynamics. Kaiser Haq’s poem advocates for the recognition and dignity of these marginalized groups, promoting the idea of sartorial equality and, more broadly, the equality of all people: “All clothes have equal rights”. The poem challenges the Western discriminatory attitude towards traditional attire, advocating not just for cultural preservation but also for resistance against elitism. Haq’s call to action is both revolutionary

and symbolic, as he imagines a world where the UN Chief addresses the world in a lungi, declaring:

When the UN Chief will wear a lungi

And address the world.

Grandpa Walt, I celebrate my lungi

And sing my lungi

And what I wear

You shall wear.

It's time you finally made your passage

To more than India-to Bangladesh (Haq 104-111)

This statement reflects his defiance against cultural discrimination and his dream of true equality. Haq declares himself a 'Lungi Activist', celebrating this often-overlooked garment not just among his fellow countrymen but also among millions of South Asians. Known by various names such as sarong, munda, htamain, saarampinon, ma'awaiis, kitenge, kanga, kaiki, or the variant dhoti, the humble lungi stands as a powerful emblem of equality across human, social, political, and economic dimensions. As a symbol of the marginalized and excluded, what the poet calls the 'global left-outs'—the lungi asserts its rightful place, dignity, and equality in global society.

5. Reflection of Unique Experience of Women

Feminism offers valuable insights into how women in our society are socially conditioned, trained, and guided to assume traditional gender roles. Combining philosophical and analytical approaches, feminist theory uses a political lens to examine cultural practices, including art and literature. It argues that portraying women as weak, submissive, innocent, seductive, or overly emotional is closely linked to real-life social conditions. These portrayals reinforce situations where women often lack power, are objectified, have fewer political and

economic rights, and face abuse. Feminism, therefore, is a worldview that emphasizes the connection between art and the realities of societal conditions and practices. It explores how cultural representations affect the material lives of women, and the role of criticism is to reveal the ideologies embedded in literary texts, as these ideologies contribute to the continued oppression of women.

The blurb of Rumana Siddique's *Five faces of Eve* (Siddique 2007) informs that the poems in this collection were written over twenty-five years, capturing the journey and rites of passage from "girlhood to womanhood". These poems draw inspiration from everyday joys and struggles of women, each bringing a new face to wear. Siddique crafts her poetry from the familiar elements of a woman's life, with references to rings, relatives, "salty tears," "letters of passion", miscarriages, "contagious giggles," bangles, motherhood, cold waters, and hot skillets, all expressed in everyday language. Her poems are not a protest against the challenges of being a woman; instead, they depict Bengali women as they are, in all their authentic complexity. In her poem *Relatively Confused,* she expresses:

My cousin's wedding day
I dress with care and dread
No matter how I look
I'll return with my ego and shreds
Aunty A will be sure to say
"You look kind of fat today" (Siddique 2007:3)

In some of the poems she harshly portrays the social unjust against women, yet the tone remains composed, never rising above a certain level of intensity, and her poetic style stays calm and measured. Her themes largely align with Third World Feminism or postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism addresses the unique experiences of women from formerly colonized nations, rejecting the homogenization of women's issues by mainstream feminism

and emphasizing cultural differences (Nayar 2010: 112). Third World Feminism values traditional roles like motherhood and homemaking, which are often dismissed by Western feminism. Siddique's *Five Faces of Eve* celebrates this diversity, highlighting various aspects of a woman's life and embracing roles such as self-sacrificing mothers and devoted wives that Western feminism might reject. Through her poems, Siddique challenges mainstream feminism by representing the struggles and resilience of Third World Women.

Similarly, Shamsad Mortuza vividly depicts the unseen miserable condition of this country's working-class women in the poem *Para Diced for the Cents of a Woman* (Mortuza 2013:26).

Eve snakes through the city,

the ant colony,

the termite colony,

the concrete jungle, (Mortuza 2013:26).

This poem's significance lies in its use of Biblical intertextuality, recontextualized within the local setting of Dhaka's garment sweatshops, where women work long hours for meager wages. The words 'concrete colony', 'dog's den', 'pig's sty' and 'bee hives' only added seasoning to the miserable condition they live through. The title's 'Cents' alludes to these workers' low wages, emphasizing the exploitative aspect of labor outsourcing while sarcastically commenting on Western fabrications of female sensuality. ''Para Diced' cleverly plays on 'Paradised' in the Miltonian sense (Dhar 2016:200), but the word 'Diced' can also mean cutting anything into small pieces, which is a particularly powerful way of expressing the enslavement of poor working-class Bangladeshi women who must sacrifice everything under capitalism. Through the following lines the poet makes a parallel between the Biblical Eve and the poor working class Bangladeshi women who symbolizes the eternal sufferings and sacrifices of Eve:

Eve weaves. Eve weeps

Cents sent

Saints sent

To check on compliance

To check on corp. finance

St. aah, St. uhh, St. ouch

St.ich! St.arch! St.one,

Wash and dye (Mortuza 2013:26)

The last line, “Eve is fruitful Eve multiplies” evidently symbolizes the never-ending hardship of a poor working-class women in a third world country and the number of these Eves are multiplying every day. The poems show women’s struggle and sacrifices throughout their life, revealing the many facets of womanhood— weak and strong, lucid and plain, light and heavy. In a patriarchal society, a woman’s identity is shaped by values imposed on her, and she is often seen as an object defined by social norms created by men. However, despite being cast in a self-sacrificing role, there remains a persistent sense of self within her—a quiet but constant protest against the injustices she endures.

6. Language as the Representative of Creating Identity

Witty and humorous, yet deeply serious, the poems of emerging English poets from Bangladesh showcase diverse styles and meanings. Often identified as postcolonial writers, they choose to write in English, the language of their former colonizers, to enhance international communication. By doing so, they aim to repurpose the colonizers' language as a tool of resistance and address the historical, social, cultural, and economic impacts of colonialism. These writers adapt English to reflect and express their native experiences, transforming it into a medium that conveys their unique perspectives.

Postcolonial writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and Chinua Achebe believe that the colonial language should be adapted to suit native readers (Ashkari 2010). They use techniques such as “appropriation” and “nativization” of English to achieve this. Chinua

Achebe, for instance, views English not as a colonial imposition but as an international language that can be transformed to reflect the native writer's voice, a practice also seen in Haq's work. Achebe argues that since English was imposed on many communities, it can now be a valuable tool to reach a broader audience. He contends that using English is not a betrayal of one's heritage but a practical means of communication that can be molded to fit the native context (Achebe 1965).

Haq's use of familiar, relatable terms in English helps non-native readers visualize the realities of his poetry. For example, in poems like *Ode on the Lungi* and *Two Paradies: Ms Bunny Sen*, Haq employs handy words like 'fig leaf,' 'G-string' and 'poncho' to describe various ways of wearing a lungi. Although these terms aid in drawing parallels for readers unfamiliar with the garment, they can only conceptualize it without firsthand experience. In other instances, the poet is able to reveal the genuine nature of Dhaka's restless, hours-long traffic bottleneck by using his phrase 'god knows how long'. Haq has the skill to portray urban landscapes and cultural nuances through English. Researchers have also noted this, as Hossain points out in *Spring in Dhaka*, where Haq references local elements like rickshaw bells: "the tantrums of rickshaw bells become merry tinkle" (Hossain 2013: 67). Similarly, in *Windows*, Haq vividly depicts the night life of Dhaka, capturing moments of people enjoying their everyday lives amidst the concrete cityscape, as seen in the lines:

True and yet, Dearest, those oblongs of light Are our home… (Haq.10-12)

A striking feature of Haq's poetry is his use of words from other languages, particularly Bangla, which acts as a form of translation that brings him closer to the lives of his people. This multilingual approach can be seen in poems like *Durga Puja* and *Master Babu*, where even the titles are translated into Bangla. In *Durga Puja*, Haq includes terms like 'banias', 'babus', 'mantras', 'shehnais', and 'dhols', capturing the authentic essence of a Bengali festival—words that have no direct English equivalents and whose cultural flavor would be

lost in translation. Similarly, in *Master Babu*, Haq uses the word 'dal' in the line "Partakes of a repast of rice and dal…Before an evening of private tuition," instead of the English term 'pulse.' This choice not only preserves the cultural nuance but also plays on the pun of a 'dull' routine and diet of a struggling teacher, a familiar image in both rural and urban Bangladesh. These elements of Haq's poetry, including his distinct use of English, reflect a commitment to portraying the cultural reality of his native context, unaffected by colonialist influence.

7. Research Findings

Literature plays a key role in revealing the truths of history, past movements, and current realities. Writing about Bangladesh's history and culture in English opens a window for the world to understand the nation's struggles, injustices, and sacrifices. This study examined how themes of resistance and socio-political conditions are used to preserve the authenticity of contemporary Bangladeshi literature in English. It identified various trends and characteristics in the poetry of Bangladesh, focusing on the works of Razia Khan, Kaiser Haq, Shamsad Mortuza, and Rumana Siddique, highlighting their ironic depictions, cultural dualities, and language reflective of the Bangladeshi context.

7.1 Mortuza's poetic trends

Dr. Shamsad Mortuza's poetic trend is characterized by a fusion of traditional themes with modernist experimentation. His work in *Barkode* reflects a deep engagement with both personal and socio-political issues, often exploring themes like dehumanization, alienation, and the fragmentation of identity in the modern world. His use of wordplay, intertextual references, and innovative forms, such as concrete poetry, aligns with postmodern literary trends, while his thematic focus on the experiences of Bangladeshis situates his work within a distinctly South Asian context. Mortuza explores the fragmentation of identity through poems like *Para Diced for the Cents of a Woman*, where he critiques the exploitation of Bangladeshi garment workers, and *I Don't Feel Anything Anymore*, which addresses the desensitization brought on

by digital culture. His style is marked by a playful yet critical approach to contemporary issues, highlighting the tensions between tradition and modernity in a postcolonial context.

7.2 Khan's Poetic Trends

Razia Khan's poetic trends encompass a rich exploration of shifting cultural and personal landscapes, moving from themes of nature and liberation to more intimate, modern concerns. Her early works often celebrate the natural world and the Bangladesh Liberation War, reflecting collective national sentiments. Poems like those in Argus *Under Anaesthesia* highlight the pain and trauma of the war. As her writing matures, Razia Khan shifts towards more introspective and personal themes, particularly focusing on the dilemmas of modern motherhood and the challenges faced by women. *My Daughter's Boyfriend* shows the poetic trend where Khan delves into the emotional challenges of a modern mother, moving away from collective narratives to focus on intimate family dynamics, such as concern and protectiveness. Thus, Khan's poems capture a broader literary shift in Bangladeshi literature—from themes of nature and nationalism to the nuanced emotions and personal introspection of modern life, particularly from a woman's perspective.

7.3 Haq's Poetic Trends

Kaiser Haq's poetry merges modernist and postmodernist elements, exploring global themes, irony, and identity within a postcolonial framework. Drawing from his experiences in Bangladesh and the West, his work blends personal and national histories with a conversational tone that touches on culture, politics, and the human condition. In his early work, Haq critiqued colonialism and Bangladesh's socio-political issues with wit and irony. Over time, he adopted experimental forms, addressing the fragmented nature of identity in a globalized world, combining humor and diverse cultural references, to address serious topics with an engaging lightness. In *Ode on the Lungi*, Haq humorously celebrates the traditional Bengali garment while critiquing colonial attitudes. In *How Goes It with the Poets*?, he reflects on the role of

poets, mixing humor with a critique of literary and social norms. In “The Triangulation of Birds”, Haq weaves personal narrative with cultural and existential reflections, using imagery that resonates both locally and globally. Thus, Haq’s poem reflects the cultural reality of his native context without being affected by colonialist influence.

7.4 Siddiqui’s Poetic Trend

Rumana Siddiqui’s poetry is characterized by an exploration of identity, gender, and the human condition, often through a feminist lens. Her work frequently delves into the complexities of being a woman in a patriarchal society, highlighting both the personal and societal struggles women face. In *Five Faces of Eve*, she reinterprets the biblical figure of Eve, using it as a symbol to address themes of oppression, resilience, and empowerment. Siddiqui's style is reflective, poignant, and often interwoven with symbolic imagery, making her poetry both thought-provoking and emotionally resonant.

8. Conclusion

The poetic trends of Bengali poets writing in English reveal a rich tapestry of themes that reflect both personal and collective experiences. Razia Khan, Kaiser Haq, Shamsad Mortuza, and Rumana Siddiqui each bring unique perspectives that merge traditional and contemporary influences, addressing issues from colonial legacies to modern-day struggles. Their works challenge cultural and linguistic boundaries, using English as a tool to articulate the Bangladeshi experience to a global audience. As Bangladesh undergoes significant social and political changes, writing in English becomes a powerful medium to share its contemporary and historical narratives, highlighting national crises, injustices, and sacrifices on a global stage. This paper explores the poetic trends of Bangladeshi poets who write in English to represent their native culture and socio-political realities.

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