

‘Push and Breathe’- A Feminine way to Tackle Violence and Trauma in the Selected Novels of Tahmima Anam and Monica Ali

Asma Fathima
Research Scholar (PhD)
&
Dr Abhisarika Prajapati
Asst. Professor of English
School of Arts & Humanities
REVA University
Bengaluru-64
India

Abstract: This paper traces the instances of tackling violence and trauma with an urge to push and breathe-a labour process to deliver hope in the time of hate and gender-based violence in the novels of Tahmima Anam and Monica, two prominent writers of Bangladesh. ‘Push and breathe’ is a feminine biological experience when a woman gives birth to a life. At the time of delivery if she does not push the hurdles and the life inside her, she may collapse hence breathing gives her strength to sustain. This is not one-time process, but it demands continuous efforts to be alive and to support the baby to be alive. Episodes of carnage, harassment and women’s suppression denying all her rights interrogates woman’s identity in our time. In search of finding and constructing an identity of her choice, she often gets frustrated and doomed to trauma but narratives of these two writers pave a way out as they offer a solution to tackle this situation in a feminine way- push and breathe, give birth to a safer new world of hope, dignity and love.

Keywords: Tahmima Anam, Monica Ali, violence, trauma, Bangladesh.

‘‘And now each knows that in the act of survival he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see. At the same time, none of them knew anything.’’
(John Hersey, Hiroshima, P-38)

Our time has travelled a long way from ‘what’ to ‘so what’. Powerful people are enacting like Avengers and the growing pace of violence marvel us. Violence is an inescapable reality of our time that has suffused our lives and living. An attempt to discern violence and its effect often lead people towards frustration, despair, anger, hatred, depression and trauma. A writer who wish to convey historical, psychological and artistic landscape of the modern world cannot filter violence as it is no longer a background story but has taken up the foreground thematic concern for literary circles, sensitive minds and intelligentsia. Twentieth century witnessed human aggression bringing about global destruction. Undoubtedly, power politics

has fanned the dirty game of suppression and illegal-unethical intervention in the world around. This is truly an age of extremes.

Predefined and predetermined gender roles of man and woman limit their potential and interrupts human bond. Female experience may differ from male and their perception but offer to find a solution which may launch drastic change in society in establishing a harmonious synchronisation. 'Push and breathe' is a feminine biological experience when a woman gives birth to a life. At the time of delivery if she does not push the hurdles and the life inside her, she may collapse, hence breathing gives her strength to sustain. This is not a one-time process, but it demands continuous efforts to be alive and to support the baby to be alive.

Valarie Kaur, a Filmmaker and a Lawyer in her outstanding speech talks about the darkness of the tomb comparing it with our world of hate- based violence, racial profiling and genocide. She offers a solution to tackle this violence and traumatic phase by breathing and pushing to be alive and to give birth to a new era and a new hope. When we see writers like Tahmima Anam and Monica Ali as powerful emerging writers from Bangladesh, a country in South- Asia, we can smell the same urge to push and breathe to come out of this transitional phase. They have sketched characters in their fictional world who talk about grappling the situations and come out as winners hoisting the flag high despite their harsher way of life. Bangladesh is a South- Asian country where communal hatred and liberal war dominated and governed people's lives.

The world is running on its metamorphosis at a very fast pace with the growing inventions, not to forget the arms and ammunitions causing destruction to society in the name of developments in the field of science and technology. And so is the impact of growing demands and pressure transversing into forms implicating situations in which a stable living is seldom a dream for those who are afflicted by its repercussions. Besides, their emotional tranquillity causes chaotic syndromes in possession with violent disposition. Deterring courage, sacrifice, heroism, confidence, peace and making way to cowardice, despair, grief, angst, anger, suffocation, laughter, parody, longing, love, hate, disgust, horror, fear, pain and suffering. The collision of these forces represses human progress delineating their quest for identity. The plurality of human identity coincides with the predominant type that strives to establish self-identity. A typology factor that deters he/ she from formulating its true identity. In a typical society, typology could be traced from ethical, cultural, legal, political and societal norms of human living. "A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports, interests, taste interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivises, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity."(P-05,Amartyasen.) It is a long-term conflict linked with global landscape of extreme violence that bring in profound changes with its widespread apparent issues. This paper would attempt to define and contextualize typology of ethnographic violence at its extreme behaviour, so far as recorded in the form of war- genocide, sexual abuse, child abuse and issues related to domestic violence. The many facets of interpersonal violence occurring in family includes issues related to early marriage, marital injustice, widowhood suffered by

women; solitude, dismay, transformation of character and huge family responsibility on men. Thus, making their living sophisticated and laboured to meet the upcoming challenges of life.

Social living has its endowment with several factors that builds relationship. The determination of single identity out of the multiple identities expected from the individual marks however, with severe limitations and restrictions. Although human beings are associated with many different groups through birth, race, association and alliances. They are committed to play a variety of roles at different sectors of living. Of one such and most challenging is the role of a widowed mother especially when no support could be derived from the family members. It's a tale of an anxious mother who lost her husband at a tender age and lived a life full of challenges. It was an epidemic of isolation that Rehana, a protagonist from the novel *A Golden Age* by Tahmima Anam experienced for years towards the upbringing of children. As it is well placed in Herman's theory of trauma that, "Isolation is the danger to be avoided at all costs, and that there is no such thing as a small concession when the issue is preserving their connections with the outside world". (P- 58, Anam) In order to free herself from the ensnared isolation of widowhood, Rehana Haque quite often arranged gathering with the mood of picnic celebration. Although the news of Silvi's engagement had disheartened Sohail, she felt happy to see him cheering at the cricket game with his friends. Out of her sober living lifestyle, she finds happiness in every small bit around her. She knows how to 'push and breathe.'

A 'lonely mother' whose children were dissociated from her in an unfair complex society on becoming widow, was a terrifying colossal experience. Running around to provide best living for her children she musters courage bearing patience and deriving all her interests, priorities and ambitions for a genuine cause. Who could have otherwise been fraught with anxiety nevertheless gratifying towards the sanity? This lonely mother's hardship towards constructing the house and bringing back children demonstrated no less noteworthy evidences as a woman's enormous struggle to stand for her esteem identity. While digging the foundation, pouring cement into the hole and enabling it with the support of metal girders is a contrast towards the upcoming obstacles on her way. Having tried'' Habib Bank first and then United and National banks''. with no guarantor to mortgage the land, however successful at her endeavour "leaped out of the room, still gripping the instrument she had brought along to sign papers, a green metal fountain pen with a letter opener at the top." (P-42, Anam)

The youths of the age could not be deterred from any sort of beleaguered atmosphere. It was when, the whole nation was found to be at crisis, her own children joined various parties to support the cause of resistance. Maya in her widow-white saree took to the streets at the University gate by joining rallies on the other hand Sohail had joined Guerrilla. "In the words of Herman, unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death." P-24 (Herman) The mother could no longer be excited to hear the torments narrated by him about the strange lifestyle that his son was living. However, she tried not to show her disappointment. As he recorded the instances one by one.

“The severity of traumatic events cannot be measured on any single dimension; simplistic efforts to quantify trauma ultimately lead to meaningless comparisons of horror. Nevertheless, certain identifiable experiences increase the likelihood of harm. These include being taken by surprise, trapped, or exposed to the point of exhaustion.” (P-24, Herman) Sohail’s predominant involvement in the resistance movement seem no less a hysteria when he says, “We didn’t know where to go, we just heard the Bengali regiments had crossed the border and were setting up camp. All the Bengali regiments in the east had mutinied. They were regrouping when we found them. It was just a temporary settlement at first, then we moved to Agartala, about fifteen miles further from the border. Now it’s become like a small town- there’s even a hospital, and barracks for the officers. And there are others, in Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshashi. Seven sectors in all.” (P- 114, Anam)

The normal breathing gets laboured during the grave situations. This intense and emotional action was resulted by the fact of witnessing “genocide” around the city impacted due to the involvement by the group of youths Sohail, Aref, and Joy in resistance movements. Sohail, an activist on observing the prevalent condition of mass violence in Dhaka refers to it as genocide not war. According to The United Nations Genocide Convention, which was established in 1948, genocide is defined as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group", including the systematic harm or killing of its members, deliberately imposing living conditions that seek to "bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part", preventing births, or forcibly transferring children out of the group to another group.” This term has been applied to the Holocaust, and many other mass killings. Mass violence and genocide thus need to be understood in terms of their connectivity within the international system and “world politics” (Straus 2001, p. 359; Stone 2004; Levene 2005, 2013). P-03 (Karstedt)

Mother's endless love and deep devotion which made her sacrifice all pleasures of life then, took a firm stand to encourage guerrilla activities at her home Shona. Thus, she made him feel comfortable and declared that the place Shona was his birth right. In a study of mothers with multiple personality disorder, the psychiatrist Philip Coons observed: “I have generally been impressed by the positive, constructive and caring attitude that many mothers with multiple personality disorder have towards their children.” (P- 83, Herman) Concealing all necessary requirements such as crates boxes consisting powdered milk, medicines, buckets, shovels, wool etc. from the army and procuring it to safely deliver them to the refugees the boys aspire a great deal which was an additional challenging aspect when Sohail’s mother and sister Maya were the added challenge before them. Maya from *A Golden Age* by Tahmima Anam finds no peace to settle herself due to the development that has been wrought in the city. The natives living in Bangladesh continually lived under threat as the army marches over past the city area. Notwithstanding the disruption caused in the city, the youths have joined hands to practice at the university to fight back their perpetrators. On the other hand, Maya, deeply upset by her friend Sharmeen’s missing out, leaves early and returns home just before the siren of the curfew.

Violence in family, attributed to the harsh methods adopted by patriarchy, giving rights to husbands and allies seem more frequently witnessed in the society both in Bangladesh and India. More threatening are the cases about acid attacks and abuse of women recorded by Bangladesh. When a woman refuses claims by the suitor, majority of the cases are observed.

Husband is the rightful owner and has rights to correct wife if she forgets her bounds. Even women endorse the same and support the law stated and applied by the traditional society. These laws prevent the growth of women in their lives. As a result they are neglected in perusal of dreams and becoming successful in life.

Zubaida, a character from *The Bones of Grace* by Tahmima Anam lost herself completely in search of the fossil and adapted in a new world which marks her identity as a Bangladeshi Palaeontologist. "Along with the recognition of the plurality of our identities and their diverse implications, there is a critically important need to see the role of choice in determining the cogency and relevance of particular identities which are inescapably diverse." (P-04 Amartyasen.) She had the company of her friends whom she met on her expedition. Among the others, Bettina, a law student who had her boyfriend living in New York. She had her own doubts and debated over it whether she should return to Cambridge after the field work. At last, ended up deciding that she could write her thesis easily in Dhaka. In America, she had obtained scholarship but due to lack of determination to stay in the country made her think of living in Dhaka and completing the thesis for doctoral degree, yet she knew many such degrees are incomplete.

The non-egalitarian gender norms enforced are generally perceived to be the caustic imposition of domestic and sexual violence subjected on women. In some customs women are restricted to enter kitchen or cook food during their menstrual cycle. They are made to sleep on the floor with just a thick sheet. In villages and tribal huts there were also reports of women dying from snake bites. There are instances that have been recorded in Simone De Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex* that menstrual blood makes women impure. During this period, they were restricted entry into kitchen, farm, kept away from fathers, brothers and sisters and so on. In Manu and other religions, a man is prohibited from sexual intercourse. He is condemned of impurity if ever he transgresses. The laws pertaining to this perpetuated with more vigour and carried out further by the following generations. There had been close affinity drawn with the fermentation of crops and soil infertility accounting to menstrual impurity.' The Laws of Manu are even harsher: 'The wisdom, energy, strength, and vitality of a man coming near a woman stained by menstrual excretions perish definitively.' Priests ordered fifty days of penance for men who had sexual relations during menstruation''.

Women married at an early age are the targets of domestic violence as they are too young to resist. One of the apparent reasons for the increase in domestic violence could be the demands for dowry and the monetary payments they negotiate to pay as a gift to the grooms. When the bride's family is unable to meet with the demands placed by the groom's family, it leads to threats, continuous harassment, torture, disputes with in-laws; finally, the battered victim having to yield to their demands, is driven to a traumatic situation or committing suicide. Similar predominant marital issues are pervasive by the newly married adolescent girls. These teenage girls tend to confront health issues as the post -marital problems perpetuate very soon in their lives. Frequent reported cases associated with these girls are; no contraceptive use prior to first childbirth, rapid repeat childbirth, unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy termination, female genital mutilation and sterilization. These are instances of

gendered based violence which becomes cause for their violation of personality and directs them toward trauma.

Women who are sexually assaulted in their adolescent, whether in post marital rape or by intimate or non-intimate relationship become poor victims. They are severely affected in their health. It increases the risk factors and undermines the maternal health. Maya, the lead character in *The Good Muslim* by Tahmima Anam, Bangladeshi writer confronts such instances which takes her breath out. Her companion and friend from Rajshashi become the victim of patriarchy whose husband, suspecting her in the name of fidelity whipped lashes of one hundred. As the situation compounded to weakening her friend's sturdiness, Maya reaches out to the rescue miscounting the lashes for hundred and gets wounded with a cut on her throat. She felt daunted by the magnitude of developments that bears to witness the prevailing conditions. The intense pain that Nazia undergoes in assuming the role of a wife and a mother on having accused of her honesty does not find any way out and hence severely wounded by the whipped lashes was found lying on the hospital bed.

The laws pertaining to women's marriage in the Muslim custom are primarily based on religious tradition (mahar) by the groom, mahar is a payment or property promised to the bride at the time of marriage. Under this system the wife has right over filing suit in case of divorce or desertion by the husband. But to take any step that could offer a better life especially in the customs consisting traditional roots need vigour and strength from the battered victim. Which is lacking in women like Nazia and more such war victims whose dead babies Maya had delivered.

Nazneen, from Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* has lived through 'Pushing and Breathing' for life. Having abandoned to live out her life, she had never questioned the mystery behind "How You Were Left to Your Fate". A comically solemn child tilted her large head back with equanimity when her mother tells her "to be still, in her heart and mind and accept the Grace of God" 'What could not be changed must be borne' P-15 (Anam) were the philosophical words she tied herself with. Although married to a man double to her age, she accepted life as it was. After losing one child out of the three children, she felt all her pleasures are associated with her husband. No secondary thoughts ran into her mind when Dr. Azad a frequent guest visits to meet Chanu to dine with them. "A woman should be diligent to perform her duties towards the man".(P-67, Gilbert &Gubar) Washing dishes left out last night and every routine of domestic work she does as a dutiful wife. When Chanu looks at his little toe, she thinks of cutting the corns that has been overgrown. "Although nature has not made women so strong of body and so clear of understanding as the ablest of men, yet she has made them fairer, softer, slenderer and had laid in tender affections as love, piety, charity, patience, humility and the like." (P-219 Gilbert & Gubar)

The typology of violence that both men and women suffer cause injury to their health both physically and psychologically. Yet another typology of crime associated with violence is unemployment. In the rising global job market, unemployment is a gigantic persistent problem. In true sense, the major cause behind unemployment could be lack of education for the job availabilities, improper planning, lack of transparency in organizations and institutes.

Here I meant lack of transparency for insufficient accuracy for being a claimant as permanent employee. Most jobs demand steady work with their own specifications which may not suit the individual's pursuit. We come across a similar pursuant having lost faith from the recruiters, could not accomplish his aimed dreams. "When I came, I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane, I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.' As he told the story, his voice grew. It filled the room. 'That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different.'"(P-34, Ali) a character named Chanu from Monica Ali's Brick Lane, who was married to a girl about half his age, narrates his pathetic tale to his wife as to how he landed on to the country London with his dreams unsettled.

In many crime related cases it has been observed that the job seekers who were unable to pursue their interests are led to squandering and criminal activities. Which may also lead to involvement in scams and other terrorist activities. These days crime related cases are frequently reported on social media for its increasing violent crimes. In the recent years in Bangladesh, the Muslim clerics' contribution towards Counter Violent Extremism played a remarkable role. About 100,000 Islamic scholars, clerics, and legal experts signed a fatwa (religious verdict) issued by a leading Islamic group in the presence of Maulana Fariduddin Masoud, Chairman of Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulema (BJU) in the year 2016. This fatwa condemned all kinds of violence that includes terrorism and militancy, targeted on all religious groups, non-Muslims, writers and social activists. Hence, the condemned acts were publicly declared as "Haraam," or forbidden in Islam. However, with all security measures, it poses a threat as planning and execution to rehabilitate the offenders involved in violence remains unsettled. Experts and professionals lack well organized approach in various fields of socio- political and technological development. Merely a comprehensive programme and collective efforts could offer better society.

In order to establish peace from the apparent belligerent rule of distorting Muslim identity, the fundamentalists and Islamic clerics stand on quite a challenging state of affirmation to assert the very cause of liberating Islam from the clutches of terrorism. The western politics tend to suppress Muslims in a singular identity. Muslims like all other people in the world have different pursuits. He or she may have connected with class, gender, occupation, food habits, aesthetic taste and so on.

Many agencies and systems of justice under crime have been operating to reduce crime against, men and children. It is a complex set up organized which includes the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the judiciary, the magistracy and clerks of the court. A wide range of task is carried out such as crime prevention, law enforcement, provision of safeguards against injustice, punishment of offenders, and custody of offenders.(P- 04) In several cases on domestic violence and child abuse, the intervention by the police does not resolve the issue rather the case is withheld. However, a disciplinary offence is constituted against the officers who neglect the complaints made by the victim. Besides this, there (CPS) is meant to check whether the woman is willing to proceed or drop the case for fear of personal security. For many police, most incidents of what is called 'domestic violence' are

defined as relatively isolated or 'one-off' or relatively irresolvable, so that intervention is unlikely to produce change behaviour. (P-07) Ostensibly when crime is reported with apparent injuries like, bruises to arms and legs and traces of assaults on the body and unhealed wounds all these alleged acts are quite insufficient to proceed with the case. Significantly, the officers attempt more intensive approach to deal with the case within their peripheral authority.

Reports about violence among children has become a burning issue which calls for a long-standing assertion from maltreatment and child abuse. Such acts of interpersonal violence results to mental disorder and illness among children. As the child grows, these acts are established as a cause of behavioural disorders and trauma for life. People who are multiply disadvantageous and intersectional weak are the targets of such violence. Zaid, a six years old child who looked about four from The Good Muslim 'by Tahmima Anam abandoned to the mercy of the father after the death of the mother Silvi, was sent for Madrasa where he is expected to be educated and given reformation of formation of character into a new life. There the child, bereft of parental care and proper homely atmosphere is left to the care of Huzoor an Arabic master. He happens to confront myriad of challenges. Having to relinquish all his interests, the lonely child looks out for someone from home who could provide him proper need, but that was all to his dismay. The atmosphere at the madrasa was no good for the child's living not even the supper that was provided. It was all to the Huzoor's instructions that the children must live. Zaid experiences a break down in his life for the first time, "The Huzoor takes my hand. He puts my hand on his heat. His whip is a snake. His snake is a whip. Hands on the heat. In the Huzoor's hand.'" (P-195,Anam)

More than 900 frequent suicidal cases due to child abuse were recorded in the history; however, the great majority of child victims suffering from dreadful memories appear to have haunting life even after their growth. As the growing mind struggles to form new mode; a transformation from childhood, teenage and adult life, the legacy of the unforgettable past becomes increasingly, burdensome. Eventually, in a bold reconciling effort, the clouded old thoughts may begin to fragment or break down. This transition occurs with a resolution towards uprising after experiencing many phases of bitterness in the past.

More such cases are recorded on the social media where the abandoned child vents out his/her plight to the various organizations that help rehabilitate these children. "When I was about nine, a man overdosed in my house. I remember seeing him on the floor in our bathroom next to a needle, and lots of blood. I was scared and didn't know what to do but my dad just told me to go to my room. Soon after that I was referred to the NSPCC's FEDUP programme which does group work with children whose parents have drug or alcohol problems." NSPCC is one of those organizations that helps children overcome such experiences left unsettled in their family.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs are constantly devising measures to counter terrorism and ensure harmony. In one of the reports from Bangladeshi news, the Muslim community was kept informed to prepare pre-sermon speech and guarantee the safety of the students who went missing more than ten days. Further the

educational institutions have also been inspected to see that the teachers, parents, and students remain vigilant. In order to envisage a government free from terrorism police involvement is made mandatory at emergency. Currently, the number of universities are thirty-seven in public and 95 in private sectors of the country with more than 600,000 students' population. The Bangladeshi government under various projects of media sensitizing control is planning to develop the technological capacity of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) to enhance and detect extremist websites and twitter. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is actively working to bring good results.

A distinctive person who takes over many attributes in building self towards living thus left with bare chances of survival and longing to identify its own self. The withdrawn self after long persistent endeavour, attempts to regenerate energies; besides, the mutilated self finds it difficult to emerge into a new life. Bestowed with brain and sense, human beings are the creatures ought to derive satisfaction by sharing wise ideas and intellects. As long as they promote this factor, they widen their horizons and open desires into new areas and avenues which could define their identity. But the same is ensnared if it is subjected to suppression.

The war rape victims from *A Golden Age* were treated by Rehana Haque and Maya at the rehabilitation centre. As a doctor she had seen many dead babies delivered during war by the rape victims. All those rape victims were mentally prepared to marry the army men who had sexually assaulted them as there was no other go. Their family members had rejected them for losing their virginity even their husbands were not ready to accept the fact.

All cases adhering to women, unemployed youth and those with domestic violence implicated need a long stand to affirm safety in society. The Bangladesh government has come up with the microcredit loan programs or otherwise they try to seek employment opportunities to reduce the vulnerability and empower women. However, the study insisted education as the sole legitimate prospect by which it can promote the earning potential and liberate maximum women from dowry harassments and domestic violence for women related issues in Bangladesh. To safeguard and protect the masses from crime atrocities and abhorrence acts, a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was activated in the year 1948. In search of finding and constructing an identity of her choice she often gets frustrated and doomed to trauma but narratives of these two writers pave a way out as they offer a solution to tackle this situation in a feminine way- 'push and breathe', give birth to a safer new world of hope, dignity and love.

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