



Understanding Marginalization in Hasan Azizul Huq's Short Stories

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Abstract: Hasan Azizul Huq (1939-2021), the eminent contemporary Bangla novelist and short story writer, essentially perceived the ongoing process of marginality, especially social exclusion, and highlighted the features and factors through his characters sincerely. In particular, he finds out the crucial crises prevalent in the society from remotest areas to advanced metropolis. In fact, he determines how marginalized people are forcibly pushed to the margin in terms of basic rights and advantages. The purpose of this study is to represent how Huq's protagonists, either male or female, are directed to face inhuman state, social isolation and exclusion due to man-made famine, marginal identity and exploitation. Keeping political and socio-economic concerns in view, the study inspects how Huq's protagonists are systematically framed to be oppressed, demeaned and marginalized in all possible ways.

Keywords: *Marginalization; Social Exclusion; Poverty; Patriarchy; Liberation War.*

Introduction: Hasan Azizul Huq is widely read and taught in the territory of Bangla literature. It is an undeniable fact that Huq wrote all his works in Bangla producing a natural and artistic flavor. His duty was not only to write but also to analyze the facts of the story. In an interview, Huq remarked, "Personally, I am not busy to comment or criticize. I want to analyze. I want to explain." [1] Interestingly, this great Bangla literary giant is yet to be exposed broadly and internationally due to the lack of worthy translations from Bangla to English. In a conversation with Rifat Munim from the Daily Star during Hay Festival in Dhaka, Hasan Azizul Huq articulated the importance of translation, "Nobody is interested in translating Bangla literature...I firmly believe that it is essential for our literature to be recognized worldwide because it has all the potentials that a national literature should have" [1].

Later, Huq voiced his long awaiting agony, "Without translation promotion of Bangla literature is impossible" (Abrams) [1]. However, over the years, Huq's ample literary contribution had been confined within the discussion and analysis of Bangla speaking people. They could not enter into the worldwide mainstream literature. Some of his short stories, however, have been translated into English by reputed translators and scholars of Bangladesh. For instance, Kaiser Haq and Kashinath Roy translated one of Mr. Huq's stories titled "Hate". It was published in a book titled Contemporary Short

Stories of the SAARC Region-2013 by SAARC Cultural Centre of Sri Lanka. Before that Bangla Academy of Dhaka published a book titled Selected Stories of Hasan Azizul Huq edited and translated by Ali Anwar. Radha Chakravarty translated and compiled a book titled Crossings: Stories from Bangladesh and India that included Hasan Azizul Huq's story "A Mother-Daughter World" in 2003. In 2015, Bengal Lights Books published a collection of short stories titled HASAN AZIZUL HUQ: twelve stories translated by Bhaskar Chattopadhyay.

Considering unique characterization, social crises and storyline, Huq has relevance both in national and international fronts. But his extraordinary contribution could not cross the Bay of Bengal, "It is said that Hasan Azizul Haque is one of the most beloved short story writers in contemporary Bangla literature.

But with the exception of the occasional anthologized piece, his work has been largely unknown to the English speaking world" [1]. Within the frame of dynamic literary cultivation and natural atmosphere, Huq sets his storyline, and reshapes his polished characters with neutral treatment and proper justification. Along with the broad issues like nationalism, war and partition, he discovers the very truth of human civilization that is rarely focused and addressed so sharply and vibrantly. In an interview, Huq commented on his understanding about the general people, "I observe the society. I want to understand how general people live in the village, how the employment process runs and education system functions. There, I encounter cruel reality [13].

This study is an attempt to present the significance of Hasan Azizul Huq's short stories before the English-speaking world within the context and concerns of marginalization. In order to complete the investigation, a number of short stories have been analyzed to understand the features and factors of marginalization.

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Literature Review: Hasan Azizul Huq has noteworthy contribution in Bangla short stories. He broke the traditional formats and established a unique way of storytelling and. In this regard, his way of expression and linguistic diversity is significant, “Haque is well known for his experimentations with language and for introducing certain modern idioms, particularly in the genre of short stories”[22]. He always wrote against religious fundamentalism:

My literary creations are against fundamentalism. I guess, whoever read my writings can comprehend; my pen went against the religious fundamentals, against militant. It can be said that all I wrote went against the extreme inhuman practices in the name of religion. It will go forever, and still it will be continued” [10].

A number of critics and research scholars have analyzed Huq’s important works. Purkayastha explored the resistance towards the translation of Huq’s novel *Fire Bird* [Agun Pakhi] and remarked on a particular theme, “The theme of Agun Pakhi, centred on an illiterate woman’s solitary battle against powers implicated in the larger processes of nation-formation, is too much outside the ambit of politically debated issues like class or gender to interest such translators” [9]. David Kopf, one of the translators of Hasan Azizul Huq, evaluated both Huq’s lifestyle and works. Kopf analyzed some of Huq’s stories like “The Vulture (Shakun)”, “Enchantress (Nagini)”, “Through Life to Death (Amrittaya Ajiban)”. He also related the liberation war of 1971 in “Days of the Dark of the Moon (Krishna Pakhshe Din)” and “The Household (Ghargerasthi)”.

Mofidul Hoque, a co-founder and one of the eight Trustees of the Liberation War Museum, briefly outlined the reflection of partition in literature. According to Hoque, “Re-reading the partition stories of Hasan Azizul Huq, one can note the complexities that remain as a backdrop of such literary endeavors. Hasan was born in a remote village of Burdwan, far from the turmoil and conflict which engulfed the urban Bengal” [2]. In the context of demonstrating social and cultural crisis of a particular group or society, Hasan Azizul Huq’s is importantly relevant. His works especially the short stories reflects how commoners become destitute and marginalized due to power, partition and poverty. Hoque continued, “One of his early stories, “Uttor Bashante” (Post-Spring), narrates the life of a migrant family that has settled in an abandoned dilapidated house in a Khulna suburb” [2].

Besides, Huq’s choice of characterization is also different from others. He incorporates very insignificant and less focused subject matters in his stories. He also develops and portrays a different set of characters. By analyzing public crisis, Huq discovers the untold sorrows and cries of the marginalized people due to language, religion and social status. Hoque argued, “The partition stories of Hasan do not betray his own past although the setting is almost always the refugees in their new environment. There they are like a fish out of water, gasping for breath and in many cases the shelter is not anything new but a house as abandoned as the people are” [2]. Like other short story writers in the literary world, Huq brings the inherent falsehood and follies of the society. These unresolved issues enforce general people to the usual victim of “Marginalization”. Singharoy made a comparative analysis where he stated, “Marginalization has been conventionally understood in a specific societal context and with distinctive connotation to delineate social groups living in peripheral and adverse situations and at times with alleged negative attributes” [21]. Particularly, Mondol connected Huq’s life experiences with reality to comment on marginalized people in Huq’s stories, “Hasan Azizul Huq sometimes attempted to capture the marginalized people with more depth and greater dimensions in an epical scale and he as usual succeeds in doing so” [16]. In order to explore “marginalization” socially, economically and politically, this study puts its concentration on several selected short stories of Hasan Azizul Huq.

Theoretical Framework: Throughout the contemporary world, the engagement of marginality is not new. In fact, it has necessarily engrossed multifarious considerations. “In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in the notion of ‘marginality’. Interest comes from the fields of inquiry as diverse as psychology, literary critique, cultural studies, political economy, urban studies, and especially development studies” [12]. Over the ages, marginalization has been considered to be a societal phenomenon in which groups or individuals are drastically relegated to the margin or periphery of a society in terms of economic and political intervention, directly or indirectly. Bush noted the historical context of marginality in America, “the concept of ‘marginality’ in the field of development goes back to early twentieth-century urban studies in the USA. In fact, the discussion seemed originally to be (and in many ways continues to be) associated with the history and debate over transition to modernity” [12]. Fundamentally, it limits the rights and opportunities of the people; “marginality” is the position of people on the edges, preventing their access to resources and opportunities, freedom of choices, and the development of personal capabilities [11] It also refers to an exploitative process in which particular groups or individuals are intensely relegated to inferior position, and intentionally deprived from personal freedom, choice and essential rights. Singharoy relates the sociological significance, “Sociologically marginality is understood in a societal context in terms of ‘non participation’, ‘non-integration’ and also in ‘reference to exclusion’ of groups or sections of population from several of the key activities of society” [21].

Like other significant fields, marginality has vital connection with literature. In the territory of Bangla literature, Hasan Azizul Huq is deeply motivated by the fact of marginalization and the marginalized people. He has discovered how these people are considered to be downgraded, helpless and socially excluded. Schatz suggests, “Their problems can be related to homelessness, unemployment, poor access to social and health services, low health status and poor living conditions” [19]. In such a crucial socio-cultural context, he depicts the image of public sorrows and sufferings, brings to light why these marginalized people are frequently detached from the mainstream and deprived from the basic rights, and how they are exploited, tortured and marginalized over the decades, even in this globally advanced era.

Materials & Method: In order to complete this paper, qualitative research and content analysis have been done. Basically, the study provides an enhanced understanding about the core features of marginalization. Accomplishing textual analysis from theoretical background, it relates the inherent factors of marginalization. As a part of this investigation, the study analyzes and evaluates relevant books, interviews, articles from different sources and journals to dive deeper into the problem for a comprehensive insight.

Results and Discussion: Due to socio-economic and political conditions, a number of people remain in the periphery of the society. They hardly access the basic demands of regular life. They are, somehow, considered to be the elements of dominance, exploitation and marginalization. The Bengali short story writer Hasan Azizul Huq could accept this manmade and preordained reality. Through his diverse characters, he questioned the ongoing social setup and conventions. He thinks that human being is stronger than natural entity. In order to highlight the problems and prospects, Huq argued, “Generally we say that man does nothing. He depends on the force of fate. But Hasan made us understand that man can do something extraordinary than the nature. To him the rebellious force and optimism of human are stronger [17]. Although there remains the strong concern of fate and destiny, man still can think of rebellious voice. These people are helpless, voiceless and marginalized. Harun Pasha gave a simple definition of marginalized people, “Marginalized people are those who live in the margin of the society. According to economic condition, they are landless and baseless, and they live below the margin of poverty. In terms of socio-economic, cultural and educational perspective, the marginalized people are neglected, deprived and far away from the center of power” [18].

Huq was much more motivated by the general people. Therefore, his stories always bring into focus the lower class crisis and struggle, “He touched the lower class life. For that his writing was inspired by the force of deprived, exploited and oppressed people. His love, compassion and attraction towards humanity motivate the storyline. Primarily, the life of lower class people seems to him more important [18]. Therefore, he concentrated on the sorrows and sufferings of the working class, “His fictions deals with themes such as the indescribable suffering of farmers and working class people, the dehumanizing effects of the partition and the ensuing communal violence, the deterioration of values, unfulfilled promises of the Liberation War, and the distress and resistance of working class women” [22]. Like other groups of the society, the marginalized people possess the same national identity. But in reality, they are humiliated and treated to be strangers of the society. Beyond the intervention of fate and destiny of the individuals, there appear social, economic and political issues accordingly.

Social Marginalization: Self-Isolation, Social Exclusion and Patriarchy

Social exclusion is one of the major features of marginality. Bush noted certain strategies, “in which some people, usually seen as individuals, or parts of distinct social groups or categories of people, rather than as part of social classes, have been excluded or pushed to the periphery of economic growth or political development” [12]. Due to manifold discriminations, the marginalized people are systematically distracted from the mainstream society. Schatz related, “the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of ‘mainstream society’, living at the margins of those in the centre of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare” [19]. Ultimately, the individuals experience social stratification, classified structure and massive struggle and then, they begin to feel like outsiders within the regular social framework. In that case, they require self-isolation for protection and survival.

Huq’s extraordinary short story “A Mother-Daughter World” [Ma-Myer Songsar] is very relevant here. Beyond the troublesome public engagement and social controversies, the mother and daughter of this story isolated themselves close to the Sundarbans. The narrator notes, “They live by themselves, in a world of their own, never going anywhere. Nobody visits them either” [4]. In the story there remains no information about other family members. Even the narrator did not mention for what they became isolated. About the marginalized people of the today’s developed society, Huq remarked:

It is true that there is ample development in the society. Revolutionary public sense has also been increased. For example, in our early days, there prevailed not only racial cast system but also strong economic cast system. In our time, the village people like gipsy, cobbler or sweeper never dared to raise voice. They firmly believed that they were born to be oppressed [13].

Reading the entire story sincerely, it can be fairly guessed that both mother and daughter had nobody to depend upon. Being vulnerable and marginalized, they never thought of modern facilities and advanced life style. In order to indicate public crises, Huq commented:

The fact of human habitation has been terribly over-crowded. Wherever I go, I see people are unrest, disorderly and exhausted. I feel that the society is enough matured now. The ponds are old too. The embankment, slope and grass are declined, huts close to huts. Everywhere I behold people are dwelling in earthen holes. (Self-Trans [13].

Therefore, earthen house and natural elements were only their options to survive, “On the floor of the dwelling are earthen plates, water pots, tin glasses, a tiny cooking stove, and at one side, on a woven mat, is the sleeping area consisting of the pillows and

hand-stitched kanthas sticky with dirt. Mother and daughter occupy a single bed. They don't need anything more [4]. That means both mother and daughter had no additional fascination. They only wanted to exercise their freedom of choice and wished to be self-dependent, secured and glad. Surprisingly, they could not meet their simple wish. Both mother and daughter were physically assaulted and raped brutally. Huq hardly concentrates on higher class people, rather he feels comfort to talk about the lower class, "His protagonists are so vulnerable that they shift their profession. Yet they never meet economic solvency. They never escape from poverty. Likewise, they cannot escape from the exploitation of the higher class [18].

The story "Mother" [Jononi] carries same concern. Sharmin remarks, "In order to draw a new kind of mother, Hasan Azizul Huq wrote the story "Mother" [20]. The protagonist is 14-15 year aged girl. She is beautiful, unmarried and straightforward. She moves from door to door for household work for survival. Interestingly, she becomes pregnant frequently. Unlike the society, Huq appreciates Ayesha's crucial condition, "To the entire society, Ayesha seems to a matter of hatred or negligence. But the author takes her normally. Being pregnant like a mother, Ayesha seems to the author as Sattayabati of the Mahabharata, whose virginity is never to be declined" [20]. In the story, the narrator avoided to mention the offenders. Being alone, helpless and marginalized, she had no voice against the society. But the society always charges her for the unlawful deed, "Being the downgraded, the women hold the position in the bottom. They are chained by the patriarchal society" [18]. Therefore, Ayesha experiences maltreatment and harsh words from the people. Although Ayesha did not charge the perpetrators, she was charged reportedly and was fired from her work. Huq writes, "Next day when Ayesha came, my wife said, I can't allow you to work anymore. Whatever you have here, take. Get lost" [7]. Therefore, it can be claimed that Ayesha is living in the self-isolation forcibly. In reality, she is excluded socially because she has no firm access to the basic social rights. But the author of the story recognizes her vulnerable condition. In fact, he compares Ayesha with motherland, "The author compares Ayesha's entire body with the map of Bangladesh. And it has given a novelty to the story. Like the motherland Ayesha is also noble. In reality, mother, either married or unmarried, has to face the same sufferings" [20]. The story "A Hell Called Hospital" [Patale Hospitale] describes the crisis of village farmers. In brief Dina explained the subject matter of the story:

Through the entire picture of a hospital, the unstable condition of the independent Bangladesh has been depicted in this story. In this long story, the contemporary socio-economic and political condition has been evaluated. Experiencing constant hypocrisy, the helpless and hungry village people are pressured to lead inhuman life. And that has been explained through sharp and harsh language [14].

Since the villagers are poor and moneyless, they cannot access health service. Inside the societal noble frame they encounter social exclusion. The man at the emergency has fair responsibility to take care of the serious patients. But he is serious in other business. In order to paint the existing reality, the narrator stated, "The man sitting on a chair in front of the emergency desk looked up, but he didn't seem to notice anything" [3]. When anyone asks him something, he became angry. The narrator notes his maltreatment towards the village patients:

The man at the Emergency snarled, "So, what the hell do you want me to do? Should I dance?

"Where should we...?"

"On my head!" Then he said in an irritated voice, "Put him down there. Put him on the floor" [3].

This ill-tempered man created such cruel and fearful atmosphere that the marginalized people cannot raise their voice. Therefore, the hospital seems to the general people a kind of hell. Instead of medical treatment, they are tormented by fear and careless death.

Economic Marginalization: Poverty, Exploitation and Marginal Identity: In the course of marginalization, economic relegation is rigorously dominant. Incidentally, the marginalized people cannot remain in mainstream society. Bush argues, "Marginality is equated somewhat with a state of powerlessness or as characterized by life chances inferior to those in the world of the 'mainstream'. In this sense, the term signifies a structural process through which certain groups or entities become 'marginalized' from the 'centre' against their will" [12]. Interestingly, marginality does not require someone to be poor. Even a particular rich group can be marginalized, "The term 'marginals' does not simply refer to the poor and working classes; the economically well off and people of prestige may also experience a state of marginality" [12]. When people are relegated economically, they become poor, helpless and marginalized. Nevertheless, poverty prevails there as an automated consequence, "Being excluded, not only from growth but also from other dimensions of developmental and societal progress, is an indication of the extremely poor being at the margins of society and in many cases marginality is a root cause of poverty" [11].

In "A Mother -Daughter World", the protagonists had no food to eat. Therefore, they decided to consume dry and black mud for survival. The narrator states how the daughter assures her existence, "All these days, she has only eaten mud. Dry, black mud. She herself has created the tall heap of the mud in a corner of the courtyard. Morning, evening and afternoon, she would grab fistfuls of mud from there to stud into her mouth" [4]. In the story "Hate" women like Joytoon, Tosiroon, Tepi, Golapi, Pushpa face extreme poverty. Due to lack of food, the children are fasting and dying one after another. Schatz noted the inherent factors that function behind their controversial profession and reality, "Vulnerable groups like migrants and ethnic minorities, homeless people, drug addicts, sex workers, youth with risk behaviour, isolated older people or people with disabilities face higher risks of

social exclusion and marginalisation” [19] Nevertheless, the situation turns so extreme that they are searching food in the drain. The narrator depicts a naked picture of poverty, “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” [5].

Similar critical incidents prevail in the story “Home Coming” [Fera]. Alef and his family members have nothing to do except fasting for long. The narrator notes, “Once they had to starve for three consecutive days. Alef spared no efforts to find a job. He desperately tried for odd jobs everywhere. He even offered to work for a lower wages, yet he could not find a job for himself. Resigning himself to fate, he then decided to squat in the village market with a come-what-may attitude rather than return home” [6]. “The Homestead Yonder” [Ghor Gerosthi] depicts, more or less, the same observation. Here, Ramsharan and his wife Bhanumati do not know what to do in such a crucial crisis. Only for food, they could not avoid their children’s untimely death. The narrator states Bhanumati’s remarks:

This time Bhanumati retorted, “How much of happiness did you get in your entire life? Did you ever have enough to eat, to fill up your stomach? You spent your lifetime slaving away for others, but could you ever give your children good food to eat? Could you ever give them decent clothes to wear?” [8].

Like social exclusion, the marginalized people suffer from bitter question of authentic identity. For this circumstance, Huq’s story “Hate” [Sorol Hingsa] is a better example. Through this story, Huq represented some fundamental crisis of a group of people, who are prostitutes. Like other professionals, their work never gets well recognized. Even they cannot lead their social life as usual. In order to depict the harsh reality, Huq notes one of the prostitutes’ vulnerability, “She didn’t remember she had a husband, not to mention mourning him. 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.” (57) [5] Due to extreme food crisis, they search something substantial, either half or fully rotten, from one drain to another to survive. Huq puts his observation, “Here people were born, grew up and died like flies” [5].

Political Marginalization: Liberation War and Its Marginal Concerns: Political engagement is also prevalent in the marginalization process. Bush relates how marginality is interconnected with political and social involvement:

Marginality’ has now been extended beyond the original status of the urban poor classes, or poor countries, to include also the economically well off – those who, nevertheless, are ‘marginalized’ in the political realm, or in the domain of lifestyles, or in their position as members of a particular gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Thus, beyond the economic marginal, we can also speak of political and social marginals [12].

Like other marginality issues, liberation war took a substantial space in Hasan Azizul Huq's short stories. As a matter of fact, war is considered to be an important component of marginalization politically. The short story "Home Coming" is based on liberation war of 1971. Economically, the protagonist Alef is not stable. He cannot provide enough food for his family. For that they have one and only choice of starvation. To Alef liberation war appears as a reliable symbol of expectations. He thinks that if victory is once gained, it will bring reasonable fortune for his family. He has a firm belief to lift his position from marginalized conditions. The narrator states the expectation, “There’ll be an end to our miseries. That’s all...Food to eat and clothes to wear” [6]. Getting the long awaiting victory, he found no particular alteration. Like Alef, many of them do not find answer for what actually they get ready to die for the country, “There were plenty like him there, scores and scores of them, roaming about with rifles on their shoulders” [6]. Within a short span of time, people lost their interest in freedom and victory. Huq then says, “As a consequence, in no time, the novelty of perambulating with rifles, or shouting the news of winning the war or the fact of freedom became worn out and stale. The village people had other preoccupations” [6]. That means, once they were marginalized when they didn’t have enough food to eat. After the victory, they are living in the same margin, “Once there was war against the foreign enemies. Now it is to be against hunger. The story indicates the devastating socio-economic and political instability after the liberation war” [14]. When the Government did not summon Alef, his mother argued, “Whom else would they summon then? Suppose the bullet had hit you on the head instead? It could, couldn’t it?” [6]. In “The Homestead Yonder” the narrator explains how general people are marginalized politically. In the name of independence and great expectation, common people lose all their hopes, beliefs and belongings. About individual freedom, Huq remarked:

As a writer, I will never sell my freedom by any means. Whatever political view I have, I will never join any political party. If I join, I have to obey the order. I will never receive anyone’s order [13].

It is Ramsharan, one of the representatives, who encounters the political hypocrisy and exploitation. In order to represent Ramsharan’s agony, the narrator states:

“We’ve achieved independence!” Ramsharan’s voice broke with hate and anger. “What did I gain from independence? All I know is that last year I fled for my life to India. For nine months I have lived there like a dog. Now I’m back in my own newly independent country, but that dog-life has dogged me here too! Holding my children by the hand, I’ve to journey endlessly to railway stations, to launch ghats. ...” [8].

Losing all the living means, now Ramsharan understands that the term “Independence” is used as the bait for public attention and motivation. Moreover, it is a political fancy game where people are treated as the puppets or objects. Raising several questions about independence, the protagonist Ramsharan expresses his observation, “Freedom, independence! What freedom, what independence? Tell me. I don’t have anything to eat, my children die of hunger. Is that what independence is really about? Standing like beggars for refugee aid, going from house to house searching for food?” [8].

Conclusions: Despite marginal conditions and social exclusion, in most of the cases, the protagonists in Hasan Azizul Huq’s short stories, cannot evade the deception of manipulative apparatus. No matter what considerable territory they undertake, by force or by choice, they are predestined to ascent the unavoidable crucial ladder socially, economically and of course, politically. The characters experience not only the cruel face of poverty but also the pitiless face of communal circumstances and doctrines. These people hardly manage sufficient foodstuff to consume and equitable housing to repose with protection and rational satisfaction. Yet they move from door to door not to implore but to labor for minimal existence. The way they undergo various maladies and predicament, the same way they encounter the laughter of destiny. To them, a handful of rice is more important than the concept of divinity and sacred values. In fact, the concept of heaven and hell seems to them abstract and meaningless. Neither fortune nor societal morals favor them. More interestingly, these wretched individuals never comprehend for what they are subjugated and marginalized over the decades.

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