

VIOLENCE IN LITERATURE: AN ASSESSMENT OF *THE GOOD MUSLIM* AND *THE WANDERING FALCON*

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Abstract

The present research article as its title suggests is an honest attempt to understand the concept of violence reflected in literature with reference to the novels by South Asian writers in English, particularly *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam and *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad. Both of the novels were shortlisted for the DSC Prize for literature in 2013 and were highly acclaimed by the critics and the readers on the basis of the representation of reality of the time. Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim* (2012) depicts the miserable situation of the after-war society in Bangladesh whereas Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) projects the wretched life of tribal people living on the borderlines of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Baluchistan during the 1970s. These two novels are overloaded with religious, political, domestic, sexual and interpersonal violence. *The Good Muslim* portrays the picture of Bangladeshi society during its formation period. It also represents the conflict between beliefs of religion and secularism. The novel is also overcrowded with the struggle, the crowd killing and the chaos in the lives of Bangladeshi people created by the war of liberation. Similarly, *The Wandering Falcon* describes cruel world through the stories of theft, kidnapping, honor-killing, women selling happening in the tribal communities. It also portrays the clash between the backward and modern society. Political upheaval, religious zealotry and gender-based violence are recurring themes in these two novels. In short, this research article primarily investigates the concept, nature and types of violence reflected in these above-mentioned novels.

Keywords: Violence, after-war society, tribal community, mass-killing, honor-killing, religious zealotry, and gender-based violence.

Introduction

The present researcher has encountered two important trends dominating the field of literature. One group including the writers like John Barth and Thomas Pynchon rejects the traditional function of literature. According to them literature should not function as the mirror of society. The other group of contemporary writers is unwilling to abandon social realism in literature. For them, literature is a reflection of society. These authors insist that literary work

should be weighty with social, political, and cultural aspects of the particular time. It is here on this background the present researcher wants to investigate how the fiction affects society and vice versa with reference to the DSC prize shortlisted novels namely *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam and *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad. Both of the writers have used a technique of social realism to present the real picture of the society and their focus centres on the depiction of violence happening due to communal code, religious zealotry, poor economical condition, and gender discrimination.

Since this is a theoretical study, the present researcher has employed descriptive and comparative methods for analyzing the topic. It is a study of the various forms of violence in literature and hence, the explanation of violence in literature is based on Rene Girard's "Theory of Violence" in which he describes a situation where two individuals desire the same object; as they both attempt to obtain this object; their behavior becomes conflictual, since there is only one object, but two people. "Violence is generated by this process; or rather, violence is the process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means" (Girard 1979, 9). The interpretations of values attached to violence and the motives of violence are merely subjective one depending on the circumstances described in the text and the attitude of the author.

Violence can be classified as heroic, triumphant, cruel and dignified too. Violence takes place in friendly affairs, between social groups and against the self itself. Brutality and exploitation are the recurring themes of contemporary literature and by exposing the readers to violence; the authors have tried to represent historical, psychological and artistic landscape of the contemporary world. Further, the biographical method is also applied for the analysis of the topic as these novels reflect the author's life or the author's experience associated with the depicted society. The coverage of this research article is a small one that begins with explaining the concept of violence, its various forms, and the causes of violence, and then proceeds through the discussion and analysis of the select novels and ends with concluding remarks showing some of the major findings of the study.

Review of Literature

The select novels viz. *The Good Muslim* and *The Wandering Falcons* are quite young literary creations and hence, there is a scarcity of critical books or academic scholarships. A full length critical book studying these two novels is still waiting. Some book reviews and scholarly articles shed a light on these two novels and hence, I feel that it is a great opportunity for me to make a profound study of these two novels focusing on the theme of violence.

The Good Muslim (2012) by Tahmima Anam has attracted scholarly eyes towards it after its publication resulting in a few research articles and chapters in research theses. Aindrilla Guin has devoted the sixth chapter of her doctoral thesis entitled *Dialectics of Identity: A Study of British South Asian Diasporic Writers*. This chapter details the concept of

homeland and the sense of displacement generated due to the war of liberation of Bangladesh. Pramila Chettri's doctoral thesis *Dialectic of their Intimate Conflicts: A Study of Select Indian Sub-continental Fictionists* (2015) owes a full length chapter to analyze the concept of "discourse of discontent" with reference to the select works of Tahmima Anam and other two novelists. In her opinion, the novel *The Good Muslim* highlights the growing fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Pramila Chettri's entire discussion of Tahmima Anam's novels retorted that the society and community in Bangladesh experienced trauma, violence, and conflict due to the freedom war that took place at the beginning of the 1980s. In her research paper entitled "Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim*: A Peep into the Post-War Bangladesh" published in the *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* (2015) Dr. Liza Nanda has explored the post-war period of Bangladesh and the psychological war effect on its people as depicted by Tahmima Anam. In *Transnational Literature Vol.4 No.2* (2012) Mohammad Saleem offered a book review of the novel *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam. The reviewer remarks that the novel offers a story of faith and the family that actively participated in the war and facing some problems after the war. In short, the review taken above shows that the theme of violence is less touched upon by the earlier scholars.

Jamil Ahmad with his debut novel *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) became the author of international reputation in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Though the book was composed in the 1970s, it was not published until 2011. Hence, the readers of literature cannot find much criticism on the aforesaid novel. However, there is little critical material available on the novel in the form of book reviews, critical essays, research papers, and research thesis at the graduate level. These are summarized here briefly. Inbisat Shuja, in his research thesis (for Bachelor's Degree) entitled *Homelessness and sense of Belonging: A Liminal Analysis of Jamil Ahmad's Wandering Falcon* (2017) has analyzed the concept of homelessness and sense of belonging reflected in the novel.

The whole thesis is a post colonial study that put side by side the Baluchi tribal community and the urban Pakistani community to show the face of civilization. The researcher has analyzed the concept of liminality with reference to *The Wandering Falcon* by using Victor Turner's theory of liminality in which he has elaborated the terms like transitional state, alien territory, ambiguity, asymmetry and anti-structure. Muhammad Imran and Ammara Gull, the research scholars from Pakistan jointly published a research paper titled as "Victims of Honor Killing in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*" in *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* (2017). These two researchers have assessed the components of honor and disgrace reflected in *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) and *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) by applying the theory of disgrace, sham, honor killing and the idea of postcolonial feminism throughout this research paper. Shazia Sadaf presented a research paper entitled "Understanding Tribal Community Codes in the Age of Terror: Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*" at the conference at the University of Calgary. In this paper

she has asserted that Ahamad's novel re-dignifies the ancient communal ways of the various tribes. She has also talked about the international politics associated the frontier regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. A book review captioned as "The Wandering Falcon: A Rich Picture of Forbidding Place" by Steve Inskip summarizes that Ahmad wrote this book to explain the culture of different tribes along the border. Basharat Peer in his review on *The Wandering Falcon* throws light on the clash between the tribal code of governing themselves and the modern government's rules of governing the state. These previous studies reveal that the concept of a new society, tribal culture, natural calamities, and the ways of survival of the tribal people have been discussed thoroughly and the various forms of violence and causes of violence need to be studied comprehensively.

Discussion and Analysis of the Texts

The Good Muslim covers the time span from 1972 to 1984 and this decade was affected by the political and religious turmoil in the history of Bangladesh. The society was trying to settle down in newly born country that liberated from Pakistan. The novel is a good picture of the changes in Bangladeshi society which is leading towards fanaticism and fundamentalism. Basically, the novel is a story of a brother and a sister in which a sister is trying to understand the drastic change brought by liberation war of Bangladesh in her brother's life, personality and identity. Anam has beautifully crafted the transformation of Bangladeshi society through the story of Sohail Huque and Maya Huque. During the pre-war period Maya and Sohail were best friends who used to share their dreams and secrets frankly. Sohail was freedom fighter and the lover of literature. He was free minded modern boy. However, after the liberation war his image of freedom fighter, liberal person and lover literature were gone and there was a drastic change in his thoughts, behaviour and personality. He became a man of few words who avoided western cloths and started to wear on only pyjama-kurta and advocated to read only Quran. Sohail became the follower of Tablighi Jamaat that rejects the joyful life for the sake of religion. Here Sohail is not an individual but he is the representative of the whole society where the religious fanaticism is growing on after the liberation war.

The Wandering Falcon comprises of nine short stories having a loose knot with the central character Tor Baz. The first chapter of the novel "The Sin of the Mother" details the story of an extramarital affair and the stoning of woman by the tribe. The second chapter "A Point of Honour" is a story of Brahui tribesmen who lost their lives for the sake of honour. The third story entitled "The Death of Camels" is full of violence and is a threat to the tribal community. It depicts the miserable situation of the Pawindah tribe as the government regulations denied their free movement. The fourth story "Mullah" is a story of violence in madness. The fifth story "Kidnapping" depicts violence that is emerged due to need of money by Mahsud and Wazir tribes. The rest of the chapters in the novel narrate the story of woman selling, drug addiction, and domestic violence, etc.

The novels namely *The Good Muslim* and *The Wandering Falcon* are overloaded with the various types of violence including communal and political violence, gender based and domestic violence and interpersonal violence. Religious zealotry and political upheavals result into communal violence and the novels namely *The Good Muslim* and *The Wandering Falcon* are the best examples that truly represent the major issue of communal violence. Tahmima Anam, a Bangladeshi-British novelist in her second novel *The Good Muslim* has honestly attempted to portray the society that was suffering due the religious fanaticism and the political upheavals after the liberation war of Bangladesh. She has described the effects of the war, political schemes and the drastic change took place in the religion from 1972 to 1984. *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam depicts the religious zealotry and political violence that took place in Bangladesh after the war of liberation. She narrated a number of incidents that are overloaded with the act of violence. Basically, the novel centres on Maya and Sohail Huque who belong to the same religion and worked for same purpose. But, after the war they have their own sectors in the religion. Sohail turned towards Tablighi Jamaat and became fanatic. He started to read only The Quran and take Namaj three times in day. The Army massacred thousand people as they thought these people were treacherous. All the killings between 1972 and 1984 happened due to political upheavals and religious fanaticism.

Jamil Ahamad, a bureaucrat who observed the lives of various tribes at the borderline of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran during the 1970s and recorded all the details including their struggle with nature and ruling government in a truthful way in his first novel *The Wandering Falcon* focusing on the violence which is caused by political interference and cultural conflict between the tribes. Jamil Ahmad's debut novel *The Wandering Falcon* offers nine life stories of different characters from various tribes and parts of society belonging at the Federated Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Each character represent different religion and all of them have their own tribal culture. All the characters belong to the tribes namely Kharot, Pawindah, Siahpads, Brahui and other Baluchi tribes. They consider themselves as the free movers who survive along with their cattles and animals by resorting to different lands. The novel is a truthful representation of the lives of these tribes, their culture, their struggle against the government and their ideologies. The first story is about an adultery that resulted into violence. Gul Bibi, a married woman from Siahpad tribe eloped with her paramour and settled down at the military outpost. She crossed the law of Siahpad tribe that treats adultery as a stigma to their culture. The tribesmen were searching the couple to punish them for their crime.

Finally, they caught the couple at water post and started stoning the man until his death as they wanted to washout a stigma or the sin of adultery with his blood. It is the culture and the rule of the Siahpad tribe to clean the sin with the blood of the sinner. The father of Gul Bibi was also slaughtered by the tribes as he insulted his son in law by calling him impotent. Thus, the first story of this novel depicts the act of violence which is caused by the culture of Siahpads. The second story entitled "A Point of Honour" is about the massacre between the

government officers and Brahui tribesmen. The Brahui tribe used to elect one person as a chief for their tribe and obey him throughout the life. However, the government rejected the idea of electing chief and forced them to follow the government rules and in this way they interfere the tribal code of living. According to the tribe, having no chief of tribe is the great loss of honor. Being furious, they killed several government officers and in turn the government also killed tribesmen. This violence happens between the government and the Brahui tribe for the sake of honor. In the next story "The Death of Camels" Jamil Ahmad narrated the incident of violence that is happened due to conflict between Army and the Pawindah People. The Pawindah people are free movers and they follow only the law of nature and not the government. According the government rule, the movers must have travel documents with themselves which is not with the Pawindah people and hence they are prohibited to cross the borders. However they crossed the border and got killed by the Army in charge.

"They had hardly gone fifty yards when two machine guns opened up from either side and mowed down the camels. The firing was indiscriminate. Men, women and children died."

The violence happened because of the rejection of the government law and hence it can be called as political violence.

The Good Muslim and *The Wandering Falcon* represent the theme of gender based violence and domestic violence. The gender based violence focuses on the sexual assault and rape whereas domestic violence includes physical assault, mental assault and low treatment to others. In both types of violence women are victims. *The Good Muslim* is also overloaded with the incidents of rape and abortion. The Pakistani Army raped thousand of women during the war liberation of Bangladesh and the victims became pregnant. After liberation war, the government of newly born country established abortion centre to wipe out a stigma. They brought the rape victim who are pregnant and aborted them as they want to see the next generation came due to the rape of enemy. The collective rape and abortion are the examples of gender based violence. In *The Wandering Falcon*, Jamil Ahamd sheds light on gender based and domestic violence through the incidents of rape and beating of Shah Zarina. Some ruffians came to the couple of young lovers and they raped the girl as well as the boy. In Shah Zarina's story, her husband treats her as bear beats her every day with the staff with nails. He keeps her hungry and insults her every time. At the end of the novel, the readers read about the women sale that shows the loss of moral values.

Interpersonal violence means the violence between two or more peoples for seeking possession and any types of benefits. Such type of violence occurs due to economical reasons, corruption, and deceitful behaviour, the feeling of taking revenge, ransom, drug addictions, insults and humiliations. A number of characters in the selected novels engaged in quarrels frequently due to above mentioned reasons. In *The Good Muslim* Tahmima Anam depicts

personal rivalry under the name of Tablighi Jamaat who hates the people against The Quran and Fundamentalism. There is a quarrel between Maya Huque and her brother's wife. The family members of the rape victims in Bangladesh didn't accept their women because of a stigma of the rape. They were expelled from their home for no crime. The raped women were the victims of the false notion of family honor.

In *The Wandering Falcon* Gul Bibi who eloped with her paramour and settled down near the army post got killed because of her illicit love affair. However, her father thought that it was not her crime but his own and remarked that he didn't marry her to a man. It means his son-in-law was sexually weak person. His remark insulted his son-in-law and being frustrated, the son-in-law killed Gul Bibi's father by cutting his throat. This bloodshed happened because of only the insult made by Gul Bibi's father. Jamil Ahmad inserted an effort of taking revenge through personal hatred of Dawa Khan towards two small children whose father murdered Dawa Khan's brother. Mullah Barrerai, an old man got killed as the mob misunderstood. A boy from Bhattani tribe was killed by someone but tribesmen thought that Mullah killed the boy and for revenge upon him, the mob started to stone Mullah Barrerai in which he died. In the next story, we read about the act of kidnapping six teachers from the school where they used to sleep. This violence happened due to need of money by Mahsud and Wazir tribes. The act of kidnapping and demand for ransom shows the poverty and backwardness of these two tribes. The kidnappers wanted to offer bride price to girl's father. The firing shots at Amir Khan's house show the feudal rivalry between two families. The beating of Shah Zarina by her husband is also the example of interpersonal violence. In short, *The Wandering Falcon* shows interpersonal violence between the characters in the forms beating, revenge, murder, and kidnapping.

Conclusion

A thorough study of these two selected novels confirms the claim that a literary work must represent the true picture of society in which it is created. *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam that portrays the true picture of Bangladesh after the war of their liberation. The novel is based on the chaos, religious struggle and mass killing in Bangladesh. Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* narrates the tribal ways of survival including theft, kidnapping, grazing animals at different regions and woman selling. It also records that the occurrence of violence among the Pakistani tribes in the name of family honour. These two novels document various types of violence such as communal violence, sexual violence, honor-killing and mass-killing, collective rape and collective abortions, etc. The representation of various types of violence brings forth the darkest side of human life.

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