

Reading Tahmima Anam's *Bengal Trilogy* vis-a-vis Fredric Jameson's *National Allegory*

Rajib Ahmed

6247652

MA Thesis

Literature Today (English and Comparative Literature Track)

Supervisor: Dr. B. M. Kaiser

Second Reader: Dr. B. Bagchi

11200 words

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Theoretical Background.....	6
<i>A Golden Age</i>	13
<i>The Good Muslim</i>	18
<i>The Bones of Grace</i>	23
Literary Merits of the Novels.....	28
Conclusion.....	32
Works Cited.....	35

Introduction

In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2016, the year she completed her *Bengal Trilogy*, Tahmima Anam, a Bangladeshi born British writer, states that ‘Bangladesh is not the story of a secular country that has turned to radicalism: it is the story of a country that has, against all odds, survived, even flourished’ (“Is Bangladesh turning”). The trilogy that she recently completed and which this thesis discusses, chiefly reflects this very flourishing: a country, namely Bangladesh, that has a bloody and laboured birth, an independent geo-political entity that tries to consolidate its powers and accept its newfound reality and identity, and a new member in the sub-continental Asia that strives to go forward convening all the aspects and ground realities of its being. The works of Anam is set in the backdrop of this birth and development of a nation state, include some of the seminal geo-political changes and embody the spirit and aspirations of independence through portrayal of some of the characters in the novels. The project is also representative and valuable in terms of documenting Bangladeshi culture, customs, religious and ecological concerns and societal values. The trilogy is written in English and published from London, aiming chiefly for Anglophone readership across the literary world.

Anam, in an interview given to *Wasafiri* in 2015 opines that “[i]t’s difficult to characterise a ‘national’ literature. People’s voices are so distinct and their preoccupations can be so particular” (Finnerty). She offers this view in response to a question that pointedly asks whether ‘English literature from Bangladesh’ (Finnerty) has a distinctive voice or does it share characteristics from other cultures and countries. What she gets at with that response is to assert that literatures, or any artistic and aesthetic production of the world for that matter, are reflections of diverse voices, each experiencing and interpreting the world around them individually. Furthermore, when asked whether her novels are political in essence, she responds that the notion of literature to be political needs to be expanded, and that ‘[i]t isn’t just writing about revolutions or armed struggles, it can also be about the politics of the family or relationships. Some of Rabindranath

Tagore's most political writing was focused entirely on the domestic sphere' (Finnerty). The gist of her reply being, that politics is not practiced on national level and by professional politicians only, but that it is to be encountered and practiced in all walks of life¹. As we see in the discussion of three novels of Anam in this thesis, revolutions and politics have a distinct and direct bearing on the development of characters and the courses of action they pursue. The characters interact and try to come to terms with the realities of the day through personal drive, motivation and manoeuvres.

However, the American literary critic, philosopher and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson thinks otherwise. According to him, all literatures coming from the so called 'third-world' are mere allegories on the national struggle, and the characters represent the collective instead of individual development. These literary productions, he adds, are non-canonical, aesthetically poor and therefore unpalatable to Western readership. He further comments that literary productions of third-world countries fail to maintain a public-private split and lack libidinal investments. Jameson cites some examples from a couple of literary works of his liking to support his claim.

What this thesis argues, is that far from Jameson's audacious array of remarks about the so-called third world literatures, literary productions of Bangladesh, of which the present trilogy is taken as a contemporary sample, portray a range of human feelings and emotions: from personal struggles and aspirations to negotiating with the horrors of war, to how best to tackle religious sentiments, and to strive to find solutions to environmental concerns. Equipped with all the characteristics and virtues of modern novels, the trilogy intends to show how Bangladeshi culture, customs, societal values and instances of human feelings and emotions are incorporated into the body of the novels to present it as a representative cultural document. In short, it is in fact a tale of a society of people striving to move forward against all odds, and the telling is done on a broader canvas of a trilogy which claims serious and compassionate attention as a literary production.

¹ Consider Aristotle's adage "Man is a political animal".

Each of the three chapters that follow discusses each of the novels, namely *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace*, in the order that they have been published, and collates samples from the works with the main tenets of Jameson for scrutiny, discussion and interpretation. The objective of the exercise is first, to see to what extent Jameson's theory of national allegory is applicable to the novels, and second, to ascertain if the novels, in contrast to Jameson's idea that the so called third-world novels act as mere national allegories, have merits of their own in terms of storytelling, plot construction, thematic variety, symbolism, characterisation, cultural import and values to be considered significant and important literary works for global consumption and consideration. If the novels possess universal appeal, significance and relevance, it can hope to be appreciated by global readership - hence the point for publishing the trilogy in English. The next section enumerates the literary qualities the three novels possess and discusses why they are worthy to be appreciated by global audience in their own rights. The final chapter contains outcome of the discussion of the thesis along with concluding remarks.

Theoretical Background

When Fredric Jameson published his article in 1986 titled 'Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism', the critical reception was mixed, as some critics welcomed his extension of interest from Western canon to the realm of post-colonial literary practices of Asia, Africa and South America, others took him to task for a number of reasons. That Jameson who had been glaringly reported to be 'world's most famous American Marxist thinker (Roberts 152) would divide up the literary landscape of the world and label them as first, second and third-world literatures, purportedly offering a reductive explanation of literatures coming from post-colonial, third-world countries, raised cautionary flags of all kind, including racial, gender and re-colonial. Since then, there have been responses criticising, deconstructing and even invalidating his arguments and generalisations by critics, with some even offering to explain such drastic and surprising critical turn of Jameson.

The primary concern is, that Jameson squarely dismisses all 'third-world texts' (Jameson 66) as more of a "national allegory", a commentary on the prevailing socio-political conditions of the nation and state, than literary productions of aesthetic merit. In order to establish his proposition, Jameson situates Freud and Marx on opposite ends, suggesting that Modernism and Realism creates a split 'between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political' (Jameson 69), a divide which is manifest in Western literatures, for example, in novels. But when the third-world literatures try to emulate this artistic form of production in their home soil, their output is marred with political takes. The productions fail to maintain this sundering of public and the private, of politics and the poetic. As a result, third-world literatures merely reflect the socio-political realities and serve as allegories, offering nothing more, not to mention artistic or aesthetic value (as if a text's being socio-politically charged automatically disqualifies itself to be valuable otherwise). He further goes on to say that Dostoyevsky cannot be equated in terms of appeal and merit with any text generated in the third-world, and that there is a 'radical difference' (Jameson 65) between

canonical and non-canonical texts, clearly placing the so called third-world texts in the latter category.

A comparison of two authors to determine who is more preferable or the best is naive, to say the least. However, at the same time, Jameson thinks reading only Western canonical works, which are often widely publicised by ‘devisers of great books lists’ (Jameson 66), is not sufficient for Western readership, and recommends inclusion of literatures coming from these third-worlds, in line with Goethe’s proposition of World Literature (Weltliteratur), despite the fact that the Western reader, by virtue of Modernism, has acquired a much better taste and therefore cannot appreciate literatures coming from the third world. There exists between the Western readership and these said texts, according to Jameson, an ‘another reader’, the ‘Other reader’, and any attempt to read such texts adequately would mean to ‘give up a great deal that is individually precious’ (Jameson 66) to the Western reader, and the Western readership has to condescend in its efforts to make the third-world literatures palatable to their ‘improved’ literary taste.

Jameson’s use of cherry-picked examples from literary works does not help to come to any such sweeping generalisation either. He discusses Chinese writer Lu Xun and expostulates that “‘cultural revolution’, as it is projected in such works turns on the phenomenon of what Gramsci called ‘subalternity,’ namely the feeling of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination - most dramatically in the experience of colonised peoples.” (Jameson 76) Following it was the example from the novel *Xala* by the Senegalese novelist and film maker Ousmane Sembene where the protagonist, namely Hadj acts as a ‘middleman between European multinationals and local extraction industries’ despite him being political and spending ‘some time in jail for his nationalist and pro-independence activities’ (Jameson 81). Based on the ironic betrayal of Hadj, Jameson sealed his case by pronouncing that it “explicitly marked as the failure of the independence movement to develop into a general social revolution” (Jameson 81). What is indicated by these two

examples is that third-world texts, in one way or the other, portray scenes of subservience and betrayal, instead of rising up to individual emancipation and development of a unified social sentiment.

Before evaluating the reactions, it would be pertinent to briefly look at what the term *national allegory* signifies. According to Oxford Reference, national allegory is

a type of narrative whose essential subject is the nation state. Because the life of a nation, large or small, exceeds the capacity of what any novel can actually accommodate, narrative fiction of this type uses allegory as a means of expressing a dimension of existence greater than that of the lives of its individual characters. National allegory tends to be focused on the lives of ordinary people, however, rather than heads of state or aristocracy, using their mundane daily struggles as a means of illustrating the state of the nation. (“national allegory”)

In other words, national allegory is an allegorical embodiment reflecting socio-political developments of a nation state. Such embodiments could be in the form of an artwork or a literary production.

Right in the following year of the publication of Jameson’s article, in 1987, Aijaz Ahmad, a Marxist philosopher, literary theorist and political commentator, issued a rebuttal with his piece titled “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”. It attempted to invalidate any attempt of “a literary theorist (referring to Jameson) who sets out to formulate ‘a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature’” by pointing out the fact that the critics of the West takes into account only the “ideal-types” (Ahmad 4) of literature which are not produced in the languages of the colonising metropolitan cities, that fact which establishes that such valuation is far-fetched as it is not based on the representative literary samples coming out of the colonised culture.

He further invalidates Jameson's classification of the three-world system by saying that the first two worlds were based on ideologies of capitalism and socialism whereas the third-world one is done on 'externally inserted phenomena' (Ahmad 6) embodying no philosophical foregrounding or establishment. The labelling of capitalist first world and 'a presumably pre- or non-capitalist third world is empirically ungrounded' (Ahmad 7) as some countries (like India) has all the characteristics of a capitalist country and a faster economic growth than some of the capitalist countries in the West. Furthermore, if what Jameson said earlier as: 'The story needs no background in time because the culture knows no history' (Jameson, *The case* 165) - is to be regarded as a valid statement, then the need for "the radical split between the private and the public" (Jameson 69) cannot be the judging criterion for *other* literatures to be at par with those produced in the West. Here '...the theoretical authority that is invoked is, predictably, that of Hegel [master/slave]' (Ahmad 14). So Jameson himself has the gaze of a coloniser and looks at third-world literatures with a biased and myopic vision.

The question of canon and why all third-world texts, according to Jameson, should be non-canonical is also dubious, to say the least, as Ahmad raises the question on the very definition of the word 'canon'. He cites authors like Salman Rushdie and Wole Soyinka and points out that these authors of recent times are revered for their good work around the world and have been awarded all the major international prizes, despite their not coming from the, to quote from Jameson's text, "Greco-Judaic" tradition. The criterion of admission to the canon is therefore exclusive and ineffective.

The concept of 'nation' in Jameson's text was introduced to facilitate the dubbing of texts coming from third world as 'national allegory', and then at the end of the same article, he propounded the notion of *collectivity*: '...the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself' (86). Therefore, Jameson's construction of a particular nationhood in a particular

region of the world does not tie in with his suggestion that a text coming from a certain corner of the world has to represent local cultural aspects. Ahmad goes on to say that this inclusion and collectivity in writing is characteristic of writers across the worlds, placing all texts on the same plane.

Jameson's argument that third-world texts essentially and necessarily reflect the national aspirations and historic-cultural situations and therefore do not stand alone as a piece of aesthetically valuable literary work is presumptuous and needs to be debunked. Reaping on the harvest of Anglo-American Modernity and Capitalism, Jameson quite hastily and equally sweepingly concludes that the ex-colonies of the third world could not have produced literature that celebrates and upholds individual freedom and values in order for those works to serve as aesthetically palatable to global audience.

For example, '[t]he third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce' (Jameson 65) can serve as a half-baked and unqualified comparison the likes of which could be ineptly drawn with respect to other authors working across cultures, to no effect or end. One could very well compare and say, for example, that the songs and poetry of Rabindranath Tagore of the Indian subcontinent stands tall when compared with those of W. B. Yeats of Ireland or Pablo Neruda of Chile; but then such comparison and placement of authors on a scale of 'excellence' would be whimsical, personal and untenable. Each author embodies the time, culture and heritage of the society he or she is born and raised into, and his or her work stands the test of time if they are read by posterity due to its intrinsic, literary and aesthetic values and relevance.

In composition of literary texts, socio-politico-economic conditions of a particular culture and society may rightly find their way and relevance within the text, or they may very well not. John Keats' *Odes* don't reflect contemporaneous issues and situations, rather are composed and consumed entirely for aesthetic qualities and pleasures. On the other hand, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* embodies socio-political realities of the close of 19th century imperial Russia. Thus, the inclusion of

politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy does not, not necessarily and not always diminish or undermine the aesthetic qualities of a literary, or more generically, artistic production.

A columnist recently penned his response of his reading of Jameson's third-world literature theory and illustrated through examples how some of the excellent pieces of literatures were written at crucial times of national history, and yet did not reflect those turbulences. Rifat Munim, a Bangladeshi columnist, literary critic and a litterateur, says Nobel prize winning authors like Tagore, along with other notable names like Manto from Pakistan, have written both as per the Western tradition of maintaining the private and public apart, and otherwise. He mentions some of the works of Rabindranath Tagore, like *Nastanir* (The Broken Home), *Chaturanga* (Quartet), *Jogajog* (Nexus) and *Chokher Bali* (A throne in the eye) which purely dealt with Freudian concept of repression². Tagore was even accused of being "apolitical" (Munim, "A critique") as his works did not reflect some of the drastic socio-political upheavals that were going on at that time in the background. So as per the definition of Jameson, it would be squarely improper and inappropriate to call Tagore's works "national allegory", at least a sizeable amount of them.

Tahmima Anam's trilogy has brought up a handful of issues, and charts the birth and development of Bangladesh as a nation state on the geo-political World map. The issues include the war of liberation, the rise of fundamentalism, an unorthodox interpretation of Islam as a religion, the prevailing social conditions, deaths, love, marriage-of-conveniences, friendship and growth of feministic traits in post-independent Bangladesh. It is also a document of how a newly independent country strives to move forward facing challenges ahead. There are characters that embody friendship, courage and longings for personal freedom. They are politically conscious but not necessarily political. They read poetry, perform religious rituals and interact in a defined social and

² Tagore's *Nastanir* and *Chokher Bali* were both published in 1901, eight years before Freud's writing appeared in English translation

cultural milieu - developing a new cultural identity for themselves. They are eager to emerge as a nation state with a global outlook, as can be seen in the novels.

A Golden Age

A Golden Age was published in 2007 in the United Kingdom by Canongate Books as the first instalment of the trilogy. It follows the fate of a family in Dhaka just as the war of Independence of Bangladesh was looming in the background in 1971. The couple Rehana and her recently deceased husband Iqbal, along with their son Sohail and daughter Maya experience the turbulent time of uncertainty and terror, witnessing how the (West) Pakistani administration carried out its brutality in an attempt to quell civil disobedience and unrest in Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan). The movement was initially for self-determination which ultimately resulted in achievement of unconditional Independence³.

In the novel, right after the death of her husband Iqbal, Rehana has to bear severance of the children from herself as the court orders that they better be left with their uncle, namely Faiz, who was still living in Lahore, West Pakistan. After some years, Rehana regains custody of the children, now adult teens. The plot begins to unfold as Sohail finds out that Silvi, the daughter of their tenant to whom he wrote a number of love letters without much success, is to enter into a marriage of convenience with Lieutenant Subeer, an East Pakistani soldier. The bondage is supposedly made to buy safety and security of the bride's family as a potential armed conflict looms in the distance. The drumrolls of resistance movement begin to be heard as West Pakistani belligerent administration tightens its grip and Maya's friend Sharmeen suddenly disappears, only to be found later, raped, pregnant and dead. Maya sees her future in Sharmeen's fate, and declares "I'm going to Calcutta. I've arranged it with bhaiya" (Anam, *Golden Age* 129).

The family harboured and embodied the predominant national sentiment of achieving independence from West Pakistan, as evident by Sohail's gift of a newly proposed flag of Bangladesh to his mother: "This is our flag" (Anam, *Golden Age* 50). Soon the crackdown of 25

³ https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bangladesh_War_of_Independence

March 1971 begins, and the atmosphere of terror is aptly depicted as the Rehana household disintegrates, with Sohail going underground, Maya secretly joining women's league to work as a journalist to report on the advancements of the liberation fighters, and Rehana opening doors of their adjacent tenement to secretly host a party of guerrillas, of which her son, Sohail, is one of the frontrunners. Soon, Sohail, along with his friend Joy and others, conducts an operation of a bomb blast at the Dhaka interContinental hotel to send to the world the message of the beginning of resistance and rebellion. Though the operation was successful in terms of drawing attention of foreign journalists to the brutal treatment of civilians in East Pakistan, it unfortunately yields serious injuries to one of the members of the team, the Major, who is then carried by Sohail and Joy to *Shona* - the Rehana tenement where they are based. The Major hides in the bungalow and masterminds the next operation, while he is being voluntarily nursed to health by Rehana herself.

The third-person omniscient narration in the novel paces forward, revealing the innermost thoughts of characters like Rehana and Maya. These streams of private thoughts do not indicate Jamesonian allegory of national import, but convey feelings and gestures of kinship and empathy. The general sentiment of characters like Rehana, Maya and Joy is personal and subjective, unlike what Jameson conjectures that contents of all third-world novels are inseparable from public to private.

In the meanwhile, the war wages on full-throttle in the background. Subeer, Silvi's lieutenant husband, is captured by the invading West Pakistani soldiers and is detained. Silvi's mother pleads with Rehana to get Subeer out, and Rehana decides to try when Sohail joins the appeal on behalf of his love, Silvi. Rehana could finally strike a tensed deal to get Subeer out, with the help of her brother-in-law, Faiz, an officer in the West Pakistani army with influential contacts. The harrowing experience of torture of civilian captives is detailed as Rehana embarks onto a perilous journey with some bravado, in the midst of a curfew, for this mission. The action then shifts from Dhaka to Calcutta where a huge gathering of people assembles and are forced to live in

squalid dwellings as refugees - all having fled the scourge of war in East Pakistan. Rehana witnesses the helplessness, hardship and resolution of people as they strive to stay alive under unfavourable conditions as refugees. But soon after, Rehana and Maya come back to Dhaka as Sohail prepares to participate in yet another operation.

Throughout the novel, an undercurrent of discussion flows concerning local election of East Pakistan that mandated their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and how his selection was undermined and unheeded to by the West Pakistani regime - the fact which finally goaded the East Pakistani (Bangladesh) people to resort to armed resistance. All the three major characters - Rehana, Sohail and Maya - are politically conscious and are not subservient to oppressive West Pakistani regime. Rehana's willingness to let her son Sohail act as a guerrilla and her daughter Maya into a war-correspondence tasks confirms her stance with the movement. She herself serves the movement by nursing an injured Major and sewing rags for the refugees sheltered in Calcutta, India. The three family members reflect the pervasive local character of self-respect, intolerance to injustice and longings for equality and freedom. They engaged actively and to the best of their individual capacity in the struggle for freedom. The fact that Sohail makes a proposed flag of their envisioned Bangladesh and presents it to his mother Rehana is a testament of such longings for freedom and equality. These actions are manifestations of personal struggles, aspirations, dreams and hopes for a better future, and are far from Jamesonian proposition that third-world novels fail to reflect private concerns and do not have a public-private split of affairs.

The tenant daughter Silvi, however, disapproves the war along with the aspirations and ongoing movement of Bangladeshi people for self-governance. When confronted by Maya as to why she is on the side of the oppressor West Pakistan, she defends her personal stance: 'Not everyone believes what you believe' (Anam, *Golden Age* 260) and "I want to believe in something greater than myself' (Anam, *Golden Age* 261). This shows Silvi's detachment from prevalent national sentiments and her individual resolution in going about her own, personal way. Silvi's

individuality invalidates Jameson's conjectures that the characters of third-world literature do not reflect personal growth and significance.

A strange courtship takes place between the Major and his host and makeshift nurse Rehana, as the latter endeavours to tell her story of hardship with the kids over the ages. She prepares meals for him and relocates her gramophone record player in the Major's chamber for his entertainment. Both of them find looking at each other closely, the Major seeking solace and peace and Rehana an opportunity to release her long pent-up emotions. They share tales of miseries and life-lessons, and through this experience of sharing, psychologically and emotionally find dependence in each other. At the very end of the operation, the Major comes back and makes love to Rehana. Again, the development and maturation of this relationship is personal and in no way '... formed by the values and stereotypes of a first-world culture' (Jameson 68), rather it is a tale of love that can be found anywhere in the world. This adult and amorous relationship also disproves Jameson's supposition that third-world literatures do not have libidinal investments.

A solid bond of friendship is reported throughout the novel as a circle of friends, known as the 'gin-rummy ladies' (Anam, *Golden Age* 110) comprised of Rehana, Mrs. Chowdhury (Rehana's tenant), Mrs. Akram and Mrs. Rahman, has a time of their lives among themselves. They play cards, get together over dinner, sew clothes for charity and stand together in times of war. The novel uses Urdu words and expressions directly, like 'Maf kar do' (Anam, *Golden Age* 6) [please forgive me] and 'biryani' (Anam, *Golden Age* 15), [a popular dish of rice, meat and spices], often followed by English translations to render sub-continental flavour to the novel as people of West and East Pakistan spoke Urdu and Bangla at that time respectively. It also uses prominent and commonly-used Bangla words, sometimes without providing corresponding English translations, like 'georgette' (Anam, *Golden Age* 17) - a type of lightweight, crepe fabric that sub-continental women wear, generically called a *sari*, 'laddoos' (Anam, *Golden Age* 21) - a special kind of sweetmeat, 'Polao' (Anam, *Golden Age* 86) - rice cooked in liquid butter, 'puris' (Anam, *Golden Age* 113) - a

fluffy bread made of flour-dough and deep-fried in oil, ‘cholo cholo’ (Anam, *Golden Age* 126) meaning ‘let’s go’, ‘bodmash’ (Anam, *Golden Age* 135) - a rogue, ‘chabir-gocha’ (Anam, *Golden Age* 164) - a bunch of keys, ‘chini...dood’ (Anam, *Golden Age* 259) meaning sugar and milk and ‘beguni’ (Anam, *Golden Age* 265), standing for fried sliced aubergine. These uses of foreign words do not impede understanding when read in the context, and add sub-continental feel to the narration. The novel also depicts local cultural practices, norms and behaviours like women forbidden to visit the graveyard (Anam, *Golden Age* 19), practice of sending leftover food to local mosques (Anam, *Golden Age* 30), talks of cricket (Anam, *Golden Age* 39), and of *Sultana’s Dream*⁴ (Anam, *Golden Age* 39). The setting of the novel is in the city of Dhaka, where the characters go about their ways. One can constitute a mental map of a major part of the city of Dhaka along with the iconic Dhaka University campus, by charting the details of the prose. The weaving of Bengali and Urdu words directly into the body of the narrative and a graphic description of the city enrich the novel’s historical, cultural and aesthetic appeal and merit, and introduces the reader to sub-continental life and living. This embodiment of local cultural peculiarities and related vocabulary in the novel stands against any form of ‘cultural imperialism’ (68) that Jameson thinks all third-world literature is inescapably infested with. Rather, the work has its own rightful and earned value.

A Golden Age is set in the backdrop of the most important historical incident of Bangladesh: its war of independence. Within the historical ambience, it depicts human emotions of love, unrequited love, friendship, patriotism, individualism, migration and solidarity. Moreover, it draws harrowing pictures of atrocities that any war can bring about to the civilian life and living. It employs sub-continental ambience fused with cultural and normative convictions as different characters interact with, define and expand them. It is an enduring manuscript of memorable characters and settings, offered in a detailed framework of social and cultural code. The war of

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sultana%27s_Dream

independence delivers independence and a geo-political identity to the people of Bangladesh, and the nomenclature of the novel suitably contains the spirit of the era - a golden age for Bangladesh.

The Good Muslim

The Good Muslim is the second instalment of the trilogy, released four years later than the first one, in 2011, by the publisher Canongate. The first novel ended with the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and the second one opens up thirteen years later in 1984 and goes back to 1972 in flashback, in alternate chapters. The two temporal positions of the plot complement and develop each other and finally complete the plot at the end. The purpose of such a juxtaposition is validated first by presenting some of the striking developments that take place in the lives of two of the main characters, namely Sohail and Maya in 1984, and then in retrospect to earlier times in 1972, by searching for reasons and circumstances that have eventually yielded such developments.

The novel begins in third-person narrative as Maya is seen returning home upon receiving the sad news of her sister-in-law Silvi's death, while at the same time reminiscing about what she herself was doing for seven long years in one of the remotest villages of the country. Disgusted and disheartened by the changes she observed in her brother Sohail's psyche, she ran away from home earlier to complete her training as a medical doctor, and afterwards decides to become a gynaecologist instead of a surgeon as too many babies are dying due to poor facilities and lack of women's doctors, in the post-war mayhem and chaos in Bangladesh. The decision is also a redemptive one as Maya assisted to abort many war-children - unborn infants who were conceived by rape during the war - and now wants to compensate for those lost souls by helping mothers give birth to new ones. Later in the novel, we see Maya similarly reacting to proposals of retaliation for war-criminals and betrayers with a clear hint that the work of nation-building is far more important than continuing with the internal feud and clashes of ideologies. Maya's spirited enthusiasm for progress and need to work for the country is indicative of the building of individual strength and sentiment in her which she emanates around. She evaluates the post-war scenario of Bangladesh, and instead of wasting time in further conflicts of trying war-criminals in court etc. prioritises the nation-building tasks. She is an example of a pro-active, positive and forward-looking citizen. The

Jamesonian conjecture that third-world literatures prefer ‘political to the personal’ (69) development is untenable with respect to Maya’s approach to life and society. Her commitment to societal progress and desire to actively participate in improving the living conditions of the masses sits on the other end of the continuum of what Jameson states that characters in the third-world literature eventually go corrupt and this ‘is explicitly marked as the failure of the independence movement to develop into a general social revolution’ (81). Maya clearly represents an enlightened personality ready to go to any lengths to rebuild her embattled country. She constantly projects this image of hope and prosperity on herself as well as on the people she comes in touch with, thus nullifying the claims of Jameson in this regard. She does work consciously and spiritedly for the country and encourages Joy and Sohail to do the same.

Maya’s brother Sohail, on the other hand, is seen burning with guilt as he recollects how, apart from facing the brutality in the war of independence he took part in, slaughters an innocent man just because the person is a citizen of the invader West Pakistan. After returning from war, the once familiar Sohail who was fond of songs of Elvis Presley and poems of Dylan Thomas, can not reconcile with the horrors of war and come back to normalcy. His traumatised state is finally addressed by his mother when she presents him a copy of ‘the Book’ (Anam, *Good Muslim* 62), i.e. the holy book of Muslims namely the Quran. Sohail’s grief and self-depreciating mode finds solace in total submission to God as he turns to hermitic Islamic way of life (popularly known as *Tablighi Jamaat*⁵). His disturbed existence finds peace because ‘[t]he book believes he is good. He begins to read’ (Anam, *Good Muslim* 125). Soon, after submitting himself completely to religious lifestyle, he is seen observing prayers, preaching religious sermons to mass gathering both in his residence and outside, and staying days together in mosques for continuous prayers and meditation. Maya too briefly turns to religious sermons and falls on her knees to pray for her ailing mother Rehana. But Maya’s submission to religion is more spiritual than religious, as opposed to Sohail’s. She was a bit

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablighi_Jamaat

skeptical of Sohail's religiousness from the very beginning, and when her mother is diagnosed seriously ill, she prays to a higher being for her, though not fully convinced. But then Rehana assures Maya and asks her to take it easy when she utters '[d]on't be so frightened of it. It's only religion' (Anam, *Good Muslim* 129). Both the mother and the daughter, Rehana and Maya take a liberal, tolerant and accommodative view of Islam as a religion. This is a bold, personal stance in a predominantly religion-dominated society which squarely disproves Jameson's suggestion that third-world texts reflect 'the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience' (Jameson 76). The progressive bent of mind of these two characters enables them to reach beyond a particular religion into the realm of spirituality and meditation.

The other variation being the brother Sohail Haque. He is reluctant to send his son Zaid to school, and spends most of his time working as a religious preacher: giving lectures and convening religious gatherings. By that time, he has burnt all his books, in line with his personal conviction that following a religion in the truest sense makes other pursuits redundant: 'It is the abandonment of all other thoughts, all other pursuits' (Anam, *Good Muslim* 127). Sohail's religious radicalisation ultimately ruins the life of his son Zaid as the kid is sent to an Islamic school instead, only to be sexually exploited by the male head-instructor there. Later, Maya locates him and forcefully frees him from the clutch of the pedophile, but by that time, Zaid has developed an acute psychological condition of insecurity and trauma due to horrific spells of torture and physical/ mental abuse. The shock of his father leaving him in a dejected island south of the country in the name of religion, only to be subjected to exploitation robs him of his sanity. Zaid's trauma ultimately results in his sad demise by drowning.

The point of bringing the entire discussion around religion is to elucidate how characters suffering from trauma and shock in life can fall prey to radicalised form of religion in their search for peace of mind. Sohail's post-war trauma is identified by Maya as 'shell-shock' (Anam, *Good Muslim* 127) and his taking recourse to religion is derided by her. Maya also welcomes religion

briefly in her life to pray to her spiritual God for her mother's recuperation, but that is done retaining her identity, culture and customs. Similarly, with regard to Zaid's education, Maya endeavours to put him in school despite opposition of Zaid's father Sohail. She thinks schooling is very important, even more important than receiving religious instructions. Maya's position with religion throughout the novel is a clear cohabitation with it if need be, but primarily a secular and progressive one, as she is seen arranging a party with Sohail's friends to persuade her brother to revert from hard-core religious life and back into one with songs, literature and socialisation. The preference of a cultured, enriching and informed existence over a religious one that does not support pursuance of one's interest is made through the character of Maya. Furthermore, Maya is representative of positive changes and progress. She takes up journalism as a means to protest against the Dictator, a general who came to power by usurpation. She delivers babies, takes care of her ailing mother Rehana and brings her back to life, goes on a perilous journey all by herself to rescue Zaid, and engages into an affair with Joy, Sohail's friend. She ventilates optimism and breathes life into almost all the other characters. The novel traces Maya's progressive trajectory of hope, love and belonging, leaving behind horrific memories of war, loss and sufferings. Maya represents a modern, secular, spiritual, cultured and optimistic character in line with the global sentiment of secularism and globalisation.

The back-and-forth, third-person narrative style is interspersed with charged exchange of dialogues, chiefly between the siblings Sohail and Maya, in their effort to reconcile with their individual viewpoints on a range of issues. The discussions and the progression of the plot sustain the reader's attention, the central conflict being religion. The author does not give a clear answer to which subscription of religion - Sohail's hermetic one or Maya's liberal one - is to be preferred. In that sense, the nomenclature (*The Good Muslim*) teases the reader into meditating on the age old issue with religion and how best to approach it. In the backdrop of fundamentalism and terroristic

activities that are often linked to religious preaching today, encouraging questions and thoughts like these signal that the society is striving forward and ready to solve its own problems.

The Bones of Grace

The final part of the trilogy, *The Bones of Grace*, is published in 2016 by Canongate. It is largely an autobiographical monologue addressed to a single audience - the addressee being Zubaida and the addressed her physically absent lover Elijah. The novel is chiefly a study of the experience of falling and being in love even though physical and social union by marriage might not be possible due to unfavourable circumstances. The sub plot details a frantic search of another character for his lost love. The two threads of the story is joined together to make up the whole plot at the end.

The novel is a continuation of the previous instalment *The Good Muslim*. Zubaida, the adopted daughter of Maya, opens and continues the narration throughout the novel while, at the same time, reevaluating and recasting new light onto the lives of the two generations preceding her, namely Maya and Rehana, in two of the previous novels. Her meditative narration forms the core of the novel as a lyrical psychoanalysis of herself being in amorous relationship with Elijah, a philosophy dropout student she meets at a Shostakovich concert in Cambridge, Boston, is continued. Zubaida, herself a palaeontologist, wins departmental sponsorship to dig up fossils of *Ambulocetus* - a rare form of whale that is believed to have walked inland many centuries ago, in Pakistan. She moves to the location and joins the excavation team excitedly, making friends with Zamzam, a local, along the way. But due to tribal rift, the security of the project is threatened and they have to abandon the venture and fly out of the country, having left the job unfinished. Zubaida, before moving to Pakistan, left Elijah in Boston despite her being in love with him, under the pretext that she has grown up with her childhood companion Rashid and that they are set to marry sometime soon. She returns to Dhaka after the project fails and finds herself constantly preoccupied with the thoughts of Elijah. Soon, Rashid proposes and pleads with her for marriage, to which she finally and reluctantly consents. Zubaida knows very well that she is about to make a mistake with that marriage as she reports to Elijah 'Rashid was not that man' (Anam, *The Bones* 142). The marriage is followed by an abortion which eventually sends Zubaida all by herself to the port city of

Chittagong in her in-law's bungalow to recuperate. Frustrated in love, profession and marriage, Zubaida takes up a job of helping one American researcher to record a documentary film on the inhuman condition of day-labourers at the ship-breaking yard in Sitakunda, Chittagong.

Soon after, Zubaida invites Elijah to Chittagong and he comes. Although she has been repeatedly apologising to him for leaving him and marrying Rashid, in the same breath and out of desperation, she also blames Elijah for her suffering: 'I had the urge to blame you for everything that had occurred in the last year, because if it hadn't been for you, I would have been a happier person, but that in your presence, happiness was immaterial - you had taken that away from me' (Anam, *The Bones* 258). She is now the result of an individual hopelessly in love with someone she cannot marry or stay together. Zubaida blames her fate and the coming of Elijah in her life who has left her deeply unhappy. Her surrender to familiar and societal expectations compels her to marry Rashid to which her heart never approves. In contrast, the depth of her relationship with Elijah is framed aptly when she reports: 'I asked you why you loved me and you said love's arguments are always teleological. You love someone because you already love them' (Anam, *The Bones* 283). Again, their total submission and helplessness in love is manifest in these words.

Zubaida's commitment to Rashid and his family supersedes her personal happiness and success with love. She submits to social and ethical expectations on her. But when Rashid refuses to take Zubaida's newfound niece Shona into the family, she takes the first available opportunity to divorce Rashid and move back to Cambridge, where she eventually arranges for an exhibition of the remaining bones of *Ambulocetus*, unearthed and sent to her by her friend Zamzam. She then waits, with a hopeful and aching heart, for Elijah.

On the other hand, Anwar, Zubaida's brother-in-law, recounts an elaborate search for his love Megna only to find at the end that she has died and left him a daughter, namely Shona. As Anwar walks through the city of Chittagong for Megna, he spots Zubaida and mistakes her for Megna, but later it turns out that Zubaida and Megna are twins. This solves Zubaida's crisis of

identity and she affectionately unites with her next of kin by taking charge of her niece Shona.

Anwar is also seen pursuing his love desperately though he has a wife at home named Shathi whom he does not love. He goes to a brothel and chooses a girl that does not remind him of Megna: ‘I stare up at the girls, find one who doesn’t remind me of anyone’ (Anam, *The Bones* 241). This appropriately sums up Anwar’s complete preoccupation with Megna as he frustratingly indulges in a sexual act with a prostitute. His love for Megna has remained obsessive and constant throughout the novel. The psychological infliction of a lover who has lost his soulmate and can not seem to find her has been reflected in the character of Anwar.

Both Zubaida and Anwar strive and suffer for love, the former walking out of it due to other considerations but repenting and paying the price for it later, and the latter betting his life and savings in a compulsive and desperate search for his lost love. The emotional stress and helplessness in the lives of these two characters is evident and manifest, without any allegorical significance of any sort. Jameson’s proposition of national allegory finds no ground in the development of these two characters, rather they serve as samples of what happens when an individual is subjected to love, loss and belonging. These two characters also preach similar existential life lessons as Anwar declares, ‘Your heart breaks, you still go on living’ (Anam, *The Bones* 245). They indeed go on living their lives, now without their lovers. Their characters have no bearings on the public affairs of the day, as the feelings and pursuits are their own. The Jamesonian ‘public-private split’ (69) that he boasts the western literature has achieved and the so called third-world literature has not, is evidently present in these two characters, the fact which also confirms that there is no requirement for ‘the Other reader’ (Jameson 66) for Western readership to help consume and appreciate this piece of literary work from the sub-continent.

Life treats Anwar particularly harshly, and he bears the brunt of it, enduring and fighting back. He works in Dubai and nearly escapes death. His latest quest to find his lost love lands him a heroic struggle with the circumstances. At one point, he vents his pent up anger from all his

deprivations in an outburst of punches at the belly of the brothel keeper: ‘I’m pounding madam’s stomach with my fists, thinking about Megna and Pahari and Shathi and my father who made me dig out the latrine, and my poor little seedling who was in this hellhole all the time, just pass my fingertips,...’ (Anam, *The Bones* 249). Anwar represents the struggle, exploitation and suffering of a person which is the lot of a very many people in Bangladesh. Their struggle is essentially private and the ‘libidinal investment’ (72) that Jameson speaks about, cannot be interpreted here as ‘primarily political’ (72).

Throughout the novel, Zubaida, tries to come to terms with her missed identity, often failing to reconcile with it and breaking down, but always looking to establish her roots. She says, addressing to the absent Elijah, ‘I was a person whose life began with her own life, and not like you, with a family tree that stretched back generations, I clung to every piece of my past, unable to forget, or let go, of a single thing...’ (Anam, *The Bones* 79). At the end of the novel when she meets Anwar and comes to know about her family, she imagines how her deceased mother could have been and composes a note about her:

In the absence of knowledge, I choose imagination. I choose to know my mother through my dreams, and the words that come from my dreams. I can draw a picture and then inflate it so that it resembles a life, a history, something I can hold on to. In the age of the Anthropocene, the human rules, and there is nothing more human than to dream. (Anam, *The Bones* 400)

This shows Zubaida’s psychological drive to resolve the vacuity of mind that the absence of her mother creates in her over the years, as explained by Freudian Defense mechanisms⁶. It also manifests her personal growth and individuality, something which Jameson wrongfully thinks

⁶ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/defense-mechanisms.html>

characters of third-world literatures are unable to achieve as they do not develop ‘the domain of sexuality and the unconscious’ (69).

The novel is written in a first-person narrative style employing stream of consciousness technique. It is a flowing, lyrical composition comprised of a host of characters that enter and exit, embodying the characteristics of post-modernist novels. It also tackles some burning environmental concerns of Bangladesh, for example, inhuman and merciless treatment of workers who travel abroad and arduous and risky job assignments to workers in the ship breaking yard of Chittagong. The style is reflective, meditative and explanatory, and the novel is addressed to Zubaida’s lover Elijah, with an expressed hope that he would read it someday. The work comes to a satisfactory conclusion as Zubaida succeeds in getting *Diana*, the whale, excavated and exhibited for public viewing, and in helping her friend Gabriela document torture and exploitation of workers in the ship breaking yard. Zubaida also severs her bond with her husband and patiently waits for her lover Elijah to return to her. She is an epitome of hope and progress, as she utters: ‘...that I too would be bones in a grave someday, that I would be dead, and then I started counting all the things I would regret if I were dying...’ (Anam, *The Bones* 122), evoking the Carpe Diem motif and resolving to right the wrongs she has brought upon her life. She untangles the complicated situations of her life and moves forward for betterment, closing the novel on a note of hope and expectations.

Literary Merits of the Novels

The *Bengal trilogy* works on a canvas that captures life-trajectory of three generations and covers periods of pre and post independent Bangladesh. It introduces dynamic characters like Rehana, Zubaida, Anwar and Maya. Rehana's love for her husband is constant and loyal. Her husband Iqbal dies suddenly of heart attack leaving her two infants and not much financial sustenance. She brought up her kids and stayed unmarried for the rest of her life, remembering her husband every now and then. She represents the devotion and attachment Bangladeshi women generally feel for their husbands. She has a moment of romance with the Major when they came closer but at her heart's core, she remains committed to her husband. Zubaida also does not compromise with her love despite her making a mistake of marrying someone else under societal and familial influences. Her devotion to Elijah, her lover, dictates all her course of action as she finally submits and waits for him. Anwar's search for Megna destroys his career and savings, yielding no result except recovery of his daughter. These characters portray strength of love and their commitment to find it, which can be related to by readers from any corner of the world.

Maya's dedication and devotion in the nation-building task in the post-war independent and war-ravaged Bangladesh is encouraging and exemplary. And the spirit and dedication that the siblings, Maya and Sohail, have shown during the war, starting from actually participating in the war to migrating to India to work to help in other ways (journalism for Maya) helped towards achieving independence for Bangladesh. Rehana's active participation is also laudable as she shelters a group of guerrillas in her house, nurtures some of them to health and helps them fight for their country. Zubaida is seen taking active interest in finding out what happens with scrap-workers on the beach of Chittagong and how they are treated by the profit-monger managers. She succeeds in bypassing Ali, the local manager who has been entrusted with the task of misleading any inquiry in the lives of the workers, and gets the real picture of inhuman exploitation and harassment. These characters set good examples of responsible citizenry and introduce the readers to the realities of

working class labourers. The discussion surrounding the ship-breaking yard is also important to draw attention to the fact that these humongous ocean liners belong to some of the developed countries and they conveniently dump these liners on the shores of the developing countries in order to avoid polluting their own coastal areas. This is an instance of how economic strength of the developed countries enable them to exploit less developed countries and make living conditions worse for their citizens.

The atmosphere of *A Golden Age* is kept appropriately tensed as the story progresses keeping the war of independence at the centre. There are visits to the jail, to the graveyard, to the martyr's memorials, to Calcutta in the refugee camps and to the hinterland where Sohail goes hiding - all incorporating to the plot and ambience of the novel. The milieu of *The Good Muslim* is more settled, situated in Rehana's house in Dhanmondi, Dhaka with occasional visits to the South of the country. The mood is light as Maya attends parties of her affluent friends and dances while being considered for marriage by the mothers present there of eligible bachelors. In *The Bones of Grace*, the tone is melancholic, reflective and relaxed, as Zubaida reminisces the life events and reports the entire story of the novel for her lover Elijah.

'Dear Husband,/ I lost our children today.' (Anam, *Golden Age* 3) - this is how the first book of the trilogy begins, and the reader is drawn to what happens to this mother, to this family amidst the war. The storyline is unrolled chronologically in *A Golden Age*, and the narration is a mix of Rehana's doleful reporting of how things are unfolding and her family coping with the spectacular events, and description of guerrilla operations. Rehana's character dominates and morphs from a careful, caring mother of two, to a secret aide to the freedom fighters to an 'affectionate' nurse to the Major. She also acts as a skilful negotiator with his brother-in-law, Faiz and a jolly friend to the gin-rummy party she is a member of. The opening of *The Good Muslim*, sees Maya, who was a war-correspondent in the first novel, working as a doctor in a remote village and the reader is immediately drawn to the story. Maya dominates the novel as she comes back and confronts her

brother Sohail over a number of issues. Maya's character also develops forward as she is seen coming to terms with religion exemplarily, rescuing her nephew from the clutches of a pedophile and falls in love with Joy. In both the novels, third person reportage unfolds the plot, unlike in *The Bones of Grace*, where Zubaida addresses to her love Elijah throughout the novel. She is as dynamic a character as Maya as she falls in love head over heels on first sight at a musical concert, digs for the remains of a mythical Whale in Pakistan, marries and divorces a husband, moves to Chittagong to help document human rights violation cases at the ship-breaking yard, and finally establishes her roots by locating a family member. The trilogy is enriched with gripping storyline and memorable characters. It also upholds values, represents local culture and makes philosophical observations over the course of its development. Therefore it has all the qualities that a global audience would look for in a work of fiction.

The settings of *A Golden Age* is chiefly in the city of Dhaka, with descriptions that chalk out important landmarks and localities like Dhaka University, InterContinental Hotel and Dhanmondi Residential Area, and some actions in Calcutta. *The Good Muslim* has its settings in Dhaka and in some remote villages in the North and South of the capital. *The Bones of Grace* transcends the sub-continent and in addition to Dhaka and the port city of Chittagong, it has its characters travelling to and staying in Pakistan and Boston. The point of view of the first two novels has been an omniscient narrator while the third novel employs first-person narration. Appropriate tension and pockets of suspense is maintained in all the three novels to capture the attention of the reader. *A Golden Age* has this prevailing air of uncertainty and terror due to war, in *The Good Muslim* the development of a wide ideological rift between Sohail and Maya, and in *The Bones of War* the cravings to see if compulsive search by the two characters Zubaida and Anwar for their lost lovers yield any result. The language in the first two novels incorporates dialogues and narration both on a personal and on omniscient levels, while in the third novel the report is autobiographical and flowing without much exchange of dialogues.

The walking-whale (referred to as *Diana*) which is a valuable artefact when excavated and the monstrous ship (named as *Grace*) that is about to be scraped are symbolically significant as the former demonstrates the importance of unearthing ancient fossils to understand the evolutionary journey of one of the members of the mammal genre, and the latter signifies waste and environmental pollution when scraped in the sandy shores of Chittagong. In this age of Anthropocene, human beings pose more hazard to nature by scraping monstrous vehicles like ocean liners in the shores of developing countries than preserving it by carefully unearthing and studying the fossils which might yield new knowledge.

The treatment of Islam is dealt with from two perspectives, with Maya and Rehana taking a more liberal, open position that accommodates spirituality and the prevailing Bengali culture all together, and with Sohail opting for a more radical and fundamental one that rejects earthly pursuits and pleasures. Zubaida appears to be indifferent to religion. Although the writer does not clearly stand by one position over another with religion, the bringing up and treatment of this matter to show both sides of the coin is praiseworthy and laudable as religion is an important and undeniable reality and part of life, living and sometimes livelihood in the sub-continent.

By means of incorporating local cultural practices, customs, manners, morals, vocabulary and even songs, the trilogy is a representative cultural document from Bangladesh. It embodies the spirit of the independence movement, the resolution in the post-war scenario and the concerns of present day environmental catastrophes that Bangladesh is currently and unjustly exposed to. Coupled with it are universal themes like love, migration, environment, familial values and commitment.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that Jameson, being a Marxist himself, would dub the so called third-world literatures as mere allegories on socio-political conditions, implicitly making a case for Eurocentric literature as the ideal type. The proposition of such a radical dichotomy coming from a Marxist is ironic and deplorable. Furthermore, genuine allegorical stories also have cultural and literary value of their own and cannot be dismissed as insignificant literary samples. Needless to say, such allegories, due to their universal appeal and relevance, find access across the literary landscape of the world. So a literary work having the characteristics of an allegory on a local or a global level cannot be an example of a negative specimen. It would also be interesting to see if Jameson's idea of national allegory has any bearing on the literary productions of countries or territories still struggling to achieve national identity, like Kashmir, Catalonia or Taiwan, assuming authors of those countries would like to compose allegorical literary work based on their national situations.

The thesis discussed the three novels of the *Bengal Trilogy* of Tahmima Anam in three sections following the Introduction part, and tried to see the relevance and applicability of Fredric Jameson's theory of national allegory on them. It also tried to gauge the literary merit and appeal of the trilogy for global readership. The discussion reveals that the concept of Jameson's national allegory can hardly be applicable to the trilogy, and the novels independently stand out in their own glory and brilliance as literary productions, suitable to be enjoyed by global readership. None of the characters or incidents seem to serve as allegories, and no discussion on 'what we have to do and how we do it, to what we can't do and what we do better than this or that nationality' (Jameson 65) finds its place in the body of the novels. There is no comparison, at a national level, that discusses achievements of any kind or lack thereof. The trilogy only deals in what any well-composed literary work should: characters, plot, theme, point of view, story and a host of other issues surrounding life and living in a developing country of the sub-continent.

The trilogy reflects indomitable Bangladeshi spirit of coming back against all odds. It is a linear tale of three generations, spearheaded by three protagonists, namely and in order of appearance - Rehana, Maya and Zubaida, encompassing the place and time ranging from pre-independence to independent Bangladesh. It is a saga containing universal values of hope and prosperity which can be applicable to any generation of any country. It is a gripping narration served for the English speaking world. It does not require 'another reader' (Jameson 66) in between by any means, and should not present any difficulty to Western readership for consumption and appreciation. No character or incident acts as a national allegory, as Jameson suggests, rather each character redefines its position to the changing circumstances, upholding human values, cultures and customs. There is a clear public-private split, as opposed to what Jameson suggests that it is not, as witnessed in the reverie of Rehana for her deceased husband and cravings of Zubaida for her lover. There is also libidinal investments in characters like Anwar as he frantically searches for his lost love but takes recourse to a prostitute, or a female domestic religious worker visiting Sohail's chamber for sexual gratification. Individual characters do not represent collective types, as Shathi waits for Anwar knowing very well that he does not love her and is pursuing other woman. Nothing that Jameson suggests the third-world literature offers is traceable in the trilogy under discussion.

A Golden Age was awarded the prize for Best First Book in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2008. It was also shortlisted for the Guardian First Book and Costa First Novel award in 2007. *The Guardian* labeled the book as a 'stunning debut' ("And ne'er"). It also described *The Good Muslim* as "Powerful and Ambitious" ("The Good Muslim"). *Los Angeles Times* commented that 'The Good Muslim brims with gripping narrative, absorbing history and Shakespearean moral conundrums...' ("Book Review"). And *Financial Times*, commenting on *The Bones of Grace* sums up the plot as '[t]his third novel does not revisit the 1970s but plays with a polyphony of pasts, from prehistoric to the present' ("The Bones"). *Stuff* aptly reports that this work 'thrashes out questions of cultural identity, women's lack of autonomy in a developing country, and the world-wide reach of

Western literature and music' ("Review: The Bones"). The popular readership ratings on *GoodReads*⁷ for *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace* are 3.77, 3.66 and 3.83 respectively. So it is observed that the trilogy has been well accepted by literary circles across the world. The works are also popular among general readership. So it will be fair to opine that the trilogy is a significant offering to the global audience which has been appreciated and will continue to do so.

So in terms of plot construction, storytelling, sketching and development of characters, themes, values, symbols and overall texture of the works, the trilogy qualifies as a notable read in the global arena. In addition to containing local flavour, the trilogy has all the merits to be placed on the global marketplace of literary productions for readers to evaluate it. With regard to the trilogy serving as national allegory, no evidence has been encountered in the discussion of this thesis to indicate so. Instead of representing as allegories, the novels stand on their grounds - the fact which has been proved by the present discussion, critical responses and reception across the world and preference to them by global reading population. Fredric Jameson's conjectures regarding national allegory is therefore a set of hasty, sweeping, superfluous and ill-conceived assumptions which are inapplicable with regard to the *Bengal Trilogy* of Tahmima Anam.

⁷ www.goodreads.com

Works Cited

- Ahmad, Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" *Social Text*, No. 17, 1987, pp. 3-25.
- Anam, Tahmima. *A Golden Age*. John Murray, 2007.
- __. *The Good Muslim*. Canongate, 2011.
- __. *The Bones of Grace*. Canongate, 2016.
- "And ne'er the twain shall meet." *The Guardian*, 22 April 2007, www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/22/fiction.features. Accessed 12 August 2019.
- "Book Review: 'The Good Muslim' by Tahmima Anam." *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Aug 2011, www.latimes.com/books/la-ca-tahmima-anam-20110814-story.html. Accessed 12 Aug 2019.
- Finnerty, Amy. "An Interview with Tahmima Anam." *Wasafiri*, vol. 30, issue 4, 2015, pp. 43-46.
- "Guardian Books podcast: Politics in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan." *The Guardian Books podcast: Fiction*, 27 May 2011, www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2011/may/27/politics-india-pakistan-bangladesh-books-podcast?fbclid=IwAR0NIkrsCD9sNGKlKyRYXqXYcU1Irg6YUTGT2HaSTmvybprL6JibLuRz3S
- I.
- "'Is Bangladesh turning fundamentalist?' -and other questions I no longer wish to answer." *The Guardian*, 16 May 2016, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/16/bangladesh-killings-atheist-gay-liberal-isis-tahmima-anam?fbclid=IwAR1y2iBJmQwiIy5UTVMpJVhgQDEFp_vcn_vv4yiRTUL7EbK89h6Aj5r8ahA. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, vol. 15, pp. 65-88.

- Kidd, James. "Bangladeshi novelist Tahmima Anam discusses cultural identity and her latest novel *The Bones of Grace*." *The Nation*, 1 June 2016, www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/bangladeshi-novelist-tahmima-anam-discusses-cultural-identity-and-her-latest-novel-the-bones-of-grace-1.199420#full. Accessed 2 June 2019.
- Lazarus, Neil. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Munim, Rifat. "A critique of Fredric Jameson's thesis on 'Third World Literature'." *Dhaka Tribune*, 21 May 2019, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-letters/2019/05/21/a-critique-of-fredric-jameson-s-thesis-on-third-world-literature-2>. Accessed 8 June 2019.
- "national allegory." *Oxford Reference*, 2019, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100223851>. Accessed 10 June 2019.
- "Review: *The Bones of Grace*." *Stuff: Entertainment*, 6 Sept 2016, www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/books/83906315/review-the-bones-of-grace. Accessed 12 Aug 2019.
- Roberts, Adam. *Fredric Jameson*. Routledge, 2000.
- "The Good Muslim by Tahmima Anam Review." *The Guardian*, 29 May 2011, www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/29/good-muslim-tahmima-anam-review. Accessed 12 August 2019.
- "The Mangroves' Date With History." *The New York Times*, 27 Oct 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/opinion/anam-the-mangroves-date-with-history.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FAnam%2C%20Tahmima. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- "'The Bones of Grace', by Tahmima Anam." *Financial Times*, www.ft.com/content/834c6eb6-1856-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e. Accessed 12 Aug 2019.