



The Presentation Of Resistance And Opposition In Nasreen Jahan's Novel 'Sonali Mukhosh'

Dr. Barunjoyti Choudhury^{1*},

^{1*}Associate Professor, Department of Bengali, Assam University, Silchar.

Citation: Dr. Barunjoyti Choudhury, et.al, (2023) The Presentation Of Resistance And Opposition In Nasreen Jahan's Novel 'Sonali Mukhosh', *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 29(3), 973 - 977
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i3.7611

The term "post-colonial" is not temporal or chronological; primarily, it is consciousness-evoking. It would be a mistake to think of post-colonial consciousness as merely following colonialism in terms of time. The main characteristic of post-colonial consciousness is protest against and rejection of the center of power and authority. Even literature created during colonial times can reflect various signs of post-colonial consciousness. During the colonial period, literature could also express the voice of the subaltern and lower classes in protest. In the introduction to the book "The Post-Colonial Studies Reader," edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, they wrote:

"'Post-colonial' as we define it does not mean 'post-independence', or 'after colonialism', for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism rather begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality..."¹

During the colonial period, a certain kind of parasitic behaviour was observed among the intellectual class, which the post-colonial consciousness seeks to defeat and reject. This idea is referred to as the "discourse of oppositionality" in the above quote. The protest, resistance, and rejection by the exploited, deprived, oppressed, and marginalized lower classes are the fundamental inspirations and weapons of post-colonial consciousness. Recently, humanism has also become associated with the stream of post-colonial consciousness. The above editors, while discussing the fundamental concept of post-colonial consciousness in that book, have said:

"The post-colonial project of dismantling the Centre / Margin binarism of imperial discourse."²

While interpreting the significance of post-colonialism, Kwame Anthony Appiah notes that the "post" in post-colonialism carries a different meaning than the "post" in postmodernism, and he further asserts that they are distinct from each other. According to him, post-colonialism "is the post of a space-cleaning gesture, a gesture which... can sometimes be characterized as 'post-realist', 'post-nativist', and transnational rather than national categories which describe the 'post modernisation' rather than the post-colonial text."³ In this way, various thoughts and ideologies have merged with the post-colonial consciousness. The concept of post-colonial consciousness is closely related to ideological and value-based positions. During the colonial era, especially in Bengali contexts, literature and other branches of aesthetics marginalized lower-class people, and women's own voices became faint and unheard under the weight of patriarchy. The struggle to place these marginalized people, including subaltern women, at the centre of discourse is one of the main issues of post-colonial consciousness. The lives of ordinary people were made unbearable under the oppression of religious exploitation and centralized power. Wherever the arrogance of power and authority tightly grips people, protest emerges—this is evident in the Bangladeshi novelist Nasreen Jahan's novel "Sonali Mukhosh," where marginalized lower-class people and women's voices are prominently featured.

Nasreen was born in 1964 in Mymensingh district, Bangladesh. With a deep passion for writing from a young age, she worked for a long time with an organization called "Chander Hat." The presentation style of her first novel "Urukku" is also reinstated in "Sonali Mukhosh." She has presented society in a logical and sensitive manner as she perceived it. Just as she brought the dirty aspects of society to the forefront of her novels, she is equally committed to restoring the social status of women. Religious exploitation and politics exploit rural life from the centers of power, while urban educated women repeatedly lose their way to liberation—this joint presence of village and city, along with the intense portrayal of protest and rejection, is the main subject matter of the discussed novel.

Nasreen Jahan's novels, such as "Urukku" (1993), "Chander Prothom Kola" (1994), "Jokhon Charpasher Batigulo Nibe Aschhe" (1995), "Chandralekhar Jadubistar" (1995), "Sonali Mukhosh" (1996),

"Shonkhonortoki" (2003), and "Shei Shaap Janto" (2010), vividly portray the harsh realities of contemporary society and time. Popularity has not weakened the novelist; rather, in each work, she embraces challenges to create new techniques and structures in her novels. Her novels remain ever vibrant in the hearts of global readers due to the conflict and tension between stability and dynamism.

In the novel "Sonali Mukhosh," there is a parallel expansion of two narrative arcs. Most of the characters in these two arcs are not acquainted with each other. However, the central characters of both stories, Nishi and Jahid, are known to each other and were once bonded in a humane relationship in the whirlpool of time. The settings of the two stories are also slightly different. The parallel presentation of the rural and urban settings brings another dimension to the novel.

Abdul Khaliq, a religious charlatan, exploits and rules over the illiterate and marginalized rural people through religion, blind faith, and superstitions. To honor his father's request, Jahid once ventures into a village steeped in blind faith and superstition to find his father's second wife. From the graves of that village emerges a two-headed python—the centerpiece of Abdul Khaliq's power. The depth of the villagers' superstition is revealed through the words of Hira's mother:

"Abdul Khaliq warned everyone to be cautious during a gathering. He advised focusing on religion, stating that the python could attack anywhere in various forms using its magic. Like everyone else, I have planted talismans around the house... Late at night, I was dozing off when suddenly I heard a sound. I opened my eyes and saw darkness like that of a robber's... Groping my way to the veranda, I saw some ghostly shadows, and under their shadows, my daughter was writhing like a beheaded chicken. You know, I didn't even recognize my daughter then... The most astonishing thing was that every shadow looked the same, as if there were five or six identical twin brothers. When I screamed, they gagged me and tied me to that pillar you see on the veranda. Then, before my eyes, they...my young daughter, who was still healthy..."⁴ (translated by self) This passage reveals the villagers' deep-seated fear and superstition, manipulated by Abdul Khaliq for his own power. It highlights the novel's theme of the clash between superstition and reason, rural and urban life, and the exploitation of the vulnerable by those in power. Rural religious businessmen exploit the fears of superstition and backwardness among rural people to build vast empires of talismans and charms. Abdur Khalik, a religious entrepreneur, establishes a tyranny to exploit and oppress ordinary people. Despite his involvement in religious business, he doesn't hesitate to assault young girls like Hira. When trying to ascertain Hira's age, her mother mentions, "Her body had not yet deteriorated." Hira seems not to be an individual entity but rather embodies all the young girls of that village at her age. Using superstition for profit on one side and alleviating physical hunger on the other, Nasreen Jahan vividly portrays the harsh realities of rural life in front of readers. While urban dwellers aspire for happiness and freedom, simultaneously, in parallel rural settings, people struggle under the scarcity of food, clothing, and shelter, while being exploited under the palatial estates of religious businessmen. Through her novelistic consciousness, she presents two distinct narratives, depicting two different times and environments in the same narrative with great skill. She reflects life through the mirror of parallel realities in the novel, giving readers a deep understanding of life's availability in a similar alternative reality. In the novel's report, we find that blind faith and superstition are first challenged by Shohor's literacy. Jahid, an advocate for reason, attempts to educate the illiterate villagers. He argues that the two-headed snake, perceived differently at different times, has no factual basis and is rather absurdly humorous. Jahid further experiences that the village cannot achieve good results because "many people have abandoned the village and moved to the city in search of a livelihood. Whether it's true or not, there is some kind of immorality lingering here. There are thefts and robberies in people's homes, as if humans aren't doing it, but Satan is. People are trying to keep themselves stable in some way under the fear of the two-headed snake."⁵

In the village, people dare not speak out against theft, robbery, or assault. The fear of the two-headed snake is used by religious leaders as a center of power and influence. From this, ordinary people cannot find a way out; they blame themselves and their fate for the hardships of life. Even the village chairman fears these religious figures because they influence people during elections using fear tactics or by issuing fatwas to gain support for their chosen representatives. Jahid takes advantage of his father's prior acquaintance and visits the chairman's house, hoping for his assistance to alleviate the villagers' suffering. He had hoped the chairman would help and take initiative for the overall welfare of the village. However, like Khalik, the representatives themselves can maintain their own power, similar to religious figures like Khalik. Khalik and the chairman complement each other, complicating the cycle of power and oppression. People remain directionless in the complex web of power and exploitation, unaware of where, how, or through what means they can attain freedom from oppression in a significant part of the village population. The wise chairman realizes that to maintain power, he must engage in alliances and divisions with religious businessmen like Abdul Khalik - "No law, no council—nothing can be solved by giving them some food, those who do this make their cycle a big deal, for a chairman like me they are invalid. They don't want me to be chairman on my side."⁶ The complex vortex of politics, superstition, and misperception raises the same issue consciously in the novel.

The modern-minded rationalist Jahid confronts Abdul Khalik through various arguments, questions, and counter-questions. Just as a snake lifts its hood in anger when stepped on, similarly, Jahid is determined to

challenge Khalik through logical reasoning. By presenting the rural life's real-life portrayal as the focal point of the narrative, the novel urges ordinary, superstition-bound villagers to wake up. Jahid aimed to provoke questions among the villagers, making them understand that they are being exploited. He realized that without spreading awareness and establishing rational thinking among ordinary people, they cannot be led out of darkness into the light. As long as the villagers do not realize they are being exploited, it will not be possible to fight against oppression and the oppressors. If consciousness spreads among ordinary villagers, they can resist and reject religious business and centers of power. Jahid, educated in the city, brilliantly highlights the conflict between belief-systems and values, presenting problems and solutions adeptly in the novel.

When Jahid's sharp criticism strikes at the center of power, retaliation is inevitable. Jahid's vehement pronouncements against Abdul Khalik are like a lifelong challenge to authority: "Reject your two-headed snake's deception! I have no desire to witness such displays; I will leave."⁷ In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's language, "blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken for".⁸ The novel "Sonali Mukhosh" desires to establish the inherent voicelessness of people in the post-colonial era. Post-colonial consciousness is naturally resistant. Natural education is necessary for the spread of this consciousness. However, education and reasoning were limited among the 'babus'. In the 19th century, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocated education for all. He expressed that without the spread of education for everyone, human thought would remain enslaved. Vidyasagar's sentiment has been repeatedly obstructed in contemporary times. Disparities in education between urban and rural areas still exist—this is the reality depicted by novelist Nasreen Jahan. She cautioned readers that without parallel development between urban and rural areas, overall welfare in the country is not possible. If rural consciousness does not expand, they will continue to think like diamonds being exploited by their mothers, with the same face of 5/6 people collectively subjecting their daughters to physical abuse. She believed everyone had the same face because all these two-faced mentions of 'Satan' had a supernatural divinity. Rationalist Zahid claimed that 5/6 people with the same face could not come together in one place. Abdul Khaleq's devastation gradually revealed that Zahid had further awareness that everyone had the same kind of mask and that everyone had come to see the same kind of darkness at night. The novel "Sonali Mukhosh" revolves around the complex and multilateral relationships of Jalid, Sajidul, and Afzal, focusing on the central character of the middle woman Nishi. The dilemma of getting and not getting middle women, the burning of relationships, and the instability of relationships are presented to the readers in a very conscious way. The relationship of profound love with Nishi ended with Zahid. However, for two long years, marital relationships were still present between Sajidul and Afzal's banker employees. Nishi's life's first chapter saw Jalid's poetry strength, love, and respect. Zahid wanted to see Nishi's birthday, but Nishi misunderstood him on that matter. She thought perhaps Zahid wanted to become intimate with her physically, under the guise of wanting to see her birthday. Alone in quiet times, Nishi pondered, "Was it just my illusion of touch? I was completely innocent. Did he not feel that? There was no need for him to resort to deception just to touch me."⁹ Zahid had no other intentions towards Nishi besides wanting to see her birthday. However, due to misunderstandings on Nishi's part, her relationship with Zahid did not become permanent. Afterward, Nishi secretly married Sajidul. At that time, Sajidul worked as a clerk at Mamata's house, and he loved her with paternal affection. From Sajidul's side, there was boundless love for Nishi. In every chapter of life, he deeply involved her. At the end of each month, he handed over his salary to Nishi. Sajidul loved Nishi with all his possessions. He wanted to spend a hopeful married life with her. However, that deep love turned into separation due to false allegations against Sajidul. In the novel's report, there is an analysis of his influence: "During Nishi's illness, he changed her sanitary napkins, fed her with his own hands, saved money from cigarettes to buy her favorite cosmetics, and when he saw a blind beggar like Sajidul, he stopped his rickshaw and gave him money, leaving a job at an office and telling him to sit back and do the job. Although he had plenty of opportunities, he did not earn any extra money, never thinking of returning the loan from him, and only what came out in the newspaper! He has given up two lakh rupees in that office!"¹⁰

In the newspaper, the news of false accusations had a profound impact on Nishi's fragile mental state. Caught in that turmoil, deep love turned to ashes, and a separation in their relationship ensued. Under family pressure, Nishi quickly forgot Sajidul's intense love. Their long-standing human relationship faltered in the face of respect and commitment. In Nishi's fragile mental state, there existed only distance, no questions, no inquisitive thoughts. Without considering whether Sajidul was at fault, Nishi distanced herself at the peak of crisis from the person who loved her. Seeking liberation from a life intertwined with Sajidul, Nishi viewed love as a loss in terms of dignity and commitment. When human love is sold in the market, when love can be easily bought with money and power, Nishi harbored no doubts about choosing an eternal path away from Sajidul. In today's modern world, where people have become increasingly selfish and preoccupied with themselves, Nishi and Sajidul's unfinished love story portrays the stark reality before the readers with skillful finesse.

Within a year of Sajidul's imprisonment, Nishi married Afzal. However, even with this marriage, Nishi could not find happiness. For a long time, mentally, Nishi and Afzal remained emotionally distant under the same roof. Sometimes Jahid, sometimes memories of Sajidul, haunted Nishi throughout her life. Through a medium of a balanced mental state, Nishi's character, characterized by a past of indulgence, emotionlessness, and a wavering mindset, was vividly portrayed to the readers through her successful narrative. In Mamata Di's words, the conflict between achieving and not achieving in Nishi's life, the struggle between dreams and the realities, erupts: "Facing the question of where to stand amidst the grip of reason, surrender there, Nishi, you are

intensely fearful and opportunistic. Don't take sorrow; whatever your dream, even if it disrupts peace, you must strive to attain it. If someone had effortlessly placed that dream in your hands, you would have lost your enthusiasm."¹¹

Afzal worked at the bank, yet his family continued to suffer financial crises. It seemed like a perpetual financial crisis of the middle class. All of Afzal's earnings went towards fulfilling various household needs without end. Nishi wants to become independent and increase the family's income. Inspired by her college friend Chhanda, Nishi takes up modeling to earn money. In the novel's report, speaking about Chhanda, Nishi says, "Where I work, they told me if I find a stunning girl with great hair—your words came to mind immediately. Any work in the world can change due to a change in perspective. This beautiful competition, someone thought it was another step for women, someone thought this woman was turned into a product in a grotesque way."¹² This quote connects the beautiful competition with the market economy. In the context of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many beauty pageant winners came to Asia, including India. As a result of these beauty pageants arriving in India over the past few years, the cosmetics industry's market has continued to grow steadily. Several cosmetic manufacturers have quickly become mountain owners in just a few years. Although many have highlighted this beauty pageant competition as another step forward for women's empowerment, it is actually a new strategy in the realm of product development. Thus, the third world population, especially women, began to be imprisoned. This subject claim extended discussion. Advertising dominated society's appreciation of only a few candles. The in-depth examination of the novelist's female production line questions the new trend and puts its weight in the hands. But the remote control of that freedom remains in the hands of men. In Reza and Swati's conversation, this issue becomes clear: "Reza's loud voice is heard, 'See how much freedom I have given you. Swati, for a moment, feels embarrassed, 'This freedom of mine, you have given it, not the creator, not my capability, not my personality, not the foundation of my freedom, you have tied the knot of that in your hands, and you are proudly proclaiming it. This is my pain.'"¹³

Svati is self-aware, an individual shining with independence. It is through Svati's intense articulation that the spark of human consciousness can be observed. She, being self-reliant, has found ways to respond firmly against her husband. Through the empowerment of women, women's independence will come, and human consciousness will expand – this message emerges before the readers through the strong narrative of the novel. Previous generations of Nishi and Jahid have risen with importance in the novel 'Sonali Mukhosh'. Jahid has presented the characters of Jahid's parents, Afzal's parents, and Nishi's parents side by side in the novel. The novelist has conveyed the message of hope to oppressed, uneducated, and exploited people. In the novel, every character repeatedly breaks the mask. The novel has brought different measures through the report of the novel, truth-lie, oppressor-oppressed, rural-urban presence. Just as rural lower-class people have tried to make the conscious journey, so have the severe pain of middle-class women brought before the readers. Foolish people have tried to awaken awareness outside the threshold of blindness, superstition, and pollution, and have gone through social dignitaries. The reader's appreciation raises the suppressed voice of local people. The message of 'Sonali Mukhosh' novel emerges from the signal of light inside the darkness in the rise of rural and urban combined presence and human consciousness. The protest, resistance, and rejection against central power and social and cultural dominance are spreading in the novel. Central power's power and arrogance repeatedly collapse in the novel. The reader's creation of consciousness in the awakening of lower-class consciousness and the surge of human consciousness is eternal in the novel. By re-establishing ideals and values, the attempt to build an alternative environment can be seen in the novel 'Sonali Mukhosh'. The main sign of the post-colonial consciousness is to challenge all central powers. Those who were confined to the periphery for a long time brought the suppressed voice to the center of the reader's consciousness with great consciousness. The novel 'Sonali Mukhosh' has again established the suppressed voice of the resident people in the reader's consciousness with great consciousness. An attempt to build an alternative and competitive environment in the context and periphery's taunting is noticed in this novel. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words: "a work to name the margin. Perhaps, that is what the audience wanted to hear: a voice from the margin."¹⁴

References:

1. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin; *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Edited); Routledge, 2003, Page – 117.
2. *ibid*, page – 117.
3. *ibid*, page – 118.
4. Nasreen Jahan; Panchti Upponnash; Onnoproakash; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Prothom Prokash, 2003; Prishtha – 285.
5. *ibid*, page – 299.
6. *ibid*, page – 362.
7. *ibid*, page – 403.
8. Pal Ahluwalia and Bill Ashcroft; *Orientalism*; Edward Said, Routledge, New York; 2009; Page – 51.
9. Nasreen Jahan; Panchti Upponnash; Onnoproakash; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Prothom Prokash, 2003; Prishtha – 377.

10. ibid, page – 283.
11. ibid, page – 334.
12. ibid, page – 349.
13. ibid, page – 280.
14. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Outside in the Teaching Machine; Routledge; New York; 1993, Page – 55.