

**BANGLADESHI LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**  
**A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY**

Editors

Mohammad A. Quayum  
and  
Md. Mahmudul Hasan



Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

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**Asiatic Society of Bangladesh**

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*Dedication*

To the memory of our beloved parents

Mohammad A. Quayum: *Abdus Salam & Rawshan Ara Salam*

Md. Mahmudul Hasan: *Md. Younus Mia & Zulekha Begum*

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## Contents

### Editors' Introduction

- Bangladeshi Anglophone Literature: An Old and Evolving Tradition  
– Mohammad A. Quayum and Md. Mahmudul Hasan 1

### A Pre-Independence Pioneer

- Chapter 1: Muslim Bengal Writes Back: Rokeya's Encounter with and Representation of Europe  
– Md. Mahmudul Hasan 17
- Chapter 2: The Influence of Rokeya's Islamic Identity in *Sultana's Dream*  
– Ayesha Tarannum 37

### Writings from Bangladesh

- Chapter 3: Images of Bangladesh in Niaz Zaman's Novels  
– Sabiha Huq 61
- Chapter 4: Reading Kaiser Haq: A Bangladeshi Transnational Poet in English  
– Tahmina Ahmed 81
- Chapter 5: Homed, Unhomed and Rehomed in Partition Stories of East Bengal / East Pakistan  
– Rifat Mahbub and Anika Saba 102

### Writings from the Diaspora

- Chapter 6: Re-storying the Past, Re-imagining the Future in Adib Khan's *Homecoming* and *Spiral Road*  
– Stefano Mercanti 123
- Chapter 7: Politics of Deformed Body/Space in Adib Khan's *The Storyteller*  
– Andrew Hock Soon Ng 143
- Chapter 8: The Blame Game: War and Violence in Dilruba Z. Ara's *Blame*  
– Sanjib Kr Biswas and Priyanka Tripathi 166

Chapter 9: Religion, Diaspora and the Politics of a Homing Desire in the Writings of Zia Haider Rahman, Tahmima Anam and Monica Ali – Fayeza Hasanat	186
Chapter 10: Transplanted Gender Norms and Their Limits in Monica Ali's <i>Brick Lane</i> – Md. Mahmudul Hasan	201
Chapter 11: Migratory Modernisms: Novel Homelands in Monica Ali's <i>Brick Lane</i> – Susan Stanford Friedman	222
Chapter 12: Negotiating the Politics of Power: Tahmima Anam's <i>The Good Muslim</i> and Women's Role in War and Nation-building – Farzana Akhter	241
<b>Interviews</b>	
Chapter 13: A Multi-talented Writer: An Interview with Niaz Zaman – Jackie Kabir	258
Chapter 14: A Highbrow "Hijra": Kaiser Haq in Conversation with M.A. Quayum – Mohammad A. Quayum	270
Chapter 15: Sanchita Islam: Art as a Cure – Elisabetta Marino	284
<b>Contributors' Biographies</b>	299



## **Editors' Introduction**

### **Bangladeshi Anglophone Literature: An Old and Evolving Tradition**

Mohammad A. Quayum  
Md. Mahmudul Hasan

#### **An Overview of the Tradition**

The urge to express creatively in English among the people of what is now Bangladesh goes back to the days of their first encounter with the British on South Asian soil. However, since historically the Bangladeshis have had to grapple successively with different concepts of national identity, the distinctive tradition of Bangladeshi literature in English has not yet received the full critical attention it deserves. It has lagged behind its Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan counterparts in the region, which have thus far claimed precedence in literary history books and attracted considerable critical discussion, with India, no doubt, being well ahead of the rest both in creative and critical output.

Even though Bangladesh is perhaps among the least developed in English literary writing in the subcontinent and Bangladeshi literature in English is less well known compared to, say, Pakistani literature in English, it should not be forgotten that from 1947 to 1971, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and Pakistan (then West Pakistan) constituted a single country, combinedly known as Pakistan. Consequently, the literary contribution of East Pakistani writers in English during that 24-year period has become part of the generic rubric of Pakistani writing in English. As Sirajuddin states, "Pakistani literature in English began to draw serious attention in the 1960s. S. Sajjad Husain, Syed Ali Ashraf and Maya Jamil contributed articles to journals and collections on topics in Pakistani literature."<sup>1</sup> Even though Syed Sajjad Husain (1920-95) and Syed Ali Ashraf (1925-98) became Bangladeshi citizens after the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in December 1971, their work in the Pakistan period was appropriated or categorised under the Pakistani



literary tradition.<sup>2</sup> What is more, Husain commenced his writing career in English with *The Statesman*, *The Daily Star of India* and the weekly *The Comrade* in the early 1940s, certainly before British India won its independence and the dominions of India and Pakistan were created in 1947. Thus, though Bangladeshi writing in English appears relatively puny on the surface, this literary tradition includes writers such as Sajjad Husain who wrote under three flags: British India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup>

It is significant to note that, as opposed to comparable literary traditions in other regions of the South Asian subcontinent, the Bangladeshi Anglophone literary tradition has arguably the most prolific and distinguished historical origins. Once considered the jewel in the crown of British India, where the country's capital was located (until 1911) and where the process of European colonisation began, the Bengal region was more exposed to English education during the British period than the other British Indian provinces. The first institution of its kind, the Hindu College in Calcutta was established in 1817 by the joint initiative of the British colonists and the native gentry, led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), an iconic Renaissance figure who was keen to spread English education among the local population long before Thomas Macaulay's policy of the Anglicisation of Indian education.<sup>4</sup> If we take this historic context into account, then Bangladeshi literature in English can be traced back to the East India Company period, to a time before Macaulay wrote his now infamous Minutes on Indian Education in February 1835 or Bentinck's English Education Act took effect in March of the same year and can, therefore, be regarded as one of the oldest and most illustrious English-language literary traditions outside the English-speaking world.

English-language writers of pre-1947 Bengal have claimed arguably some of the earliest and finest South Asian literary works, dating back to Sheikh Deen Muhammad's<sup>5</sup> *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) and Kylas Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1845* (1835). However, because of mapping and remapping of the borders, critics often consider the 1971 spatial (not temporal) boundary of Bangladesh as the site of Bangladeshi literature in English. Some of the precursors of this literary tradition include such distinguished figures

as Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), Toru Dutt (1856-77), Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932), Humayun Kabir (1906-69), Syed Sajjad Husain and Syed Ali Ashraf. The last two in this list wrote creative and critical pieces in both pre- and post-1971 Bangladesh. Rokeya's (fondly known as Begum Rokeya among her readers and admirers) feminist utopian story *Sultana's Dream* (1905)<sup>6</sup> is "arguably the first significant piece of literature in English written by a Muslim author, followed by Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*,"<sup>7</sup> and probably the first feminist utopian fiction in South Asian literature.

Bangladeshi English-language writers in the post-1971 era can be divided into two generational categories. The older generation includes, among others, Razia Khan Amin (1936-2011), Niaz Zaman (1941-), Feroz Ahmed-ud-din (1950-) and Kaiser Haq (1950-). The list of the emerging, younger generation of writers is too large to enumerate here, but some of the more prominent ones, especially from the diaspora, will be mentioned later in this discussion.

Perhaps the main reason why the English literary tradition was slow to find a footing in independent Bangladesh and writings were rather sparse in the early years is that, after all, Bangladesh was created out of a language movement and formed exclusively on language identity. The language movement, which commenced in 1952 after Bengali was left out "as one of the divided country's official languages,"<sup>8</sup> eventually led to the "country's movement for independence, culminating in the 1971 Liberation War that resulted in the massive murder of ordinary Bangladeshi – at that time East Pakistani – civilians by the Pakistani army."<sup>9</sup> Because of this hideous atrocity by the Pakistani forces, which by some estimates claimed as many as 269,000 Bengali lives,<sup>10</sup> it was obviously difficult for the aspiring writers in the English language to shake off the nationalist sentiment and start writing in English in the immediate years after independence.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Bengali was instituted as the sole medium of education at both primary and secondary levels in the newly independent country. Even the renowned English-medium schools in Dhaka founded during the British period, such as St. Gregory's School (established in 1882) and St. Francis Xavier's Girls High School (established in 1912),



became Bengali medium after independence.<sup>12</sup> However, as time passed, the memory of the war began to recede in the national psyche, and concomitantly the need to re-accommodate English – the emerging global language of business and technology – became more acute. Henceforth, English language education, and with it, creative writing in English, started to grow and slowly wrest back its prominence. English-medium schools began to proliferate in Dhaka and other major cities in the country in the early 1990s. The number of English-language dailies that published original English works in weekly instalments and/or in literary and Eid specials also began to multiply. The launching of the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts in Dhaka in 2011 (renamed Dhaka Lit Fest in 2015) has likewise contributed significantly to the present advancement of the English literary scene in Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup> Among these factors, however, the contribution of English-medium schools is perhaps the most notable. One example of it may help to illustrate this point.

Manal Mohamed (1986-) published her first writing in English, “Life in Bosnia,” in *The Bangladesh Observer* in 1994 when she was only eight years old and a grade-2 student in an English-medium school in Dhaka. Subsequently, her fiction and non-fiction works appeared in almost all major Bangladeshi English dailies, and she won various writing competitions conducted by these same publications. The pinnacle of her literary career to date occurred in 2009 when her short story “Sotto Voce” was published in Routledge’s *Wasafiri*. Her “A Recluse in Rain” was included in Niaz Zaman’s *New Age Short Stories* (2006) and has received an award. Like Manal Mohamed, many other English-medium school students have written English pieces, and the trend is increasing.<sup>14</sup>

Also significant is the influence of English dailies. *The Daily Star*’s Saturday literary supplements, as well as *The New Age* and other English newspapers’ occasional literary specials, attract an increasing number of writers and readers in English. *The Daily Star* and *The New Age* have produced collections of short stories, *The Daily Star Book of Bangladeshi Writing* (2006) and *New Age Short Stories* (2006) respectively, which are significant contributions to this burgeoning literary tradition. The Hay Festival in Dhaka, or the Dhaka Lit Fest, attracts crowds of prominent and promising literati from the region and

beyond, although the most enthusiastic participants are local (that is, Dhaka-based) Bangladeshi English-language readers and writers.

Linguistically, Bangladeshi writers in English can be classified into three groups: 1) those who produce original works in English, 2) those who self-translate their English writings into Bengali and 3) those who self-translate their Bengali works into English. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Humayun Kabir self-translated *Sultana's Dream* and *Men and Rivers* (1945) respectively into Bengali; Syed Waliullah rendered his own classic Bengali novel *Lalsalu* (1948) into English under the title *Tree Without Roots* (1967);<sup>15</sup> and Syed Manzoorul Islam's *The Merman's Prayer and Other Stories* (2013), published by *The Daily Star* publishing group, is a collection of his short stories which he himself translated from Bengali into English. Meanwhile, *Galpa: Short Stories by Women from Bangladesh* (2005), edited by Niaz Zaman and Firdous Azim, and *New Age Short Stories* contain both original and translated pieces.<sup>16</sup>

Creative writing in English among the Bangladeshi diaspora is worthy of serious critical and analytical consideration. Some of the most prominent Bangladeshi diasporic writers include Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri (1897-1999), Adib Khan (1949-), Syed Manzoorul Islam (1953-), Muhammad Abdul Bari (1953-), Dilruba Z. Ara (1957-), Mahmud Rahman (1964-), Husna Parvin Ahmad (1964-), Monica Ali (1967-), Neamat Imam (1971-), Sanchita Islam (1973-), Rekha Waheed (1975-), Tahmina Anam (1975-) and Kia Abdullah (1982-), among others. Ali's debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) has received more critical attention to date than any other work by a Bangladeshi diasporic writer. It "is regarded as very successful in drawing very lively portraits of first- and second-generation Bangladeshi immigrants" in London.<sup>17</sup> However, Australian writer and pre-eminent feminist, Germaine Greer (1939-), questions Ali's portrayal of Bangladeshi society, stating, "Ali is on the near side of British culture [and]... her point of view is, whether she allows herself to impersonate a village Bangladeshi woman or not, British."<sup>18</sup>

### Scope and Structure of the Book

The list of Bangladeshi writers in English we have mentioned above, and including those covered in the different chapters of this book, is far from complete but should nevertheless intrigue, induce and enable interested researchers to delve further into this literary tradition. The



number of writers within this slowly but steadily developing literary body is fairly large, and the themes they address are likewise too varied and numerous to detail in the scope of this introduction, or to address in a comprehensive way in a single critical volume. The issues that the contributors discuss in the chapters of this book are by no means exhaustive or fully representative of the tradition but mainly represent the prevailing interest of the researchers in the field. Our selection and inclusion of chapters were based purely on the critical merit of the items, and breadth of coverage. In other words, we have decided to include some of the best critical material on Bangladeshi literature in English internationally, balancing it with discussions on the maximum number of new or established writers we could accommodate in the book. We are fully aware that there are many other important Bangladeshi writers, both at home and abroad, who have written works of high quality and contributed meaningfully to the development of Bangladeshi Anglophone literature, and whose writings reflect Bangladeshi society and its people both in Bangladesh and in the diaspora, but whose works have not been featured in this collection. Again, this lapse is not by choice but rather determined by the spread and quality of the material that we managed to generate and had at our disposal.

There are fifteen chapters in the book in all, twelve research articles and three interviews. The articles are divided into three sections, with a fourth consisting of the three interviews. The first section, titled "A Pre-Independence Pioneer," contains two articles on the writings of Begum Rokeya. This is followed by the section, "Writings from Bangladesh," which has three articles, one each on the fiction of Niaz Zaman and the poetry of Kaiser Haq, and an article on three short stories from the Pakistan period, written originally in Bengali but translated into English and collated in a volume, *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*, by the veteran writer and editor Niaz Zaman in 2000, long after the emergence of Bangladesh. The third section, and by far the largest section in the book, "Writings from the Diaspora," has seven articles, and all on fiction by well-known writers who were born in Bangladesh but have since found a home elsewhere, but still identify with Bangladesh, consider Bangladesh as their original homeland, and write about Bangladeshi life and culture or on its uprooted variations: Adib Khan (Australia), Dilruba Z. Ara (Sweden), Monica Ali (UK), Zia Haider Rahman (UK) and

Tahmima Anam (UK). Moreover, wherever possible, the chapters have been arranged chronologically, according to the seniority of the writers, within the sections.

As stated above, the first two chapters of the book are devoted to the life, works and worldview of Begum Rokeya, and fittingly so because, although an autodidact, deliberately deprived of formal education and learning of both English and Bengali by her orthodox father, she was one of the earliest Bengali writers, and certainly the first Muslim writer, to use English as a creative medium in a significant way. Rokeya lived most of her life in Calcutta/Kolkata and founded a school there in 1911 for Muslim girls, and her writing in English is rather limited to only a few short pieces. Yet, she is now regarded as a Bangladeshi writer (as she was born in the Rangpur Division of present Bangladesh) and a trailblazer and iconic figure in Bangladeshi literature and culture.<sup>19</sup> She is also accorded much devoted, deferential honour for her bold vision and activism for women at a time when they were reduced to, in her own metaphor, "animal state," in Bengal and larger India. It is because of her formative contributions to the advancement of the Bengali (Muslim) imagination, her transformative worldview for Bengali (Muslim) women and her historical significance as a writer in English – and especially for her groundbreaking and stouthearted utopian, feminist story, *Sultana's Dream* – that we believe she deserves the attention and extended analyses of her oeuvre that are presented in the two chapters in the book.

In the first chapter of the book, "Muslim Bengal Writes Back: A Study of Rokeya's Encounter with and Representation of Europe," the volume's co-editor Md. Mahmudul Hasan discusses how despite her restricted life as a Muslim woman, who had to conform to the spatial gender norms of her time, Rokeya came to experience and explore European culture even though she never visited Europe. Hasan extensively comments on Rokeya's interpretative summary of Marie Corelli's novel *The Murder of Delicia* (1896) and on her treatment of the Victorian "woman question" and shows how Rokeya compares the gender norms in Europe with those in British India in her writings.

In Chapter Two, "The Influence of Rokeya's Islamic Identity in *Sultana's Dream*" by Ayesha Tarannum, as the title suggests, the focus



is exclusively on Rokeya's radical ecological, feminist, utopian story, *Sultana's Dream*. In this chapter, the author argues that being a practising Muslim, Rokeya's sensibility was deeply influenced by Islam's primary texts – the Qur'an and the Hadith – and that there are many Islamic undercurrents in the story. One example of the apparent use of Islamic imagery is the physical parallels that Rokeya creates between Ladyland and *Jannah* or Islamic Paradise. Moreover, there are parallels between Prophet Muhammad's journey to heaven, commonly known as Isra and Miraj, and Sultana's visit to Ladyland in her dream. The author argues that it is Rokeya's frequent use of religious-inspired terms in *Sultana's Dream* that propelled her to locate the text within the Islamic *Weltanschauung*.

In Chapter Three, "Images of Bangladesh in Niaz Zaman's Novels," Sabiha Huq examines Zaman's realism in her portrayal of Bangladeshi women and their struggles at different historical junctures. Detailing the everyday experiences of ordinary women as depicted in Zaman's three novels – *The Crooked Neem Tree* (1982), *The Baromashi Tapes* (2011) and *A Different Sita* (2011) – Huq sheds light on "an essentially Bangladeshi reality" and women's "glorious and extraordinary journeys." The chapter argues that women's resilience, strength and resourcefulness are better manifested during challenging times when they have to cope with tragedies of epic proportions on their own, without the presence or support of men.

In Chapter Four, "Reading Kaiser Haq: A Bangladeshi Transnational Poet in English," Tahmina Ahmed celebrates arguably the most prominent Bangladeshi poet in English, whose work has been received favourably both inside and outside the country. In an era of globalisation and transnational exchanges through migration as well as information technology, a poet of literary merit can easily transcend national and geographical boundaries, which is what Ahmed offers to demonstrate by way of evaluating some of Haq's poems and translated works in this chapter.

Drawing on three short stories from Niaz Zaman's edited anthology, *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*, in Chapter Five titled "Homed, Unhomed and Rehomed in Partition Stories of East Bengal / East Pakistan," Rifat Mahbub and Anika Saba take readers back to the

beginnings of independence for British India and the subsequent partition of the region into India and Pakistan in 1947. Predicating upon Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" and Ananya Jahanara Kabir's "post-amnesia," the chapter dilates on the violence and cross-border mass migration in the aftermath of the partition, and how these experiences shaped the intergenerational identities of many Bangladeshis. The discussion focuses on Syed Waliullah's "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," Abu Rushd's "The Bone" and Ashraf Siddiqui's "A House with a Pond" – stories that allow us to look at the movement of people from West Bengal to East Bengal in the wake of Partition, away from the dominant representation of migration from East Bengal to West Bengal.

In Chapter Six, "Re-storying the Past, Re-imagining the Future in Adib Khan's *Homecoming* and *Spiral Road*," Stefano Mercanti delves into two of the five novels by the Commonwealth Writers' Prize winner for the First Best Book in 1995, Adib Khan. Mercanti argues that, in his fiction, Adib Khan generally challenges the orthodoxies of rigid cultural boundaries and hierarchical systems in society by imaginatively redefining histories, landscapes and identities into forms of cross-cultural dialogue. In his novels *Homecoming* (2003) and *Spiral Road* (2007), Khan attains this by creating protagonists, Martin and Masud, who strive to find a suitable place for themselves in a world ranked and measured by labels, points of origin, skin colour and religion, by embracing new ways of overcoming disconnection, violence and other forms of cultural stereotyping common to all cultures; thus, the characters rethink their past in the novels to recreate a more equitable future.

In Chapter Seven, on the other hand, Andrew Ng deploys theories of deformity and space to investigate Adib Khan's novel about a raconteur dwarf, *The Storyteller* (2010), thereby attempting to probe a postcolonial text through a mixture of western cultural theories of bodies and space. Ng's objective is to show how space defines and confines the body, and how the body can "escape" this confining space, not by relocating itself physically away from space, but by recasting or resignifying itself *within* it through, among other *modi operandi*, language and imagination.



In Chapter Eight, “The Blame Game: War and Violence in Dilruba Z. Ara’s *Blame*,” Sanjib Kr Biswas and Priyanka Tripathi explore the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and its aftermath set out as a trope in the Swedish-Bangladeshi writer, Dilruba Z. Ara’s 2015 novel. The chapter touches on gender-based violence against women and investigates women’s self-esteem during and after the war. Using the context of Ara’s novel, a Bildungsroman about self-development and coming of age, the authors situate women in the midst of a culture of blaming that reproaches women for unconventional behaviour and “unwomanly courage.”

In Chapter Nine, “Religion, Diaspora and the Politics of a Homing Desire in the Writings of Zia Haider Rahman, Tahmima Anam and Monica Ali,” arguably the most ambitious chapter in the book, Fayeza Hasanat focuses on three novels from the new millennium by three British-based Bangladeshi writers, Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Tahmima Anam’s *The Good Muslim* (2011) and Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* (2014). In the chapter, Hasanat examines Zia Haider Rahman’s interpretation of the cognitive burden of home, Tahmima Anam’s understanding of the blinded soul and Monica Ali’s portrayal of the radical frictions in the context of what Edward Said calls in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), an issue of “overlapping territories and intertwined history”<sup>20</sup> of diasporic consciousness. Hasanat also investigates the role that religion plays in Bangladeshi fiction in English, what it means to be a good Muslim in the Bangladeshi diaspora and how the discourse of religion changes not only from one novel to another but also in the contexts of gender, culture, nation and diaspora.

The next two chapters, “Transplanted Gender Norms and Their Limits in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*” by Md. Mahmudul Hasan, and “Migratory Modernisms: Novel Homelands in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*” by Susan Stanford Friedman, focus on – as is obvious from the titles, and as mentioned earlier – the most discussed contemporary novel in English by a Bangladeshi writer, Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*. Their research interest in the work is commensurate with the fact that Natasha Walter describes it as “the kind of novel that surprises one with its depth and dash,” and that she vaticinates as “a novel that will last.”<sup>21</sup>

In his chapter, Hasan investigates Ali's portrayal of the spatial and metaphysical geography of Bangladeshi immigrants living in the diaspora in the UK and how they are affected by the diasporic anxiety of severance from the cultural values of their country of origin. He argues that a sense of displacement and identitarian fear of being lost to metropolitan cultural influences compel the Bangladeshi diasporic community in Britain to transplant Bangladeshi gender norms into their new lives and cultural surroundings. Mainly drawing upon Ali's depiction of the character of Nazneen, Hasan contends that such measures are inept and inefficacious in the context of the contemporary world of virtual communication, which renders the private realm of domesticity porous and vulnerable to outside influences.

In Chapter Eleven, Friedman investigates the intertextuality in Ali's *Brick Lane* and concludes that the presence of elements of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) in the narrative gives a different kind of legitimacy to the novel, not as an instance of the empire writing back against colonial dominance or of post/colonial mimicry, but as a work that belongs to the centre, not the periphery, of modern British literature. She argues that the clue that gives away the intertextual connections is the name of Chanu's boss, Mr. Dalloway, followed by the numerous echoes of the two precursor texts in the "target" novel, such as Chanu as James Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Nazneen as Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway. Friedman describes this as a form of cultural translation that legitimates the new while registering the dis/connection between the old and the new.

A feminist empiricist and historicist perspective is employed in Farzana Akhter's "Negotiating the Politics of Power: Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim* and Women's Role in War and Nation-building," in Chapter Twelve. Using Anam's second volume of the Bengal trilogy, *The Good Muslim*, the article discusses women's participation in the 1971 war on multiple fronts and how, in the subsequent grand narrative that followed, women faced a masculinist erasure that denied them their rightful place in history. The chapter argues that in the hysteria of eulogising male heroism, women's contributions are often forgotten in the nationalist jubilation and its lexicon. This chapter has a certain affinity with the one by Sanjib Kr Biswas and Priyanka Tripathi, as both



Ara's and Anam's novels centre on the Liberation War of Bangladesh and the effect it had on women in general and the "birangonas" (war heroines or heroic women) in particular.

As mentioned earlier, in the book's last section, there are three interviews; the first two with two locally-based acclaimed first-generation writers of the post-independence period, Niaz Zaman and Kaiser Haq, and the third with Sanchita Islam, a British-born Bangladeshi writer and artist whose name has been mentioned earlier in the list of Bangladeshi diasporic writers. These interviews are most intriguing and engaging and provide extensive discussion on the life, imagination, creative process and achievements of the writers. They also highlight many of the challenges these writers encounter either from the marginalisation of their creative medium in the case of Zaman and Haq or from cultural dislocation in the case of Islam. The interviews also explain the thought process behind some of their works and in some instances, how they are inspired to write, what are the issues that engage them most, their artistry, limits of their writing and what they intend to write or take on in the future. Since Niaz Zaman and Kaiser Haq are also well-known translators, and Sanchita Islam is an artist, composer and filmmaker, in addition to being a writer, the interviews shed much light on these and other aspects of their interests as well.

### **Conclusion**

Women's experiences and feminist issues involving the political events of 1947 and 1971 and diasporic life seem to dominate many of the chapters in this critical anthology. As mentioned earlier, the literary forms covered in the volume are fiction and poetry. Some of the important themes that have not been touched on in this volume and which future research projects may wish to consider are the issue of class, the rural-urban divide, tradition and modernity, gender and work in Bangladesh, women in the garment industry, internal migration, and religion and culture. Literary forms that have not been investigated in the book but merit research attention are autobiography, drama, memoir, travelogue and other forms of non-fiction. Moreover, there is only one article on poetry, which certainly does not measure up to the achievements by a host of younger poets.

Majority of the articles in this edited critical companion, including two of the three interviews, focus on women writers. This does not necessarily indicate that more Bangladeshi women are writing in the English language than men, nor that the work by women is necessarily superior to that of their male counterparts, but perhaps it suggests that more research is being carried out on the works of women writers compared to those of their male counterparts. Another observation is that more than half the book is on diasporic writers, which perhaps says that Bangladeshi writing is faring better abroad than within the country's borders; that more and more writers are relocating, mostly to the western societies, possibly for better opportunities to write, away from the dominance of Bengali and the negative associations that English still carries in some segments of the population in this former British colony. It should be pointed out that although English is used widely among the country's middle-class, the English-language press is thriving, universities are producing thousands of graduates in English language and literature every year, more and more English medium schools are opening for business in the country's urban and metropolitan areas, still the language has no formal status in the country, no recognition in the Constitution, and when writers choose to use it as a creative medium they are looked upon with aspersion in several quarters, even by those who groom their children with English education and send them to western countries for education or residence or both with their ill-gotten money.

We are aware of the book's limitations, yet we are pleased to bring out this first-ever critical anthology on Bangladeshi Anglophone writing. We are disappointed that we could not include articles on such major writers as Nirad Chaudhuri, Razia Khan Amin, K. Anis Ahmed, Sadaf Saaz and many more, or that there are no articles on drama and prose. Nonetheless, we believe that this effort is timely and marks the beginning of more research to come on the tradition of Bangladeshi literature in English, which it certainly deserves given that it has been growing steadily in the last twenty-odd years, despite the many challenges of a practical and ideological nature that the writers experience in their everyday life.



## References

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- 2 Not all Pakistani Bengali writers decided to take up the Bangladeshi citizenship after the country's independence. For example, Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1915-2010), who was born in the renowned Bengali Muslim Suhrawardy family in Calcutta, Bengal, retained her Pakistani citizenship and decided to stay back in Pakistan after 1971. She is the author of three literary works in English: *Letters to Neena* (1951), *Behind the Veil* (1953) and her autobiography *From Purdah to Parliament* (1963).
- 3 Another writer who deserves mention here is the playwright Sayeed Ahmad (1931-2010), who wrote three plays in English during the Pakistani period, *The Thing* (1962), *The Milepost* (1965) and *Survival* (1967). Because his plays were patterned after the tradition of the essentially Western European Theatre of the Absurd, Sayeed Ahmad is often considered a pioneer of the literary genre both in Pakistani and Bangladeshi literature. He is also well-known for his plays in Bengali, such as *Kalbela* (1962), *Trishnae* (1968), *Ek Din Protidin* (1974) and *Shesh Nawab* (1988), which have been translated into English, French, German and Italian. Sayeed Ahmad received the Bangla Academy Award in 1974 and the Ekushey Padak posthumously on 21 February 2010.
- 4 The primary purpose behind establishing this institution was to give a liberal education "to the children of the members of the Hindu Community"; however, it also enrolled "non-Hindu students like Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists and Brahma Samajists" (Swawpnil Patil, "The Hindu College (Calcutta)," *Sulekha*, accessed January 16, 2021, [http://creative.sulekha.com/the-hindu-college-calcutta\\_418581\\_blog](http://creative.sulekha.com/the-hindu-college-calcutta_418581_blog)). Roy was so determined to spread English and Western education in India, that when the Bengal government decided to set up a Sanskrit College in Calcutta, he wrote a letter of protest to then Governor General, Lord Amherst, on 11 December 1823, saying, "The Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness" (Tina Das, "Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Polyglot Reformist, Journalist and Educationist," *The Print*, 22 May 2020, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://theprint.in/features/raja-ram-mohan-roy-the-polyglot-reformist-journalist-and-educationist/426726/>).
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- 11 Shikhandin, "Writing Matters: In Conversation with Dr. Mohammad A. Quayum," *Kitaab*, 1 March 2018, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://kitaab.org/2018/03/01/writing-matters-in-conversation-with-dr-mohammad-a-quayum/>.
- 12 Manjuma Akhtar Mousumi and Tatsuya Kusakabe, "Proliferating English-Medium Schools in Bangladesh and Their Educational Significance Among the 'Clientele,'" *Journal of International Development and Cooperation* Vol. 23, No. 1 & 2 (2017): 1-13, 3.
- 13 This literature festival was founded by three young Bangladeshi writers in the English language, Sadaf Saaz, Ahsan Akbar and K. Anis Ahmed. Their vision was, in the festival's co-founder Sadaf Saaz's words, "to showcase the best of Bangladesh – Bangla and English as well as our less known other indigenous languages – to a world beyond the Bangla speaking world, which is unaware mostly of our rich and diverse literary and cultural heritage, based on hundreds of years of influence from various traditions, like Sufi Islam, tantric Buddhism, Animism and Hinduism" (Clare Wilson, "Dhaka Literary Festival: Bringing the Best of Bangladeshi Literature to the World," July 4, 2016, Culture360 ASEF.org, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://culture360.asef.org/magazine/dhaka-literary-festival-bringing-best-bangladeshi-literature-world/>).
- 14 Of course, it goes without saying that majority of the native Bangladeshi writers in English, including Serajul Islam Chowdhury (1936-), Niaz Zaman and Kaiser Haq, were brought up in English-medium schools and were exposed to the language early in life.
- 15 For further information on the author's translation, see "Syed Waliullah," *Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing Press*, accessed January 14, 2021, [http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/syed\\_waliullah](http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/syed_waliullah).
- 16 M. Obaidul Hamid and Md. Mahmudul Hasan, "Bangladeshi English," in *The Handbook of Asian Englishes*, ed. Kingsley Bolton, Werner Botha and Andy Kirkpatrick (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 297-315, 305.

- 17 A. Nejat Töngür, "Rebellion: Second Generation Bangladeshi Immigrants in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali," *Journal of International Social Research*, Vol. 6, No. 26 (2013): 561-67, 561.
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