JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 3 • July 2026

REPRESENTING THE SUBALTERN: GENERALIZATION AND HOMOGENIZATION OF WOMEN IN ANAM'S *THE GOOD MUSLIM*

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22108358

Keywords
Postcolonial feminism, Homogenization, Monolithic representation, Hierarchies, Subjugation

Article History

Received: 28 May 2026
Accepted: 15 July 2026
Published: 31 July 2026

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Abstract

Homogenization entails reducing the diverse experiences of Third World women to a monolithic representation of oppression, subjugation and weakness, thereby obscuring the complexities and differences that shape their identities. The present study aims to analyse how the homogenization against these women works through the use of language, form, and production in Tehmima Anam's The Good Muslim. Homogeneity flattens the struggle of women in Third World countries and deprives them of true political and cultural representation by overlooking the nuances of social, cultural, religious and regional differences. These marginalised characters are deprived of interiority and complexity, negating their struggles to fight and negotiate for themselves and are represented as lacking agency, control and power, reinforcing hierarchies which feminist fiction is expected to dismantle. These subaltern women struggle to fight and reclaim their true identity in the selected work. The representational strategies of Anam's selected fiction are studied through Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes". The Good Muslim explores Maya Haque's struggle in the aftermath of Bangladesh's war of independence and the events that took place after it, weaving the complex and multilayered stories of characters associated with her. The novel has a non-linear structure, moving between two time frames during the war in 1971 and decades after it, depicting the social and psychological impacts of war on different characters. This study is significant in deconstructing the tension between reinforced hierarchies in the representation of marginalised women as monolithic identities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The movement of feminism could not hold back from the whirlpool of market realism. Feminist authors are often charged with market realism, thus further complicating the already not-so-easy task of highlighting the conditions and issues of women. Hence, the question of women's rights became a commodity to be sold and valued in the publishing economy. Moreover, these English-writing authors have privileged backgrounds, education and limited experiences; they write for specific audiences. Most of the authors live in metropolitan centers or live in the diaspora, so the question of representation is doubtful. Authors claiming to be the representatives of these marginalised, knowingly or unknowingly,

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Volume 4 • Issue 3 • July 2026

create hierarchies within those structures that are expected to challenge these structures. One of the kinds is the generic representation of subaltern women. As one starts to read South Asian Anglophone feminist fiction, one realises that one novel after another, one story after another, one subplot after another, and one character after another, in fact, much of what constitutes feminist fiction in South Asia in the English language has this monolithic representation of women. These women are not simply neglected, but much of the struggle of these marginalised women against patriarchy is perhaps not well understood by the feminist writers because their writers' personal experiences, as well as their readings of others' experiences, are developed from European feminism as a referential point. When marginalized women appear in their writings, it is in the form of a bit of a stereotypical, underdeveloped character that misses, and perhaps misrepresents, the nuance of the struggle of a woman against the patriarchal forces she contends with, and so the feminist fiction flattens the dominant majority of women as a single unit, overlooking their individuality and presenting them as stereotypes lacking any nuance. Anglophone feminist fiction in South Asia is mostly written by women who are urban, educated, and fluent in English. These authors have more privilege than the marginalised women they may write about. They also write inside a literary world shaped by elite South Asian and Western frameworks, because English-language publishing tends to circulate through these networks.

A first issue, and one that shapes everything else, is the English language itself. English is not just a neutral tool in South Asia. It has a long history linked to colonial administration, elite schooling, and city-based life. That history still matters, because it affects what kinds of experiences can be expressed easily in English and what kinds become awkward or hard to translate. Meenakshi Mukherjee makes this point in The Perishable Empire (2000) when she talks about "cognitive limits." By this she means that writing in English can place limits on what can be thought and communicated, at least within that language's usual categories and expectations. The Indian English novel grew within colonial education and elite culture, and Mukherjee argues that it still carries traces of those origins. Writers like Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, and Kamala Markandaya used polished, standardised English that helped their books travel globally, but it also meant that South Asian life was often filtered through certain linguistic and cultural frames (Mukherjee, 2000).

This matters for subaltern women in particular. English, especially in the way it is used in international publishing and feminist debate, tends to come with a vocabulary that fits Western experience more smoothly. Words that commonly appear in English-language feminist discussions, such as autonomy, independence, self-determination, rights, and choice, often assume a certain kind of life. They tend to match the world of the educated and mobile urban middle class, where a person can imagine leaving, studying, working, seeking legal help, or building an independent identity. Subaltern women's lives may not fit easily into that vocabulary, not because these women have no agency, but because the kinds of agency they use may not have clear names in this discourse. Sometimes those actions are named only in negative ways, like "compromise," "acceptance," or "silence," as if they must be weakness. So when English-language feminist fiction tries to represent these women, it is doing it in a language that may already lean towards Eurocentric frameworks of understanding.

At this point, this problem moves from difference to evaluation. The issue is how European feminist ideas of agency might be imposed onto these women's lives. Representation is never innocent because when elites represent marginalised women, they are also using their own categories and assumptions. Even sympathetic representation can silence if it forces the other person's life into a framework that cannot recognise it properly (Spivak, 1988).

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After this comes a related but slightly different issue: the absence of serious attention to what feminism might look like from these women's own perspectives. Most writers producing Anglophone feminist fiction in South Asia are urban, educated, and fluent in English. Their personal experiences of patriarchy are therefore likely to be Eurocentric or metropolitan experiences. Their access to feminist theory is also shaped by English-language and often Western academic traditions. This does not mean they cannot write about these women's lives, but it does mean marginalised experience may be at a distance. They may not have close knowledge of these women's daily negotiations, and the theories most available to them may not give them the best tools to represent their agency with full nuance.

It is important to stress that this is not only an individual issue. It is structural. Lisa Lau argues that South Asian women writers often negotiate between English and South Asian realities, and also between "centre and periphery", while writing for multiple audiences at once, including Western readers, diaspora communities, and local English-speaking elites (Lau, 2002). Those pressures shape what is written and how it is written. Publishing markets, prize cultures, and reader expectations can encourage certain kinds of feminist stories because they are familiar and easy to recognise.

2. Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism poses the question of who is authorised to speak for marginalised women, and how language and literature itself function as a category that shapes who can be recognised as a feminist subject (Showalter, 1979; de Lauretis, 1987; Spivak, 1988; Mohanty, 1984; Massey, 1994). Elaine Showalter, who is one of the most influential figures in the development of feminist literary criticism. Her 1979 essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" is a foundational text that sought to establish feminist criticism as a serious and methodologically distinct field of scholarly inquiry. Showalter argued that feminist scholars needed to develop their own critical tools rather than simply borrowing from existing schools of thought. Showalter identified two distinct modes of feminist literary criticism. Showalter's differentiation of feminist critique and gynocriticism also makes the critic remember that there is no innocent representation. Women are not merely present in a text; they are actively arranged in the text to become central, complex or exemplary in the narrative world of the text. When women's writing is considered as a tradition, then it is possible to enquire what sorts of women are most prominent in that tradition and what sorts of women are marginal. Subsequent feminist critics have made the image more complex by showing that gynocriticism may become too homogeneous when it assumes that the experience of women writing is uniformly in one place, and Rajan (1993) has shown that the representation of postcolonialism is determined by the struggles between gender, culture and nationalism. Collins (1990) also believed that the prevailing theoretical frames must be disrupted by the situated knowledge of variously placed women. These criticisms come in handy in this case since they caution against the inclination to consider women's writing as inherently inclusive just because it was written by women.

Teresa de Lauretis goes further to suggest that cultural technologies create gender, as opposed to being reflected in the texts (de Lauretis, 1987). Gender is made meaningful through literature, film, religion, education and the law. This change is significant to the current research since homogenization, should it be, can be both explicit and focalised, as well as through narrative closure and in the types of action that can be understood as agency in the first instance. De Lauretis intensifies the question by posing whose is the point of view in which the novel is organised, whose desires can be intelligible, and which actions seem to be reasonable, courageous, childish, exorbitant, or tragic. When a novel is repeatedly rewarding of speech, movement and separation of family, it educates its reader to regard those as significant liberation; when it

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educates the reader to regard compromise, strategic silence or negotiation as passive, it educates the reader to value it less. It is not the fact that one set of actions is objectively better than the other, but the form of narrative can render one repertoire of action to appear to be naturally better than the other.

A shift towards gender to space is also supported in her work. When gender is created by means of representation, then place is important, as it is the place that determines the types of plots that appear possible. The city environment is more conducive to plots of learning, work, legal action or anonymity of movement. Different pressures and different temporalities are created in rural settings. The issue of representation of women is not only a formal problem, but how space renders certain forms of womanhood narrable and others less narrable. This fact is consistent with a literature that considers the city and countryside as cultural and physical locations. Williams (1973) demonstrated that literary traditions have reiterated the value of movement between country and city, and feminist geographers like Rose (1993), Massey (1994) and Soja (1989) have argued that space is produced socially and unequally lived. These arguments assist the current study in differentiating a novel that is simply about subjugated women and a novel that does provide these women with conceptual depth.

To synthesise, Showalter and de Lauretis provide essential understanding of how fiction participates in the construction of gender and how feminist criticism must remain attentive to biases within its own traditions.

The work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is instrumental in this respect since it attracts attention to the challenge of the representation of women who are structurally marginal in the dominant systems of knowledge. The fact that she differentiates political representation (speaking on behalf of) and textual portrayal (speaking about) is particularly significant to the study of literature since a character can be presented in a story, but still not be given conceptual authority (Spivak, 1985, 1988). It is not just whether or not subordinated women are represented in a text, but whether their speech, their strategies and desires can be given a voice of their own.

Criticism on *The Good Muslim* has largely concentrated on war memory, secularism, religion and nation-building. Akhter (2018) argues that the novel revisits the Liberation War through women's roles in power, memory and national reconstruction, while Majid and Jalaluddin (2018) focus on the conflict between secular and religious worldviews embodied by Maya and Sohail. These readings are important as they demonstrate how domestic relations are closely related to national history in the novel.

Chambers (2014), in her book *Imagining Muslims in Diaspora*, dedicates a chapter to Tahmima Anam titled "Bangladeshi Islam, secularism, and the Tablighi Jamaat", which studies the inconsistencies and drawbacks of both the ideologies secular and religious in her two novels, *A Golden Age* and *The Good Muslim,* where Sohail joins orthodox religious movement and Maya remains loyal to Marxist ideals of secularism.

Lal (2022) highlights, in her research titled Silence and the ethics of partial empathy in Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim,* the dangers of partial empathy.

Bhattacharya (2017) explores the shift of linguistic identity as a secular notion of the new state while comparing it to the religious fundamentalism that arises after the assassination of Sheikh Mujeebur Rehman, leading to the erasure of national identity and the trauma of war under the regime of the dictator Irshad. "Education can become a source of salvation for a nation which has become oblivious of its past. Maya feels that modern education can inculcate liberal sensibilities which can help the future generation to revoke glories of the past. That is why she wants Sohail's son Zaid to get modern education. However, Sohail's insistence on the madrasa education shows how education can function as the machinery for the dissemination of the dominant ideology" (p. 191).

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Mridha and Suchona (2024) study the Bengal Trilogy from the postcolonial Feminist and Marxist lens. They explore the role of women in the independence movement and the challenges they faced after independence. According to them, the role of women in Anam's trilogy is not passive, but they behave and act like fully conscious citizens of the country despite the challenges they face in conservative Bangladeshi society. "The women in Tahmina Anam's books are anything but passive; they fight for their rights and the rights of others" (p. 21).

This literature is particularly robust in describing the political interests of the novel. It reveals the connection between Maya's medical practice, her activism and her struggle with her brother and the bigger debates concerning the future of Bangladesh after 1971. It also explains why religion is not merely a background but one of the main languages in which the postwar trauma and power are discussed. What remains less developed, however, is the novel's handling of marginalised women. Figures such as Piya, Nazia, Rokeya and the unnamed village women scarred by war are often discussed mainly as evidence of national trauma rather than as subjects with distinct narrative agency (Akhter, 2018). The present study builds on existing work by asking whether the novel's investment in essentialising marginalised women also produces a hierarchy in which these women remain visible mainly as wounded background to a more legible liberated protagonist.

3. Theoretical Framework:

Chandra Talpade Mohanty is a prominent postcolonial feminist theorist whose work has shaped how scholars understand the politics of feminist knowledge production. Her 1984 essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" is one of the most widely cited and influential essays in transnational feminist theory. In this essay, Mohanty offers a sustained critique of how certain Western feminist scholarship represents women in the Third World. Her argument is not that Western feminists should not write about Third World women, nor is it a rejection of feminist solidarity across national and cultural boundaries. Rather, Mohanty is concerned with the methodological and political problems that arise when feminist scholarship uncritically reproduces colonial structures of knowledge. Her intervention was significant because it came from within feminism and demanded that feminists examine their own practices of representation with the same critical scrutiny they applied to patriarchal representations of women.

Mohanty's central critique is that certain Western feminist texts produce a composite, singular figure she calls the "Third World woman." Mohanty writes that "I would like to suggest that the feminist writings I analyse here discursively colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the life of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular 'third world woman'...." (Mohanty, 1984, p. 63). Mohanty argues that this image is produced through specific discursive strategies. First, there is the assumption of a universal patriarchy that affects all women in essentially the same way, which ignores how patriarchy operates differently in different contexts and intersects with colonialism, capitalism, racism, and caste. Second, there is the use of reductive categories—"women" as a homogeneous group defined by shared oppression—that effaces differences of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and location. Third, there is a methodology that begins with a predetermined framework of gender oppression and then finds evidence for this framework across diverse contexts, rather than attending to the specificities of each context on its own terms. Mohanty argues that the construction of the Third World woman has a corollary: it implicitly produces the Western woman as the norm against which the Third World woman is measured. If the Third World woman is oppressed, the Western woman is liberated. If the Third World woman is tradition-bound, the Western woman is modern. If the Third World

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woman is passive, the Western woman is agential. This binary does not need to be explicitly stated; it operates through the structure of the analysis itself.

In 2003, Mohanty published *"Under Western Eyes Revisited"* in which she reflected on the reception of her earlier essay and clarified her arguments. She emphasised that her critique was never intended as a rejection of cross-cultural feminist engagement or as a claim that only Third World women can write about Third World women. Her argument was about methodology and politics, about how feminist scholarship is conducted rather than who conducts it. She also acknowledged that the dynamics she critiqued were not limited to Western feminism but could be replicated within Third World contexts, where elite, urban, educated women might represent poor, rural, lower-caste women in similarly homogenising and essentialising ways.

The discussion of Mohanty gives the main theoretical base for my study of the homogenization of women in Tehmima Anam's *The Good Muslim*. Mohanty challenges the homogenization of Third World women, where marginalised women are represented as flattened, stereotypical and subjugated figures, keeping the Eurocentric standards of women's emancipation as the referential point.

4. Statement of the Problem:

The portrayal of subaltern women in South Asian fiction often focuses on their experiences of marginalization, oppression and resistance. However, even with their differing social, cultural, economic, geographical and psychological backgrounds, these women may be depicted in broad categories that suggest they are all one single group. Such depiction can ignore the diversity and complexity of their real experiences. Chandra Mohanty in her critique of Western feminist portrayals of "Third World Women" argues that viewing women from various contexts as a single, uniform group risks simplifying the complex realities to a shared experience of oppression. For that reason, the present study draws primarily from Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" to test these ideas against Tehmima Anam's novel *The Good Muslim* to examine whether the selected literary representations allow the subaltern women to emerge as complex and differentiated subjects or reduce them to a monolithic category primarily defined by oppression and marginality.

5. Research Questions:

1. How are the identities, experiences, and forms of agency of several women are constructed in the novel?

2. What recurring generalisations characterize the representation of these women and in what ways do these generalizations contribute to the homogenization of their identities and experiences?

6. Significance of the Study:

This research is significant for several reasons. It delves deep into the questions of language, form, power, representation and the nexus between them in Anam's *The Good Muslim* by using the critical lens of Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes". It challenges the tendency to construct the Third World woman as a homogeneous subject whose experiences can be explained through a single universal idea of patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, the study fills the existing gap in research on *The Good Muslim* by shifting attention from generalized discussions towards the ways how women are represented as flattened subjects within the feminist narrative. The study may also provide a significant foundation for researchers examining representation, gender and homogenization in South Asian and postcolonial perspectives.

7. Analysis and Discussion

Tehmima Anam is a prominent Bangladeshi-American author who is known for her fiction exploring themes of history, society, gender and identity. *The Good Muslim* is the second novel of the Bangladesh Trilogy, narrating the journey of three women, Rehana Haque, Maya Haque and

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Zubaida Haque. *The Good Muslim* is the multilayered story of two siblings, Maya and Sohail, who took an active part in the War of Independence, dreaming of a secular country. While Sohail worked as an active soldier in the guerrilla army, Maya wrote articles in a newspaper. After the war, she aspired to be a doctor. As the horrifying incidents during the war and subsequent events that follow traumatize Sohail, he seeks solace in religion. Gradually, he isolates himself and starts a "missionary" group in a room above their mother's bungalow. Maya, a doctor and revolutionary Marxist, couldn't bear this change and flees to Rajshahi, a remote village where she practices as a doctor. In Rajshahi, she befriends Nazia, the wife of Maya's colleague. Maya and Nazia are caught taking a bath in a pool, defying the cultural norm. Nazia is punished with leashes, and Maya is threatened with leaving Rajshahi. Eventually, she returns home after a decade and finds her mother diagnosed with cancer and Sohail usually absent on his mission within and outside the country. After seeing her mother's deteriorating condition, she decides to stay in Dhaka. She also finds out that Sohail's young son Zaid has no one to look after him, other than envious and cruel ladies who are part of the missionary group. She convinces Sohail to let her take care of Zaid; meanwhile, Sohail catches him stealing and sends him to stay at the Madrassah, believing that he will be taken good care of. Zaid runs out of the Madrassah and tells about the physical and sexual violence inflicted upon him there. Sohail catches him and sends him back. Maya leaves on a mission to rescue him from a madrassah; on their way back, Zaid drowns in the river, and Maya is taken into custody. To her surprise, not for killing Zaid but for writing articles demanding trials for traitors who sided with the enemy during the war. Years later, Maya reunites with Piya, the woman who was raped and assaulted by the enemy soldiers during the war. Sohail rescued her from the army barracks. She visited him in Dhaka when she was pregnant, spent a few days at his house and left out of shame, though Sohail seemed to heal and develop a connection with her. The novel ends with a representation of justice served.

The novel's female protagonist, Maya Haque, is an urban upper-middle-class woman, a doctor from whose point of view the story is narrated. Other significant female characters that are represented are Piya and Nazia, Rokeya and Jahanara Imam, as their stories add depth to the plot and lead to the climax of the novel. During the war, Maya's heroic act of reporting as a journalist, and after the war ended, her services to help women rehabilitate, indicate how women played a part in nation-building. Her emotional attitude towards her mother and brother, her love for them, is intricately woven into the story; as the reader reads the novel, the idea of an unbreakable bond of love with her family is presented. Her decision to stay back after her mother is diagnosed with cancer reflects her sense of responsibility and empathy for her loved ones. While her emotional baggage and trauma of performing the abortions during the war intricately weave the multidimensional personality of Maya, a well-developed round character, soft from the inside, resilient from the outside. Her determination to fight injustice, either for Zaid or for calling out the dictator for the erasure of war wounds by forgiving the war criminals. Her character entails the strength to fight cruelty, injustice and subjugation. She seeks justice for assaulted women during the war; she is fearless and rescues Zaid from the Madrassah. She also takes financial responsibility by accepting a job at the hospital. She is the archetypal example of a liberated woman who not only controls her own life, but also lives according to her ideals. She also protects and speaks for the rights of the marginalized both on the personal and political levels. She is fighting patriarchy by standing strongly against all the odds in conservative society. Maya is represented as the perfect epitome of an emancipated woman, strong and resilient, fighting patriarchy, standing strong and having a political and social voice.

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Jahanara Imam is another revolutionary leader in the novel. Maya looks up to her. She has lost her loved ones in the war, and she is now struggling to seek justice for those who were assaulted during the war. She is bold enough to challenge the dictator of the country, who believes in forgiving the war criminals and moving forward as a nation. Her movement is seeking justice for women who were raped and assaulted during the war. Ultimately, after years of struggle, she succeeds and brings the suspects to trial. Mohanty, in her critique, underscores that homogenization of third-world women is not only done by European feminists but also this can happen within postcolonial discourse. The representation of women regardless of their ethnicity, religious affiliations and cultural beliefs, that may be different from the dominant discourse of neo-liberal ideals, reinforces the hegemonic order of colonialism. It not only creates the binary of oppression and liberation but also gives them the authority to judge these marginalised women according to the dominant ideologies. Jahanara Imam and Maya are liberal women and they are seeking justice for the other women. One such instance in the novel is when Maya meets her old friend Saima. She is astonished to see that Saima has accepted motherhood. She views the role of motherhood as degrading her sense of self, as she has given in to the temptation of marriage which she believes is the oppressive tool of patriarchy. Maya's idea of a liberated woman is tarnished to see Saima as a dedicated wife and mother. The narrative depicts Maya's thoughts and beliefs as an agent of liberation, creating binaries of subjugated versus liberated. Her liberated character is a binary to the women who are presented as subjugated in the novel. When contrasted with other subaltern characters who are represented as stereotypes of third-world women, their struggle appears to flatten, reinforcing hierarchies within the feminist fiction.

Another such instance in the novel is the women Maya saw during the immediate aftermath of the war, described as "eating grass like ghosts", which represent perhaps the most extreme case of subaltern women's dehumanisation in the novel. These women, pouring in from villages, are rendered as spectral figures, as images of abjection rather than as subjects with stories of their own. Their presence in the text serves to illustrate the scale of wartime devastation, but they are not individualised, named or granted voice; hence, homogenised.

Nazia is another significant female figure in the novel. She cannot defend herself when she is brutally punished with one hundred and one leashes for violating social custom and giving birth to a baby with Down syndrome. Her point of view is not discussed in the novel. Especially the cultural background for believing in superstition. Though violence against any human being is not justified. Even Maya, represented as the strongest woman, cannot stand for her and is forced to leave Rajshahi. "They would go to the police; they would break up the meetings. But Nazia said no, and her black foot said no, and Maya realised she would have to leave the wound open, leave the village with her protest still urgent, still angry" (Anam, 2011, p. 24). Here Mohanty's idea of the monolithic subject of the West relates. Nazia, as a subaltern, cannot speak for herself. Similarly, the question of representation as posed by Mohanty is also relevant. Nazia's representation can be considered as a monolithic figure of a third-world woman. The deteriorated condition of Nazia is represented to highlight the atrocities faced by women in patriarchal society. Nazia is inherently represented as a victim of generic patriarchy that works through domestic violence, familial pressure, religious subjugation and economic dependence, without lending her individuality. Her character is not nuanced but is a perpetuation of the stereotypes associated with women in the developing world. Mohanty in "Under Western Eyes" urges the postcolonial intellectuals to read the silences of the text and question what is taken for granted. In the novel, Nazia's character is taken for granted, silenced and presented without a nuanced socio-cultural background. Backwards, uneducated, subjugated,

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beaten. Later, as the novel proceeds, Maya contacted her just once and didn't bother to find out her condition. When Maya contacts Nazia, she goes back to her husband and family who inflicted such violence upon her. Here again, the description flattens her character as a monolithic, subjugated woman. The narration doesn't give details about how she was treated and reached hospital? What happened to the newborn with Down syndrome, marked as the devil's baby? And how is Nazia going to deal with it? She is used as an agent to show the intersection and workings of patriarchy, religion and superstition to inflict violence upon women, thus perpetuating the preconceived notion about the fate of women in Third World countries.

Another important female character in the novel is Piya. She is a war victim, kidnapped and raped by the army, and rescued by Sohail after the war. Though her story has a certain degree of nuance, when the question of representation arises, she politically represents the traumas of women during the war. She is emotionally deteriorated and, as a result, is silenced at Haque's family home, but her inability to respond to narrate her story robs her of the opportunity to speak about the experiences of the atrocities she faced at army barracks. "She was half-present, a person both and without them. Maya sometimes forgot she was there - she was busy too" (Anam, 2011, p.71). Her journey from her village to finding Sohail's home is also not documented in the novel, which could give her a voice and show her real struggles. Here, Mohanty's concept of the homogenization of Third World Women relates. She cannot speak for herself. Maya and Sohail are trying to give her a voice. We get to know about her through Maya's perspective. And in giving that voice, Piya's original voice is not heard. She is representing the trauma women face in war. Her individuality is not nuanced, thus again flattening the struggle of subaltern women as monolithic figures.

Khadija is also a significant female character, as she is second in command and the female leader of Sohail's Jammat and the setup at home. She is represented as a female version of a tyrant mullah and an agent of gendered oppression in patriarchal society. She appears to be dark, and her mission is to seduce and train women in the mission. She is apparently assigned the duty to look after Zaid when Sohail is travelling. She meanly reports to Sohail about Zaid's activities when he begins to connect with and trust Maya. As a result, Sohail sends him to Madrassah, where he faces sexual and physical violence. She is the dictating figure at the ladies' section of the jamaat. Even when Maya begins to visit upstairs initially for participating in prayers held for Ammu's health during her cancer treatment, her observation of the filthy atmosphere upstairs raises the question of homogenization of marginalised individuals. The rooftop where Sohail lives and conducts his sermons is nauseous. Maya is repulsed by "the small piles of rubbish dotted along the ground, the windows papered over, the smell of cooking grease and strong odour of urine" (Anam, 2011, p. 185). Later, when Maya stops participating in Jammat's activities, she feels guilty about giving in to the temptation of the religion and seeking comfort in it. Maya accuses Khadija of seducing her. She knew she had been seduced, knew she had betrayed herself by accepting the solace it had given her. "She carried a small wedge of guilt, for her own falsity, the fraud of it" (Anam, 2011, p. 212). When studied through the lens of Mohanty's critique, Khadija is portrayed as a tyrannical figure as Mohanty points to religion as one of five homogenising factors for feminist writers.

Western feminists represent religion without considering individual differences. Khadija's character, like Sohail, is a typical stereotyping of a Muslim religious figure. Her role is to seduce more members to the mission. When Rokeya fails to bring her other family members, she dismisses her. And the women like Rokeya and, at some point, Maya give in to the temptation of it.

Rokeya is an apprentice and follower of Sohail who later connects with Maya. She is described as

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
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an epitome of female subjugation. Her character is represented as a subject of religious subjugation. She is also a doctor by profession and is inclined towards religion. She comes regularly to listen to Sohail's speeches. She is depicted as an intermediary figure who is trying to learn religion but ultimately finds it oppressive and evades it. She is punished ruthlessly twice, even though she is pregnant. "Maya crouched down and looked closely at her. Lines of sweat criss-crossed her face, and her face was damp and loose. Underneath the burkha she could see the rise of her belly" (Anam, 2011, p.185). Eventually, she is emancipated by getting out of the clutches of the missionary group and liberates herself when she is unable to bring members of her family to the mission. "Khadija was angry because Rokeya didn't bring in the rest of our family" (Anam, 2011, p. 235). Her character is represented as a monolithic entity perpetuating the Eurocentric ideals of subjugation of third-world women. Her socio-economic background is overlooked, as she is also a doctor. When Maya learns that she is also a doctor, she thinks of the wastage of her degree and imagines herself married to an old man who must have pushed her to join the group. The narrative doesn't delve into Rokeya's individual point of view and socio-economic background. Maya already believes that she must have been forced to join the Jamaat, that she is in an oppressive marriage, and that she wasted her degree. As a result, readers are also made to believe so. We don't know the reality of Rokeya's life.

Rokeya's character is homogenised, as she is represented as oppressed by religion; she is always presented clad in a suffocating purdah, doesn't practice her profession, is punished physically, married to an old man. Mohanty in her essay Under Western Eyes, highlights these five aspects that Western feminists use to represent Third World women without underscoring their individuality. The narrative doesn't delve into Rokeya's individual point of view and socio-economic background. Maya already believes that she must have been forced to join the Jamaat, that she is in an oppressive marriage, and that she wasted her degree. As a result, readers are also made to believe so. We do not know the reality of Rokeya's life from her own perspective.

8. Conclusion:

The Good Muslim shows the journey of Maya Haque, representing the strength of the emancipated woman who stands not for herself but also for others who are marginalised. Jahanara Imam is also an emancipated woman. Her character gives voice to the voiceless. This study explores in detail whether the voice she tries to give those who are not able to stand for themselves adequately represents them. The already marginalised characters like Nazia, Piya, and Rokeya, who are subjugated, are represented as lacking nuances of character. When they are contrasted with Maya and Jahanara Imam, who are educated, liberal, nationalist, revolutionary and seek justice for the oppressed, their struggle appears weak or of no significance. This comparison reinforces the normative feminist subject of the Third World woman. This representation discursively creates hierarchy within feminist fiction, creating hegemony of Western ideals by producing homogenising figures of subjugated and liberated women. The homogenization of these women as a single monolithic entity robs them of their right to adequate, nuanced representation. The novel creates the dichotomy of liberated and marginalised without giving nuances. This dichotomy is created by keeping Eurocentric ideas of liberation at the centre, thus further pushing them to the periphery.

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