



Selina Hossain's "Du'rokomer Juddho" and *Hangor Nodi Grenade*: A tribute to the unsung war heroines of 1971

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the glorious novel *Hangor Nodi Grenade* and "Du'rokomer Juddho", written by the prolific writer Selina Hossain. Selina Hossain wrote the novel *Hangor Nodi Grenade* based on a real incident that occurred at Kaliganjin Jessore in the War of Independence in 1971. The novel glorifies a mother who sacrifices her own son to save the lives of the freedom fighters. "Du'rokomer Juddho" delves into the world of Nurjaan, a young brave woman who wishes to fight against the Pakistani invading army. She joins the 'Muktibahini' and goes to an enemy camp to spy on them. She has to undergo a series of tortures. She decides to pass on all the information she would receive from this camp to the 'Muktibahini'. Nurjaan, along with five freedom fighters saves the entire village. Towards the end of the story we see Nurjaan, naked with a lot of wounds in her body. Bloods are dripping out from her body. Being an ordinary woman, she does an extraordinary thing. Selina Hossain's female characters are strong-willed who boldly breaks the barriers. Selina Hossain does not showcase her female characters as weak damsels; rather, she sings the song of the unsung war heroines.

Keywords: war of independence, war heroine, tribute, unsung, glorify

Introduction

A living legend, national award winner, one of the most vocal female writers of Bangladesh, Selina Hossain has penned ten novels exclusively on the War of Independence of 1971. She dreams that she would bring forth the stories of the war refugees who were forced to fly away from their motherland during this war.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: "War is an intense armed conflict between states, governments, societies or parliamentary groups. generally characterized by extreme violence, destruction and mortality..." and "War crime" according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: "War crime is a cruel act that is committed during a war and is against the international rules of war."

Selina Hossain was born on June 14, 1947, in the northern district of Rajshahi. She believes that she is lucky as she grew up in Rajshahi and Bogura. These two places helped her to become a creative person. Her father A.k. Mosarraf Hossain, a sericulture expert, used to live in Rajshahi in the 1950s. When she was four years old, her father was transferred to Bogura district. Her parents were progressive. Two of her elder sisters went to Bharateshwari Homes in Tangail to pursue their studies as there was no famous educational institution in Bogura. Selina Hossain never faced gender discrimination while studying just because of her progressive minded parents. Selina Hossain had six siblings but her parents never deprived them necessary education.

Selina Hossain passed matriculation examination from Pramathanth Ray Girls High School, Rajshahi in 1962. Then she got admitted at Rajshahi Women's College. She was the first-batch student of that college. In 1964, Selina Hossain got admitted at Rajshahi University. She was the student of the department of Bangla Language and Literature.

Selina Hossain in an interview says, "My university life was not typically studious or aimed at achieving only the degrees" (<http://www.newagebd.net>). Selina Hossain was fortunate that she got a favourable cultural milieu at Rajshahi University that increased her creative potential.

Selina Hossain wrote twenty-one wonderful novels, seven collections of short stories, four collections of essays and four collections of children stories so far. Some of her novels are in the syllabus of Indian Universities like Rabindra Bharati University, Jadavpur University and University of Assam. Her novels have been translated into Indian regional languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam. Her stories have been translated into French, Russian and English.

In her novels, Selina Hossain tries to tell the story of the female participants who were the obscure figures buried deep under the dust of history written by the male historians. She tells the story of female informers, female freedom fighters, simple homemakers who find the strength to help the freedom fighters with food, cloths and shelter. We get a close and intimate picture of the roles our women took on to support as well as survive the Liberation War of 1971.

In Selina Hossain's novel, we find ordinary women do extraordinary things. We find widowed Boori trying to do something to save the freedom fighters while they took shelter in her house. She ignores her motherhood and sacrifices her son to save her motherland. War prompts her to reinvent herself. Nurjaan, the heroine of "Du'rokomer Juddho" also finds the strength to do the impossible. Though she has to pay her price, she has to sacrifice her virginity; she uses her body as a weapon to fight against the Pakistani army.

Methodology

This study was conducted from August 2022 to November 2022. This analytical research aims to explore Selina Hossain's *Hangor Nodi Grenade* and "Du'rokomer Juddho" where the author tells us the tale of an unforgettable war heroine of 1971 and the legendary story of a mother who sacrifices her disable son to save life of two freedom fighters. This research is based on secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, textbooks, and periodicals. Reference books have been consulted from libraries, internet and other available sources.

Discussion

Inspired by a real historical incident, Selina Hossain in her novel *Hangor Nodi Grenade* tells us the story of a mother who sacrifices her disable son to save the life of the freedom fighters. This novel is a superb contribution of Selina Hossain that pays homage to the female participants who directly and indirectly helped to freedom fighters. The story of *Hangor Nodi Grenade* revolves around the life of Boori.

The novel delves into her life - adolescence, youth, marriage, childless life, giving birth to her own son Rois, death of husband, wedding of her elder (Foster) son, becoming grandmother. Boori is different among her twelve siblings. She is the youngest member of her family. She is not like others. She has a merry blithesome nature. She loves to roam around her village Haldigaon. She loves to play with her playmates. She would never listen to her mother who always tries to control her. At a very young age she has to get married to her widowed cousin Gafur. Gafur's wife died leaving her two sons Salim and Kalim.

From the very beginning of the novel we find Boori young and energetic. She is very active. She loves to roam around the entire village Haldigaon. She loves to spend her time with her playmate and classmate Jalil. She declares boldly: "I will go! Definitely! I will go away one somewhere one day." (Hossain 9) Boori wants to explore the world. She wants to know the world outside her village. She knows her limitations as a girl. She cannot do things like a free bird. She feels that her friend Jalil is lucky as he is a boy. Jalil can go anywhere. Jalil wants to go to Dhaka. He even confesses his love for her and tells her to leave the village and start a new life with him. Boori is confused, she is unable to ignore the so called patriarchal society that always restrict women. In the article, "The silent soldiers: a postcolonial feminist study of Selina Hossain's 'River of My Blood' and Khaled Hossain's 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'", Farhanaz Rabbani and Tazin Aziz Choudhury says: Boori is unable to leave her parents and defy societal norms, and consequently cannot muster up the courage to reciprocate his love." (Asiatic, volume 12, number 1, 2018)

Jalil leaves Haldigaon. Boori's father dies. One day, Boori was roaming around the village and she saw a boat where a newlywed couple was travelling. She started to imagine herself as bride who is sitting with her groom. She was bored to death in her own village. She will be happy to leave this village with her bridegroom. She is eagerly waiting to see the world outside Haldigaon. Unluckily, she was married to her cousin Gafur whose house was just a few steps away from her own house. So her dreams were never fulfilled. She always longed to get on a boat and discover the world outside her village. Despite of her young age, she was burdened with all the boring household chores. She had to take care of her husband and her two stepsons. All those duties were uninterestingly repetitive and boring. Sometimes she regret that she could accept Jalil's offer and would happily live a good life with him. Her husband

Gaffor allowed Boori complete freedom. Her dauntless spirit was still there. She was happy with her two stepsons Salim and Kalim but her neighbours instigate her by telling her to have her own baby. She has been married for four years and now she wants to have her own baby, "I want to have my own flesh and blood." (Hossain 27) Now she has to stop roaming around her village especially in open fields and has to avoid visiting the river. The village women believe, "women should not move so freely." (Hossain 28) Everyone was convinced that Boori could never become a mother. So, Boori confines herself within the four walls of her house. She is ready to sacrifice her freedom to become a mother. Even she visits Kesa Baba's shrine to fulfill her dream. At last she gives birth to her own son Rais.

Unfortunately the baby turns out to be a disable baby as she was married to her cousin. Then the Liberation War of 1971 starts and we find Boori extremely proud of her elder stepson Salim who joins the war. She feels sad because her own blood, her son Rais cannot join war as he is disabled. She says to her son, "my son! you do not know that the village is in great danger now. Won't you contribute anything for the country?" (The Library of Congress the South Asian Literary Recordings Project)

Boori, at one point says: "Rais! You have lot of pains in your chest, you can't speak. I had pain and sorrow too, I can't go to war. Now I don't have sorrows. Rais! Salim- Kalim transformed our house into a warfront. You and I am warriors too." (Hossain 27)

The Pakistani soldiers come to her house and torture her younger stepson Salim in front of Boori just because he didn't inform about Salim and the freedom fighters. Boori is still indomitable. She says, "Why do you keep your head down, Kalim? You must look up, son. Let the flames blaze your tiger eyes. Let Haldi be born again." (Hossain 105) The Pakistani soldiers brutally torture Kalim and kill him in front of her. Thus, Selina Hossain shows us the brutality of the liberation war.

Later on, Boori hides two teenage freedom fighters, Kader and Hafiz inside her house to save them. Their lives were now in her hand. When the Pakistani invaders enter her village and start searching all the houses, she immediately hands over her disable son Rois with the weapon of Kader and Hafiz and says, "He is, in front of me, a freedom fighter. From today I will call you 'Freedom'" (Hossain 141). Though Boori's actions are controversial, inhumane but for the sake of her motherland, Boori sacrifices her son. She is a silent freedom fighter. She is the representative of all the valiant mothers who sacrifice their beloved ones with the belief that it is better to sacrifice one life than sacrificing thousand lives.

The story of "Du'rokomer Juddho" portrays a young brave damsel Nurjaan who grows up listening to the stories of "Ghaji's." Her father used to tell her the stories of legendary warriors. 'Shonabhan' is her idol. This epic poem *Shonabhan* written by Shah Garibulla inspires her a lot. When the war of Independence started in 1971, we find Nurjaan telling her sister Tamija that she wants to join the war. Her sister tells her that, girls cannot fight battles. She tells her sister, "call me Shonabhan" (Muktijuddher Shotogolpo 498) Tamija thinks that her sister has gone mad. No one calls her Shonabhan but she decides to become Shonabhan.

In one morning, she tells her father boldly, "I want to go to the war." (Muktijuddher Shotogolpo 499). Her father replies angrily, "Have you gone mad?" (499) Her father is scared to send her as she is young and unmarried. She threatens her father that if he does not let her go, she will commit suicide.

Her father tells her that she is too much impetuous. Nurjaan declares that she would not commit suicide, “why should I die; I would kill a khanshena and then will die” (499). No barriers can stop her now. She is determined and secretly leaves her house and joins Mukti Bahini. The leader of Mukti Bahini, Nizam Master is not amazed at all when he finds her in their camp. He tells her to get trained in their camp first. Nurjaan starts learning how to handle and operate weapons. The Pakistani army founded a camp in the power house. Nurjaan and Abu Bakar go to the enemy camp to spy on them. They are caught and kept in the Pakistani military camp. Selina Hossain says the camp is “Hell! Hell!” (499). Both of them has to undergo a series of physical and mental tortures. Nurjaan has to satisfy Pakistani soldiers physically. She is stabbed by the soldiers and gets wounded at her back. The wound is deep. Abu Bakar and Nurjaan are determined and they decide to pass on all the information they would receive to the Mukti Bahini. When Nurjaan gets to know that the Pakistani soldiers decided to raid Kandopasha village, she decides to pass on the information to the Mukti Bahini. She tells Abu Bakar that if anybody looks for her he should tell that she has gone to the river to take a bath. She ties a lot of mines and grenades on her chest and her back. She starts running swiftly with all her might. She thinks that she is not running, she is flying. She runs and runs with strong determination. Finally she reaches her destination. Nurjaan believes that she has to deal with two types of war. The first war is the national war of Independence of 1971 and the second one is her body. Her body is a warfront for her. Nurjaan believes that she can use her body as a woman to help the national war. As women, it is easier for her to move freely. She can access the social spaces frequently. Nurjaan can be called a superhuman as she runs swiftly with her two strong legs. She thinks her legs need the air not her lungs. Selina Hossain, at one place says that Nurjaan is thinking that she is riding on an invisible horse. After reaching the Mukti Bahini camp, she undresses herself and informs them that the Pakistani soldiers are coming to attack the Kandopasha village. Nizam Master asks her to go back to the Pakistani camp but Nurjaan wants to stay with them and plant mines. The way she talks, the way she orders everyone on the mission to plant mines and grenades, it seems as if Bangabandhu himself has come to that camp. Her fellow freedom fighters are surprised as the courage and the determination she has. Selina Hossain compares Nurjaan to Bangabandhu. Nurjaan, along with five freedom fighters plants the mines and grenades so that when the jeep of the Pakistani soldiers reaches there, they will be blown away. After doing that, Nurjaan takes a bath on the river and comes back to the Pakistani camp. In the afternoon, when the Pakistani soldiers get the news that their jeep was blown off, they drug on Nurjaan and torture her. Towards the end of the story, we find Nurjaan, naked with a lot of wounds in her body and blood is dripping from her body. Tahmina Akter Dipu, in her article, “war heroines of 1971 of Bangladesh: how they are Treated in our society” says about the war heroines “Bangladeshi woman played a significant role in 1971 working as combatants, sneaks, nurses. shows their unyielding determination by sending their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons to the Liberation War. Sometimes to save the freedom fighters they

surrendered themselves to the Pakistani army.” (<https://doi.org/10.46291/cenraps.v2i3.48>)

According to the information given by the state minister for Liberation War Affairs while giving his answer to a question in the National Assembly on 16 November 2012, two hundred three women took part in the 1971 Liberation War. Among them Dinajpur had the highest number of twenty one women. Besides, fifteen women took part in the liberation war in Chapainawabganj, nine in Jessore and Gopalganj, seven in Sunamganj and Panchagarh and six in Sylhet and Barishal. Only three of them get ‘Bir Pratik’ award. (Sohel, S. (2019, December)^[8]

The government has recognized 15 more Birangonas as freedom fighters for their significant role during the countries liberation war in 1971. They would enjoy the same benefits that freedom fighters are enjoying. (<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/bangladesh-liberation-war-heroine-birangona-recognised-freedom-fighter-1430593>) (9) 17 November, 2022.

The report states that, among 448 gazetted Birangonas, 107 are in Rajshahi Division, 61 in Rangpur, 53 each in Dhaka and Sylhet, 51 in Mymensingh, 50 in Khulna, 43 in Barishal and 30 in Chattogram division. The contribution of women in our Liberation war is unforgettable.

Conclusion

Selina Hossain has portrayed Nurjaan as a symbol of courage, a symbol of war heroine. She is a Birangona. Most of the male writers fail to portray such characters but Selina Hossain with her powerful story telling pays tribute to all the unsung war heroines especially the Birangonas. The author adroitly portrays Boori as the most courageous mother who sacrifices her own son to save the life of two freedom fighters. Characters like Nurjaan and Boori are rare. They are very special. They are war heroines. Through these two characters, Selina Hossain pays tribute to all the female participants who directly and indirectly aided during the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

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