

## MESTIZA AS SPEAKING SUBALTERN IN TAHMIMA ANAM'S A GOLDEN AGE IN NEW HISTORICIST PERSPECTIVE

**Saiqa Siddiq Khan\***

Lecturer, Department of English Gomal University D. I. Khan  
[saiqa.phdeng124@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:saiqa.phdeng124@iiu.edu.pk)

**Ehsanullah Danish**

Assistant Professor, Department of English Gomal University D. I. Khan  
[ehsaanish@gmail.com](mailto:ehsaanish@gmail.com)

**Qazi Haroon Ahmed**

M.Phil. English, Hazara University Mansehra  
[qharoon3@gmail.com](mailto:qharoon3@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*By drawing a nexus between Gloria Anzaldua's notion of mestiza consciousness and Gayatri Spivak's conceptualization of speaking subaltern, this article discusses that how the protagonist, Rehana Haque in Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age raises her voice, struggles for survival and achieves mestiza consciousness in the backdrop of 1971 war and therefore can be named as speaking subaltern in new historicist perspective. Haque is resilient, brave and courageous who not only challenges the societal norms but also sets a precedent for oppressed and marginalized women. She relishes a hope despite hardships to get a country of their own; irrespective of their religion, language and multiple culture. Anam in A Golden Age has brought into limelight the struggle of resilient female figure and the hurdles she faces while achieving mestiza consciousness. The study is qualitative and hence implies concept of Mestiza Consciousness and Subaltern stance.*

**Key Words:** Mestiza Consciousness, Speaking Subaltern, 1971 War, New Historicism

### BACKGROUND

Pakistan and Bangladesh present contrasting approaches about 1971 event and war in their national discourses. The narratives of both countries highlight dichotomies and depict it as 'secession' and 'liberation' respectively. Pakistanis lament over forced separation of the East Pakistan and deem it as the cutting of a limb, whereas, Bengalis consider it as an achievement and celebrate it as Liberation war of 1971. The comparison, critical thinking and resultant analysis surface a new point that history – being subjective interpretation, is not a Meta but Mini narrative. In this connection Michael Payne shares that New historicists are doubtful about monolithic and unified presentations of cultures or historical periods (2005, p.3). Therefore, they promote the idea of multiplicity of depictions in their new historicist writings. Plurality of the historical interpretations shatter the notion of unified and monolithic presentations. Now it is 'histories' not 'history'. E. Lamberti and V. Fortunati have forwarded the same idea by using the words memory and memories instead of history and histories.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the debate on the ontological status of various scholarly disciplines, the juxtaposition of macro and micro history, the questioning of the ideas of objectivity and subjectivity in the historiographic rendering, as well as in literature, have taught us all to be prudent observers and use the plural instead than the singular: no longer a unique memory, but many memories (2009, p.1).

### THEORITICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The study views the event of 1971 from different discursive angles and to build up a point, which is about histories (in plurality) from new historicist perspective and (re)interpretation of history as 'his-story'. It grounds the current research work in New Historicist theory to depict the Bangladeshi-Anam's

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\* Corresponding Author

standpoint about the war of 1971 and pre/post war scenario. Anam's protagonist-Haque, encounters hardships in her life but she resiliently struggles and passes through different stages and then achieve *mestiza* consciousness. *Mestiza* consciousness is a self-motivated tool for self-empowerment and resilience against patriarchy and superiority. According to Anzaldúa, *mestiza* develops her identity for herself and her new self-consciousness and its representation assist her in narrating her story of identity to her surroundings. We shall extrapolate how Haque raises her voice, struggles for survival and achieve *mestiza* consciousness in the backdrop of 1971 War and therefore can be termed as speaking subaltern. Partition of Indian sub-continent formed new boundaries and drove a wedge across various nations. East and west Pakistan were at loggerheads with each other on the two sides of India. Haque is touched by the rebellious atmosphere around her and eventually contributes in war efforts. Haque's involvement in 1971 war and nationalist movement give her a space where she can assert her new *mestiza* identity.

According to Spivak, there are two registers for female figures i.e. childrearing and soul making (1999, p.116). Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness relates to and resembles soul-making. Individualist soul-making is to change the self to the "native subaltern female" (Spivak 1999, pp.116-7). The new *mestiza*, then, constitutes her subject as the feminist individualist in Spivak's terms. Spivak's primary focus in "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1985) is subaltern consciousness. Pramod Nayar opines, that through discourses, subaltern as subjects are formed (2010, p.25). The term "Subaltern" is taken from Antonio Gramsci. Subaltern means "subordinate" or "dependent" (Nayar 2010, p. 93). Spivak shares that the word "subaltern" is kept reserved for the utter heterogeneity of decolonized space and not only for being postcolonial or ethnic minority. She elaborates that subaltern has been implanted into long road to hegemony (1985, p.310). McLeod, moreover, opines that the "subaltern consciousness" is a fiction (2010, p.219). He shares that the speech of subaltern cannot be interpreted properly that's why they cannot speak. The failure of interpretation and not failure of articulation on the part of subaltern female figure results in silence. The act of speaking is not an issue but the process of representation in which such speaking (about subaltern) is not properly heard (2010, p.223). McLeod's opinion ropes the notion of the subaltern's speech being "a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception" (Spivak 1985, p. 310). The communication starts from an interpreter who is not a subaltern and not from the subaltern herself. Keeping in line with Spivak, Nayar shares that "the practices of representation, the ethics of narration, image-making and meaning-generation" (2010, p.126) Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness resembles to Spivak's notion of the need for voice-consciousness in case of subaltern's communication abilities. The *mestiza* positions between different locale helps her in articulation even though she is not properly understood and interpreted by interpreters. But she speaks resiliently and therefore, Anzaldúa's *mestiza* can be deemed as a speaking subaltern.

Haque shows resilience, struggles with all hardships, passes through different stages and ultimately achieve *mestiza* consciousness. The dormant areas of her consciousness activates during her struggle towards *mestiza* consciousness. Keeping in line with Glen Jacob we argue that this is the point where subaltern-Haque is speaking (2006, p.82). The heightened consciousness, display of resilience and the absence of reticence (shyness) will convert her subalternity in to self- empowerment. Anthony Easthope, however, shares that the "speaking subject cannot live in the gaps between identities" (1998, p.347). But *mestiza* can resiliently, and her speech can be articulated and therefore heard. Therefore, we argue that after achieving *mestiza* consciousness, Haque can be called a speaking subaltern.

## **DISCUSSION**

Tahmina Aman in *A Golden Age* has reframed the long-established image of women during wars. Keeping in line with Manju Kapur, we argue that Haque possesses the characteristics of new woman, who is inclined to select/adopt and walk on her own road (p.56). She is resilient, brave and courageous who not only challenges the societal norms but also sets a precedent for oppressed and marginalized female figures. Haque's struggles in getting back her kids from the guardianship of their uncle as well as her role in 1971 war is truly unconventional and inspiring. She relishes a hope despite hardships to get a country of their own irrespective of their religion, language and multiple culture. Anam has brought into limelight the struggle of resilient female figure and the hurdle she faces while reaching self-empowerment.

Female bodies are always cursed and blamed in patriarchal system for any mishap. The monolithic stigma generates more complications in Haque's life. She is deemed responsible for the death of her husband and that she could divert the ongoing disaster and loss by burning some chillies

and hovering them over his head, or slaughter a goat. But she neglected these practices and as a result he had died. After sudden death of Iqbal Haque, Rehana Haque restricts her life to her children. Iqbal Haque's brother-Faiz Haque, wins guardianship of his nephew- Sohail and niece-Maya in court. He labels Haque as an irresponsible mother because she along with her children visits theatre for a movie –Cleopatra, which he opines is not according to his religious (moral) standards. Haque remains motionless as she is unable to stop neither her brother in law nor the judge. The patriarchal court supports Faiz Haque's stance as the Judge announced that Haque is young enough and cannot take responsibility of her children. Moreover, she has not been able to teach them a lesson about Life after death and Jannat. To judge a woman on (insignificant issues) propriety in South Asia is a common phenomenon and the situation becomes worse when she has no moral and financial support. Drawing on Spivak, we argue that that the colonized subalterns are irretrievably heterogeneous and that the dominant indigenous groups at the local and regional levels are deemed "elite". The elite like courts and Faiz Haque act like colonizers to Haque (colonized subaltern) and most importantly the patriarchal society in which she resides (Spivak 1985, p. 79). Haque remains silent as she is well -aware that no one will pay attention to her point of views. She confesses to her husband while sitting in front of his grave that she has lost her children's custody because she remained silent in front of the Judge. Although, she remains silent in court but she is not satisfied with it because she is passing through a stage-nepantla of *mestiza* consciousness. *Nepantla* sets up the passage where the journey towards self -reflection, self - proclamation perhaps liberation begins. Haque like Anzaldua is a threshold woman and as a *nepantlera* occupies diverse worlds and struggles for survival. She strives to invent rational and holistic theories that will enable her to reconceive and to transform the diverse worlds in which she exists. She gets back her children's custody from their Uncle and later on inspires them to play active role in Bangladesh Liberation war. According to Rosi Braidotti, "woman is connected to the patriarchy by negation" (1994, p.235). Cultural tyranny in a society negates her existence and in cultural tyranny according to Anzaldua "males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (2007, p.38). Female bodies are as Braidotti puts it are "defined by others so that women end up being defined others; they are represented as different from Man" which labels their inferiority (1994, p.235) and depict their negative value. Anzaldua shares that "the struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one" (2007, p.106). Drawing on Braidotti and Anzaldua, we argue that Haque considers the manmade social norms that introduces different values to the culture and society as depreciation. She unmade the manmade rules with her feminist logic. She challenges the societal norms and patriarchal oppression as she journeys towards *mestiza* consciousness.

She relishes the hope despite hardships to get a country of their own irrespective of their religion, language and multiple culture. Her inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes her vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation. She stands resiliently. She still is well aware that she is not capable to be listened at this stage in this patriarchal society and she will have to make her capable and bring herself to that mark of accomplishment, where she will be listened, and her views will be respected.

Haque journeys into the depth of the self and realizes that something forces her to push up and walk towards the world and confront and fight with the bitter realities of life. The real strength of women, according to Spivak resides in her own self. Whenever she shows resilience and start to love and prefer her own self, no one can dare to stop her. Through the character of Haque, Anam depicts strong aspects of women through her courageous and bold decisions. Everyone in her close circle forces her to remarry but she refuses and prefers her children well-being over her sexual desires. She negates the idea of introducing unknown person in her organized life. "It was too risky. It could too easily go wrong. And the thought that some man might be cruel to her children was enough to make the bile rise in her throat." (Anam 08). Haque chooses a very difficult and challenging route for herself. Drawing on Beauvoir, we argue that Haque's difficulties are more evident because she has preferred battle over resignation (1949, p.695).

Haque at this stage of her struggle towards self-empowerment exhibits both masculine and feminine characteristics. Haque like Anzaldua owns the land and accomplishes her desire to create a new space and standing (an endeavor that Anzaldua calls masculine desire to reflect men's tendency to wrest ownership. We feel Anzaldua claims this masculine thinking also exists in women and keeping the title of masculine desire in a woman's activity is one constant reminder and rebuttal to the binaries the world has created in what a sex can or cannot do and what she or he are entitled to do, a process that

often involves forcing men and woman not to work as androgynous personalities. Anzaldua uses this stage to balance male and female binaries. The mainly or masculine side claims the land, and the womanly or feminine forms a new identity in the same space. The newly created identity-*mestiza* is beyond the binary. Haque owns and claims a land. She wants to establish her own house which symbolically reflects her struggle for her own identity on this space. Haque's struggle for establishing and building her own house is evident in this case. She faces hurdles while arranging bank loans because she has no guarantor. One of the bank workers offers her bank loan, and takes her to his office where he slips his hand under her elbow. This man harasses her sexually but somehow she manages to escape. Anam paints the true picture of that men in society who uses females only for enjoyment and opine that they can take benefit of any female for quenching their thirst and feeding their lust. She faces hardships ultimately builds her house and makes herself capable and gets back her children from Lahore. Nayyer shares that one way which woman can utilize to change the meaning of embodiment is to escape "both her gender and her racial identities – to assert her individual identity/agency in the process." (p.35). Haque like Anzaldua does not utilize this strategy to escape; "she recreates her own self/identity" (2007, p.102).

Haque at this stage achieves *mestiza* consciousness because the juncture which she occupies now is that focal point or fulcrum, where phenomena tend to collide and all the separate parts unites. The love of women and especially the love of mother of her children is the most powerful emotion in this world. Haque's love for her children and nation empowers and strengthens her. Anam depicts glorification of motherhood through Haque. Beauvoir underscores the strength of women's love in the following words: "On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself – on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not mortal danger" (1949, p.679). The narrator has repositioned the third world resilient woman who exercises her power of resistance and achieve *mestiza* consciousness. The notion of "Single Mother" which is deemed as a product of female's power of resilience is applied in *A Golden Age* in the setting of 1971. Haque proves in every case to be brave and unconventional. She is now an empowered and independent woman who had raised her children alone. She proves that female figures do not need help and sympathy from men; they have valor and courage and can struggle alone for their survival. According to Beauvoir: "Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator" (1949, p.689). Beauvoir praises the empowerment of female figures and opines that once they are empowered, they do not need a "masculine mediator" (p. 687)

During *mestiza* consciousness, the most important among many struggles is to strive for the transformation of the overall social structures. She, therefore, during this stage becomes a political actor who tries for creating emancipatory spaces, teaching resistance building communities of solidarity, transforming institutions etc. Anzaldua opines that this political consciousness comes during *mestiza* consciousness. She elaborates it further in the following word: "It is not enough to stand in the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions" (Anzaldua, 1987, p.78). She, in the same paragraph, shares that one's (he/she) role during *mestiza* consciousness is to act and not to react from whatever opinion, position, stance and profession one may have. One's action must be politically engaged. Humanity is the only religion that Haque follows. She prays and gives her children Islamic teachings but she trains her children to prefer humanity. Religion never becomes a hurdle in her logical sensibility and sense of humanity. She provides residence to Mr. and Mrs. Sengupta-her tenants in her house during the tough and troublesome time of 1971 war. She participates in public gathering with Hindus and Muslims without any discrimination. She prefers and enjoys free and unrestricted life during public gathering and socialization. She admires gatherings, goes to cinema to watch Cleopatra and to stadium to watch cricket matches with her Hindu tenant and children.

Haque is an embodiment of Anzaldua's *mestiza* and Spivak's speaking subaltern. She is a strong motherly figure that represents the whole nation. She is an exceptional war heroine who sacrifices everything during 1971 war. She knows Urdu language and helps the Bengali freedom fighters against the Urdu speaking West Pakistani army. Her only target is to support her sons and to build their own independent nation and in that struggle she ignores the threat that she could be idea of being raped and tortured. She is now the mother of every freedom fighter not only of Sohail and Maya. She deems independence of her country as her prior duty and above her personal relationships and grudges. She visits refugee camps sheltered by millions of Bengalis. She gradually forgets to pay routine visit to her

husband's grave and remains busy in the services freedom fighters. She sacrifices her beautiful saris (which Iqbal Haque presented her) during war. She unfolds the saris and use them to cover the freedom fighters. Drawing on Christine Pyle, we argue that Haque's this gift to the freedom fighters demonstrate her transference of love and priorities. She moves out from the shadow of her husband's death and initiates a courtship with her nation (2010, p.4).

Haque's struggle, resilience and *mestiza* consciousness brings unexpected results. She as a liberated mother and resilient woman plays her unconventional role in her personal life as well as in national issues. The fictional narrative ends with optimistic message of liberation of Bangladesh after nine months' struggle. Haque shares with her husband at his grave "Dear husband, the war will end today (269). Bangladesh emerges as an independent state on the surface of the globe after a lot of sacrifices, killings and deaths. Haque is an epitome of love and shows that pure love conquers all. The fiction ends with a family re-union. She shares at the grave of her husband that how she struggled and survived. This war has taken away many young boys but Sohail survived. Many girls were raped and killed but fortunately only Maya remained safe. (Anam 273-274).

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