

The Portrayal of Women in Hasan Azizul Huq’s “A Mother-Daughter World” and “Hate”

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Abstract:

The concern of female, one of the basic components of Hasan Azizul Huq’s short stories, raises multiple questions on readers’ mind contextualizing the biased social treatment and patriarchal distorted dogmas applied to women intentionally. The arrangement is so naturally installed in the society that women hardly can activate their reasonable eyes to see the gap of the truth. Like uncontrollable diseases and natural catastrophes, they are taught to accept the reality knowingly. In order to confirm this smart graded social acceptance, they learn to dwell like demoted wretched creatures, take the inedible and humiliated foods and love to be the puppets of lascivious males of the society. The most striking point is that society rarely concentrates on these loathsome male activities seriously from impartial point of view. In such cases, women are generally humiliated, trampled and pressurized to take all the responsibilities on their shoulders. Nevertheless, they receive no basic recognition as human being, no particular platform to stand let alone the hope of equality. This paper investigates women’s unending cataclysmic social status and everyday struggle. To conclude, it analyzes Huq’s two short stories titled “A Mother-Daughter World (Ma Mayer Songsar)” and “Hate (Sorol Hingsa)” from a feminist experience.

Keywords: *Woman Rights; Discrimination; Humiliation; Violence; Hatred; Feminism*

Introduction

In the context of Bangla literature, short stories have spawned its substantial form and expression. Like other literary genres such as poetry, novels and essays, short stories are considered to be expanded with well recognition and glory. In the field of contemporary Bangla short stories Hasan Azizul Huq is a familiar and well acknowledged name. By self-learning process this prolific author educated himself from lifelong practical experiences especially his migration from West Bengal to Bangladesh. These experiences have been reflected in most of his works directly or indirectly. Huq projected all his compatible thoughts and lively observations creating chosen plot and target characters. In order to comment on Huq’s characters, David Kopf (1970) stated, “On the contrary, they are uprooted by war, oppressed by a socioeconomic system they do not understand, victimized by natural catastrophes—all of which they struggle against in impotent defiance” (p. 85). Particularly, Huq describes his stories keeping the local dialects unaffected and natural. “Haque is well known for his experimentations with language and for introducing certain modern idioms, particularly in the genre of short stories. In over 50 years of an illustrious literary career, he has written short stories that have given life to an exquisite form of literary language hitherto unknown” (“Hasan”, 2016). In Huq’s short stories, the heroes and heroines represent the sorrows and sufferings of the general people like the farmers, the working class and the victims of social and political violence, “His heroes and heroines are the chotolok (common people) of agrarian Bengal, but they are not logical abstractions of rural folk performing their everyday acts of normality, stability, and solidarity within village society” (Kopf, 1970 p. 85). Among Huq’s

versatile characterization, he concentrated on the life stories of women. Basically, he moved forward to figure out the unexplored negligible female characters like the widows and prostitutes. Huq examines these characters from the basic field of humanist, existentialist and feminist perspectives inviting multiple questions to be resolved and addressed. "Feminism" itself is controversial as Arneil Barbara (1999) argued, "Feminism is an equally term to define. No definition is completely satisfactory because the term is amorphous and ever changing and because there are so many schools of thought with widely varying views" (p. 3). However, Huq's two important short stories "Hate (*Sorol Hingsa*)" and "A Mother-Daughter World (*Ma Meyer Songsar*)" explore the feminist perspective in the society where women become the congenial components of social, economic and cultural exploitations. Pramod K. Nayar (2010) put forward his argument, "Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality, rights and justice" (p. 83). But there remain controversies about the common notion of feminism especially in the context of Indian subcontinent. According to Elizabeth Jackson (2010):

The concept of feminism has been controversial in India and other developing nations for a number of reasons. On the one hand, traditionalists argue that it alienates women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities; while some on the left see it as a diversion from the more important class struggle or the struggle against Western cultural and economic imperialism. (p. 2-3)

The most important point of feminism is to determine the basic women needs along with the recognition of equal social status and dignity. In particular, it is the result of previous actions and movements. "The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'women's movement' of the 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start, in the sense that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence" (Barry, 1995, p. 121). Interestingly, women were considered to be weak and inefficient compared to men. "Aristotle declared that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities.'" (qtd. in Selden, 1985, p. 121). Feminism challenges the existing male domination, social wrongs and evils. Denise Thompson (2001) remarked, "From the outset, it should be obvious that feminism is a social enterprise, a moral and political framework concerned with redressing social wrongs. It is an ethical stance in that starts from and continually returns to questions of value, of good and evil, right and wrong, of what is worthwhile and significant and what is not" (p.7). However, creating a number of socially downgraded characters, Hasan Azizul Huq initiated a new way to treat women for the betterment of the society.

The Portrayal of Women in "Hate"

Hasan Azizul Huq's short story "Hate" portrays two sides of a coin in terms of social reality. In one side, the narrator explains the vulnerable women's customary nature in the form of prostitutes. To society, they are downgraded people having no value or social recognition. As regards, they are considered to be the symbol of living bugs and evils of the society. In this perspective, Gregory Castle (2007) remarked Mary Wollstonecraft's apprehension, "A product of the Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft believed that women should enjoy social, legal, and intellectual equality with men and drew for support from the work of progressive social philosophers" (p. 94). The key aspect of this argument is that people hardly recognize them as human being. In fact, they are treated as

negligible creatures like dogs and cats or other insignificant animals. Even in literature, women had been represented despicably.

Habib (2005) commented:

Indeed, the depiction of women in male literature – as angels, goddesses, whores, obedient wives, and mother figures – was an integral means of perpetuating these ideologies of gender. It was only with women's struggles in the twentieth century for political rights that feminist criticism arose in any systematic way. (p. 667)

The girl who had been described firstly in the story defined the ground, "Here people were born, grew up and died like flies" (Haq, 2013, p. 57). As a matter of fact, people generally call these disgusting creatures' insects because they are threat for food and crops. Consequently, there remains no sympathy for the flies. Same things happen to the women in the story. They have been treated like merely pleasurable tools. This perilous spot raises question on their essence of existence as human being.

The other side of the coin reflects why and how these women had preferred the disputed profession like prostitution. Were there other alternates to think of? Which factors were responsible for their miserable circumstances? Later, the narrator transported another five women called Joytoon, Tosiroon, Tepi, Golapi, Pushpa respectively. By enclosing these characters, Huq instituted a concrete ground to venture his keen scrutiny from different angles. The dwarf who approached in the story seemed as if the mirror where Huq initiated a diverse look towards these wretched women.

The women in the story are abandoned socially and cautiously. Since they do not have economic creditworthiness or stability, they cannot work out their freedom of choice and judgment. They are living in a society which is strongly backed by capitalist manipulation. If they had respectable education and skill like the male, they could have a reverential and well-intentioned job. By the way they could lead an attired life what people always believe to see. Having no certain schooling or skill, they determine no alternatives to think of twice. The way they cannot repudiate their lives, the same way they cannot castoff the obnoxious nature of starvation. The consequence is- they have chosen this uncertain path. For instance, the first woman in the story is sick and unhealthy. Due to life-threatening scarcity and foodstuff crisis, she could not eat enough to feed her child. As a result, she lost her child untimely. The narrator described her distresses:

It began as a slight throbbing, then the pain rose in waves through the arteries and veins, reaching the brain, where it lodged fast. The brain joined with it in alliance and dispatched tiny venomous asps to her breasts. Then she had to squeeze it out. She tilted, just as a snake does to squirt venom into its prey, and squeezed out her milk. (Huq, 2013, p. 56)

Losing her child, she still has no time to mourn. The most striking point to be noted here is- the food she manages once a day comes out as milk. Her health condition is not so well to stand. A kind of liquid is coming out from her body, "The thin white liquid flowed down her belly – a little dribbled into the dirt" (Huq,2013, p. 56). In the society, there are huge people for criticism. But there prevails less number of people who extend their helping hand.

Additionally, women do not belong any particular class which will determine their social and occupational identity due to the prevalence of biased ideologies. Nancy F. Cott (1987) questioned:

What kind of a "class" were women when their occupational, social, and other loyalties were varied; when not all women viewed "women's" interests, or what constituted sex discrimination in the same way? The problem is in its ideological dimensions cut across both class consciousness and gender identity. At its heart not only the question whether in law or social policy each women should be treated as an individual or as part of a social group, but also what social group was the most relevant categorization. (p. 142)

Getting no food to eat, the woman is searching food madly. Huq (2013) noted, "I've eaten only once today, and it has come out as milk. I won't live very long if it goes on – the girl was worried. She had already rummaged three dust-bins and dredged a drain, and found nothing" (p. 56). From this statement it is clearly understandable how helpless one can be to search food in drains. Like other ten women in the society, she wished for a family having a caring husband and loving children where she could find herself and individuality. In reality, she had bitter memories of sorrows and cries:

She has had a taste of domestic life and the male of the species: a thick-boned, unsightly fellow reeking of sweat, raw onions and garlic. This is what her experience of him was like: a choking sensation, as if it was the moment before death; ribs crackling; heart pounding; fiery currents coursing through the whole body. (Huq, 2013, p. 56-57)

Motherhood is one of the most important incidents of a woman. She always expects well acknowledgement and appreciation from the society. Moya Lloyd (2005) noted necessary observations of some feminists like Adrienne Rich:

Feminists, such as Adrienne Rich and other materialists, appropriated the discursive link between women and mothering, rearticulated – or reversed – its claims and valorized nurturance and motherhood. They reformulated and redeployed several of its constitutive elements in order to argue a very different case, seeing motherhood (outside of patriarchy, at least) as a joyful and fulfilling experience for women. (p. 100)

But the story "Hate" portrays a lady traumatized by the fact of her dead child and husband. Particularly, she has been so shocked mentally that she hardly reminds the previous incidents anymore. "And when she had to squeeze out the milk from her breasts a couple of times in a day, she didn't remember anything at all" (Huq, 2013, p. 57). Yet she had to go outside to do something for food. This is not only the incident of a single woman. There are different stories of Joytoon, Tosiroon and Tepi. The dwarf discovered a different world when he met them together. As regards, he witnessed a different truth prevailing in the society. Huq (2013) pointed out, "A woman stood up from the bushes. The dwarf looked as if he had been struck deaf by thunder. Then with a cry of fear he clasped the girl he had just paid" (p. 60). Later, he discovered something strange. The second woman is more destitute than the first one. She pleaded to offer herself only for one taka. The dwarf became astonished to think what kind of society he is living. Here, somebody is coming to spend money only for entertainment while the others are compromising their means of self- respect and dignity for survival. The condition of the third women is more pathetic to describe. She had come from Satkhira and taken no food in the last three days. Huq noted, "Listen Sahib, please have mercy,

said Joytoon. I've come all the way from Satkhira. I haven't eaten for three days. I don't want much" (2013, p. 60). It means that she demanded less than one taka. By telling these untold stories, the narrator wanted to focus the socio-economic and political affairs of a country especially the worst downfall of humanity.

Like male, women should have the equal rights to fulfill their basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education. But the irony is –the first one is still on question let alone other four demands. In order to represent Joytoon's sufferings, Huq remarked, "Joytoon pleaded again; Sahib, the Police won't come this way. I've lost three kids in a month, now there's only one left" (2013, p. 61). Joytoon's statement proves how extreme food crisis she had experienced last. As a mother she could not give any food to her three children. Therefore, they died eating nothing. Forgetting all, she had come from Satkhira to eat something. More or less Pushpa had the same story to share. It is true that she has no kids but she has a husband. The fact is that her husband is about to die. In order to keep her husband alive, Pushpa decided to sell her honor. Tosiroon is also a member of this box. She had also four kids. But now her youngest kid is dying. Therefore, she needs the money more urgently. Tepi also followed the same line. But her story is little bit different, "Let me keep my kid, I'll also show him, said Tepi, who all this while had a baby cradled in her arms. She hurried to the pavement and deposited it. The baby set up a wail like the buzz of crickets, in which, if one paid attention, the syllable Ma might be detected" (Huq, 2013, p. 62). Observing all the miseries the dwarf forgot his ill intention. He wanted to leave the place as quickly as possible. Therefore he pleaded, "For God's sake let me go!" he begged.

It was true that the women were helpless in the story. They do not have food. They lost their nearest ones untimely. But they never considered them beggars. They never expect kindness from the system which forced them to choose dog like humiliating job. In fact, it was their strong voice against the patriarchy, "What are you saying, Sahib? Joytoon sniggered. We don't want your kindness, we're not beggars" (Huq, 2013, p. 63). That is the spirit of women. They may accept their death. But they cannot accept the so called charity of the society.

The interesting fact is that the dwarf became silent after observing the entire circumstance. But the women could not tolerate his silence. Perhaps this silence symbolizes the eternal silence of the society where women are dominated, suppressed and repressed like animals. This strong feeling made Pushpa violent, "She gave a violent push, flinging the dwarf to the ground. Almost instantaneously, Tosiroon caught him by the neck. She had no time to waste" (Huq, 2013, p. 64). If the dwarf is considered to be the symbol of patriarchy who exploits women as a part of entertainment, then everything becomes clear. The last incident reveals the strong hatred against the suppressor and the capitalist, "He lay spread-eagled, and a circle of light falling on his face revealed terrible agony behind the whites of the eyes. A dot of red blood – sign of love or hate? – was there in the corner of one eye" (Huq, 2013, p. 64).

The Exposition of Women in "A Mother-Daughter World"

Comparing to the context of western countries, women are regularly exploited and humiliated here in the Indian subcontinent devising altered form and dimension. In the context of western culture, Castle (2007) argued, "What all of these women have in common is an interest in exposing patriarchal forms of power as the cause of the unequal and subordinate status of women in Western societies" (p. 96). The story "A Mother-Daughter World" embodies

two beautiful women. No specific name has been mentioned to define the identity. Particularly, the term "Mother" and "Daughter" might have been used to inscribe the sense of respect and dignity towards women. Whatever the writer envisioned, the mother and daughter steadfastly presumed that solitude can be a better option to protect their beauty and chastity. Perhaps, the narrator tested women's position and vulnerability in a diverse location if they cut the relationship with the well-established patriarchy. However, the mother and daughter in the story decided to dwell in a secluded region close to the Sundarbans. The narrator articulated his anxiety in the very beginning of the story, "It's a mother-daughter household. Both of them are very beautiful. Who knows why they are so beautiful, and for whose benefit" (Huq, 2003, p. 45). The narrator suspected that something bewildering was going to happen for what these two innocent women were unprepared. Nevertheless, the narrator observed their innocent concern, "They live by themselves, in a world of their own, never going anywhere. Nobody visits them either" (Huq, 2003, p. 45). Therefore, the women envisaged a sweet equation of life having the natural force of freedom. According to Castle:

Modern Feminism began with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), a work that criticizes stereotypes of women as emotional and instinctive and argues that women should aspire to the same rationality prized by men. (2007, p. 94)

Since the habitation was out of mass engagement, there was no interrogation of social dignity and acknowledgement. The girl and her mother scarcely thought the urgency to fulfill the basic demands as human beings. They accepted poverty and hunger as a matter of fate." For most of this long history women were not only deprived of education and financial independence, they also had to struggle against a male ideology condemning them to virtual silence and obedience, as well as a male literary establishment that poured scorn on their literary endeavors" (Habib, 2005, p. 667). To some extent, they were pleased in the sense that they were far away from the charge of unfair social norms and values. In the broad daylight, they walked freely on the bank of the canal. By the time being, they made friendship with hantal and golpata. During those days they never thought of economic exploitation and the lack of modern facilities. In order to indicate their ordinary lifestyle, Huq (2003) pointed out:

On dump, dank-smelling bumpy ground, it was surrounded by a fence made of stems. It is thatched with chhan, a tall grass. On the floor of the dwelling are earthen plates, water pots, mat, is the sleeping area consisting of pillows and hand-stitched kanthas sticky with dirt. Mother and daughter occupy a single bed. They don't need anything more. (p.46)

What they sought was the taste of autonomy and impartiality. Interestingly, they secured them from the attack of wild animals like tiger. But they failed to protect themselves from the grip of the so called superior species. In the story, the narrator did not recognize as men rather unpalatable foxes:

The mother dosed off. Hearing some sound in her sleepy stupor, she thought: I wonder what that is, there's no hen in the house, after all. Out there, four foxes had been lying in wait; in a flash, one of them came and caught the girl in his mouth. Up came another fox and stuffed a torn, tattered gamcha in her mouth. All she could do now was to move her limbs and produce a faint groaning noise. (Huq, 2003, p. p. 46)

For the first time, the girl understood how cruel these two footed superior creatures were. They showed no sympathy towards the innocent girl as a human being. Later the narrator admitted, "Mother and daughter were so solitary that

ever since she grew up, the girl had hardly ever looked at a man properly. She didn't know the facts of life, and the mother hadn't ever told her either" (2003, p. 47). Like the daughter, the sleeping mother experienced the same mercilessness. After committing dreadful crime, the four human like beasts swallowed their prearranged food. "After a while, inside their hut, the mother, too, lay unconscious like her daughter. Dividing the rice meant for two into four portions, the four foxes devoured it and then went away, calling noisily" (Huq, 2003, p. 47). To recover the unforgettable trauma, the girl required six months to be back to ordinary life. Again, she confronted the utmost crisis of food. Huq demonstrated, "Six months later. The girl is able to eat a little bit, now. All these days, she has only eaten mud. Dry, black mud" (47). Demonstrating hatred towards human society, the girl sometimes went into the forest intentionally so that she could be grabbed by the wild animals. By the way she searched solution to forget the ill memories. Huq (2003) revealed both the mother and daughter's miseries in a conversation:

Morning, evening and afternoon, she would grab fistfuls of mud from there to stuff into her mouth, and crossing the canal, she would go into the forest. When her mother tried to stop her, she wouldn't listen.

"Let the tigers get me if they will, why do you behave so, Ma?"

"You are all I have. If you die, I shall be left alone." (p. 47)

The story indicated no information about the male members. In the family, if the girl had father or brother, they would not be so stranded. The daughter wanted to depend on her mother. At the same time, the mother could rest on her daughter. This worry generalized a truth that women had no choice to be self-reliant. Even they hardly get state support and security applying suitable law and enforcement system. Teresa Brennan (1989) included the aspect of political intervention and cultural contents, "Feminists have taken up the struggle over the production, distribution, and transformation of meaning in a number of specific cultural practices as a focus of political intervention and opposition in order to challenge the forms of representation which constrain and oppress them" (p. 147). Being so impoverished, they questioned on the basic believes and ideals of religion. The narrator remarked that conversation:

And if both of us die, there would be no-one to call our own." "Not even Allah." "They say, if no one else remains, Allah is always there." "For us there is neither hell nor heaven." "Even if there is, who would take us there, when we don't have an Allah. Those who have Him will be accepted there. (qtd. in Huq, 2003, p. 48)

What the mother knew was that she could not live alone. She needed someone to support. A woman can understand another woman's position and crisis well. The mother answered these when the girl asked several questions more, "Then why do you stop me? So what if I end up inside the tiger's belly, so what if I die of snakebite, why do you stop me?"(Huq, 2003, p. 48) The most striking incident happened when both the mother and daughter faced another truth. After six months, they began to feel someone's presence in their bellies:

Both mother and daughter are forced to go through long spells of fasting. But the mother does not suffer from the lack of appetite, nausea, clay-eating or any such thing. One day, the daughter says: "Oh Ma, there's something moving inside my belly." "Come here, let me see. (Huq, 2003, p. 49)

The mother was habituated with these sufferings and struggles from long ago during the birth of the daughter. Like before, they were going to be mother once again. What moving inside cannot be treated as human being because

they are the feedback of the beasts they came across six months ago. Huq (2003) reported, "Is there a monster growing inside her abdomen? That's what it must be. Since the captors had been monsters, it's a monster that's bound to be born" (p. 49). It is necessary to point out that the mother and daughter were not responsible for this unwanted pregnancy. In fact, the beasts that attacked them were responsible. Both the mother and daughter clearly knew that nobody will acknowledge their motherhood. "Recognition was demanded by feminist activists for the dissimilar career patterns of women compared to men. Governments and employers were petitioned in light of the importance of child-bearing and child-rearing for enhanced maternity benefits, paternity leave, family-friendly policies, and career breaks" (Lloyd 100). Surprisingly, society never asked the males what they had been done. Even there was none to support when they eat mud to survive. The narrator stated, "What's all this? asks one of them, pointing first at the mother's belly, and then at the half-naked daughter's swollen lower abdomen" (Huq, 2003, p. 50). Listening to their questions the mother became furious and asked her daughter to go inside. The fact is that she knows the hypocrisy, follies and controversial dogmas of the society. Replying nothing the mother threw several questions to the patriarchal agents:

Isn't your son named Mohammad? She turns to ask the man who had questioned her earlier. "Isn't your son named Ashiq Ali. Isn't your son named Kamal, and isn't your son named Charag Ali?" the mother asks, looking at the three other persons. (Huq, 2003, p. 51)

For the first time, the mother revealed the names of four abominable beasts whom the narrator designated foxes. The way the village people raised questions against the two women, in the same way they could throw the questions to the male society. But they never did so as they were the representatives of the patriarchal dominants and exploiters. Their next charge was very remarkable towards the helpless condition of women. "Get rid of what's inside your belly, or else you can't live in the society. You can't live in our society if you commit sexual sins" (Huq, 2003, p. 51). Using the term "Our society" means male's society where women have no authority.

In the name of religious dogma, the village people put a biased charge on the mother and daughter. Without acknowledging the rapists' concern, they advised them to surrender before religion, "That you have committed these acts is all we know. You kept it hidden all these days, but now your belly is exposed. Have we ever come to tell you off before this? Now that we have seen it, we have come. Everybody must obey Allah?" (Huq, 2003, p. 51). In addition, the villagers never tried to concentrate on the women's opinion rather threatened them to be punished intensively. Huq (2003) added, "Watch out, you lewd woman, guard your tongue. Don't you know what the fellow has to say? The two of you must be buried waist- deep in mud and stoned to death" (p. 51). The mother could not tolerate this humiliation. Both she and her daughter had been brutally abused and raped. Even they were being threatened with the reference to religion. Observing this, the mother revolted and expressed her intense feelings toward the patriarchy. Huq(2003) mentioned her words, "So go and arrange for that then, all of you. And bring your sons with you. There is no Allah, that's why you speak of Allah. If he had been there, you would have been burnt black by his thunderbolts by now. " (p. 51) Afterwards, she explained her logical position, "You won't be able to remain in society, I warn you." "We are not in society, there's the jungle just across the canal" (qtd. in Huq,

2003, p. 52). This statement means that village people have no authority over them as they do not belong to the male dominated society.

Conclusion

In a patriarchal setup women are considered to be vulnerable mentally and physically. What the reality implies here is- women always desire self-reliance implying their physical workforce and creative zeal. But the so called male-backed social norms and customs hardly allow them to be so. In front of capitalism, the poverty stricken people are openly regarded as the production tool or machine to make profit. In such a position, women become the worst victims. Even the state itself plays villainous character to shut the public mouths so that it can run smoothly. When the state itself becomes biased and controversial, women find no alternatives to survive managing the minimum food stuffs. As a result, they take any kind of job for food and existence. The story "Hate" has demonstrated that picture of women. Besides, women are crucially motivated by the abuses of religious doctrines. Surprisingly, a daughter is not secured in front of her own mother. The system is so vague and harsh that one woman cannot protect or defend another woman. Despite being raped and physically tortured, they remain suppressed and voiceless. The story "A Mother –Daughter World" explores that controversial male dominated world.

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