

BENGALI NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN *FAGUN HAWAY* (IN SPRING BREEZE, 2019)

Reffat Ferdous¹
Saiyeed Shahjada Al Kareem²

Abstract

The years 1948-1952 were pivotal for the history of Bangladesh. The question of what would be the state language was raised by the people of this country. Muslim leaders in Pakistan, at the time, believed that Urdu should be the state language because it had become recognized as the cultural symbol of sub-continental Muslims. However, most of Pakistan's population, the Bengalis of eastern Pakistan, to whom Urdu was a foreign language, considered it a ploy by the West Pakistanis to colonize East Pakistan. Protests erupted across East Pakistan after the then Prime Minister of Pakistan replaced Bangla as the state language with Urdu. On February 21, 1952, a student protest resulted in the deaths of some students by police. The language movement drew Bengalis' attention to their collective aspirations to create a new nation and nationalist identity, leading them to fight for an imagined sovereign state, Bangladesh. Against the backdrop of our language movement, *Fagun Haway* (In Spring Breeze, 2019), a film by Tauquir Ahmed, captures the anecdotes of Pakistani repression towards Bengalis by portraying the nationalist consciousness and identity approaches of this nation. Employing the concept of nationalism and the historical development of our identity approaches, this paper shows that Ahmed displays the coexistence of Bengali and Muslim identity approaches as well as the contentious relationship between these two approaches inside our nationalism at that time. Besides, Bengaliness is viewed as the dominating approach when the debate over the state language turns into a divisive political one and a fight for our very existence.

Keywords: Bengali Nationalism, Identity Approaches, Language Movement

Introduction

The emergence and development of nationalism and nationalist concepts in Bangladesh is the historical saga of a people searching for their destiny and a

¹ Reffat Ferdous, Assistant Professor, Department of Television, Film, and Photography, University of Dhaka. Email: reffat_ferdous@du.ac.bd

² Saiyeed Shahjada Al Kareem, Lecturer, Department of Television, Film, and Photography, University of Dhaka. Email: skareem@du.ac.bd

way to establish their shared identity. The partition of India and Pakistan based on religion in the 1940s, the birth of Bangladesh based on Bengali nationalism “within less than a quarter century of the achievement of Pakistan” (Kabir, 1987), and the gradual reemergence of religion as a crucial aspect of identity in post-1971 Bangladesh all serve as catalysts for the formation of Bangladeshi nationalism. An abiding sense of belongingness to religion, particularly the Islamic faith, became the primary source of nationalist identification during and immediately after the separation of India and Pakistan. However, this religion-based political identity could not avoid the significant conflicting issues of economic and political life in Pakistan for long. Despite being a part of Pakistan, the Bengali community developed its consciousness as a well-defined entity with its own distinct culture, linguistic differences, and aspirations. At that time, the political emergence of Bengali ethnicity centered on the demand for Bangla as the state language. Consequently, religion was supplanted as the primary focus by language with the emergence of Bengali nationalism. At the East Pakistan Literary Conference held in Dhaka on December 31, 1948, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah described this “As much as we are Hindus or Muslims, the greater truth is that we are Bengalis. This is a reality, not idealism. Mother nature has imprinted *Bengaliness* on our faces and languages in such a way that it cannot be concealed by a *garland-tilaka-tiki* or a *dhoti-lungi-saree*” (Umar, 1970, p. 118). The profound appeal to this linguistic identity paved the way for a successful movement that resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation in 1971. These historical phenomena continue to attract the attention of many Bangladeshi filmmakers as a core theme for their film narratives. Tauquir Ahmed, for his *Fagun Haway* (In Spring Breeze, 2019), certainly occupies a central place in this list.

Ahmed’s film *Fagun Haway* (2019) is a blend of history and drama genres that intermingles the history of the language movement between 1948 and 1952 with the birth of an *imagined community* known as Bangladesh. The film, inspired by Tito Rahman’s short story *Bou Kotha Kou*, is worthy of studying since it takes us back to the root of our freedom movement. Before Ahmed’s endeavor, the Language Movement had only received partial cinematic attention in *Jibon Theke Neya* (1970) by acclaimed director Zahir Raihan and in *Bangla* (2006) by Shahidul Islam Khokon. However, *Fagun Haway* (2019) is the first feature film entirely based on the 1952 movement. This paper aims to analyze how Bengali nationalism and identity approaches have been portrayed in *Fagun Haway* (In Spring Breeze, 2019) since the film foregrounds numerous perspectives on the construction of Bengali nationalism. The study adopts a constructionist epistemological stance

to critically examine these representations. Constructionism, as defined by Crotty (1998, p.42), suggests that narratives are shaped by their socio-cultural contexts. This perspective allows for an exploration of how the film constructs and communicates these themes, taking into account societal discourses and viewers' interpretations. Given the film's nationalist undertones, comprehending its narrative requires a theoretical framework that sheds light on the process of nation-building and identity formation within the Bangladeshi community. A conceptual definition of nationalism, as defined by various scholars, coupled with the historical context of Bengali nationalism, provides a valuable interpretive lens. This qualitative study primarily employs textual analysis of the film to address the research questions, supplemented by secondary sources to support the arguments.

Research Questions

The key research question of this study is to discern how Bengali nationalism is manifested in *Fagun Haway* (2019). Based on this inquiry, the paper will examine-

- a) How does Ahmed portray the Bengali nationalist consciousness among the people of this country during the Language Movement?
- b) In what ways do the cinematic techniques and the narrative structure of the film construct our identity approaches, particularly *Bengaliness* and *Muslimness*?

Theoretical Framework

Concept of Nationalism

Nationalism, one of the most multifaceted and elusive concepts of the present time, is the political ideology of a state, which unites a group of people into a strong political identity, that is, a *nation*. Gellner (1983, pp.1-2), in his seminal essay *Nation and Nationalism*, contends that nationalism emerged in Europe at the end of the 18th century due to the transition of an agrarian society into an industrial society. In an agrarian society, ethnocultural homogeneity among states was neither presented nor needed. However, once industrialization began, cultural homogeneity became essential. If members of the existing ethnic or cultural groups inside the modern industrial state are unable to function as homogenized cultures, differences between them exacerbate. This uneven expansion of industrialization invokes nationalism among the deprived nations. Gellner, in this regard, considers nationalism as a 'contingent, artificial, ideological invention', which 'engenders nations' (1983, pp.55-56) where they do not exist. By revising

Gellner's modernist thesis, political scientist and historian Anderson (2006, p.4) contends that "nationality, nation-ness as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kinds". To elaborate his argument, he offers an incisive way of looking at nationalism by defining a nation as "an imagined political community" that is "inherently limited" in nature and "sovereign" in scope. The nation is imagined because it is impossible for the members of even the smallest nation to know every member of their community and to be connected with each other. Yet, unselfconsciously, they hold a single political identity in their mind. Conversely, this imagined community is limited since, regardless of size, no nation can think that people all over the world will one day become coextensive of their nation. Likewise, it is sovereign because every nation has its own governance. Finally, it is a community due to its ability to consolidate people in a deep horizontal comradeship, which makes it feasible for millions of people to die willingly for such an imagined community (2006, pp. 5-7). In a similar vein, scholar Renan refers to the nation as a 'soul', a 'spiritual principle', noting that it is the result of years of labor, sacrifice, and dedication, much like the person. A nation is, therefore, a vast group of individuals bound together by a common experience of having made and being prepared to make sacrifices (2018, p. 261). Thus, according to Joseph Stalin, "a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 20), and a continuous narrative of national progress and a system of cultural signification as exhorts by Bhabha (1990, pp. 1-2). In Tagore's words, a nation is a 'political and economic union of a group of people, in which they come together to maximize their profit, progress and power' (Tagore, 1917, p. 19); it is 'the organized self-interest of a people, where it is least human and least spiritual' (Tagore, 1917, p. 26). In contrast to a nation, which is a community, a state is defined by its territorial boundaries and is governed by legal and political organizations. Despite their distinct characteristics, the concepts of nation and state are intertwined and cannot be examined in isolation. As Max Weber (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 25) posits, a nation is a 'community of sentiment' that typically aspires to establish its state. This notion prompts the consideration of Hobsbawm's (1992, p.10) assertion that 'nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way around'. Therefore, Thapar says, nationalism upholds principles that provide justice and equal rights by strengthening 'democracy, territory, and power'. Moreover, notions of nations founded on a 'single exclusive identity', such as those based on religion, language, ethnicity, or other characteristics, are essentially 'pseudo-nationalisms' and shouldn't be permitted to be referred to as nationalism

(2016, pp. 12-13). Conversely, Nandy, in his influential work, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (1994), meticulously scrutinizes Rabindranath Tagore's political novels, shedding light on Tagore's unconventional interpretation of national ideology. Nandy posits that figures like Tagore perceived Western-conceived nationalism as an unintended consequence of modernity. Despite embracing this conventional view of nationalism, they advocated for a form of 'universalism' deeply rooted in the multifaceted traditions of their society.

These conceptual notions provide insights into why Bengali nationalism emerged before the formation of the *imagined community* known as Bangladesh. The collective consciousness of Bengali nationalism, which surfaced among the Bengali populace of East Pakistan, was a consequence of a series of incidents, conflicts, disparities, and persecutions over a century. This consciousness propelled them toward the establishment of an independent secular nation-state in 1971. While numerous elements and historical experiences contributed to the propagation of nationalism, language, and religion were instrumental in shaping the identity of the Bangladeshi people. The following section discusses the emergence of Bengali nationalism influenced by different identity approaches among Bangladeshi people at different times.

Identity Approaches in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, nationalism originated as a result of the two most significant components in the process of compound identity formation—language and religion—where *Bengaliness*, an ethno-linguistic identity, and *Muslimness*, a religio-linguistic identity, emerged (Akhter, 2014a). During the medieval age, *Bengaliness* spread through Bengali literature and culture. Predominantly this identity approach as national identity was converted into the Bengali Language Movement in 1952 in East Pakistan and gave birth to Bangladesh through the Liberation War of 1971. On the other hand, during the 19th century, numerous Islamic reformist movements gave rise to a religious identity known as *Muslimness*. In 1947 Pakistan and India were established as two separate states based on this identity, which marked the beginning of the Pakistan movement in British India.

Citing Majumdar (1960), Karim (2004) states that Bengal which was mainly consisted of three major territories, once known as *Gangaradai* in early recorded history (Majumdar, 1960 as cited in Karim, 2004, p.41). Although little evidence can shed light on the racial origins of the Bengali people, some Indian authors harbor that Bengalis belonged to the tribe called *Bang*, who came from Indonesia

or Malaya. However, others suggest that Bengalis are the Dravidian and Mongoloid admixture who lost their homeland to the Aryan expansionists almost one thousand years B.C. Later they migrated toward the delta region (Karim, 2004, pp. 41-45). Aryans succeeded in mushrooming their influence in Bengal in the 5th century B.C. However with time, Aryans' Vedic Hinduism became localized by embracing the pre-Aryan religion and *agrarian practice* in Bengal. However, until the 11th century, Bengal was mainly governed by the Buddhist rulers. As a result, the influence of Hinduism was moderate due to its simultaneous contact with Buddhism. But in the year 1201 A.D., when Turkish General Muhammad-Bin-Khilji conquered Bengal (Sarker, 1973, p.32), this territory witnessed Muslim penetration who continued to rule Bengal, earlier by different independent sultans and later by the Mughals. However, several religious saints (Sufis), accompanied by Arab traders, arrived in this region prior to Khilji's invasion of Bengal in the 10th century A.D. to preach Islam in the various areas of Bengal. At this time, the Hindu-Buddhist culture, especially the liberal devotional sect (*Bhaktibad*) and philosophy in Bengal, were merged with Sufi Islam. Along with the spread of *Baul*, *fakir*, and other forms of mystical practices in Bengal, the amalgamation of these liberal streams of the three major religions produced a localized popular religious (Islamic) identity (Ohlmacher and Pervez, 2013, p. 156-157), which is still existent in the peripheral regions.

This liberal relationship between Hindus and Muslims persisted even under the Mughal rule of the Middle Ages. However, the Battle of Palassey in 1757, when the British conquered India, marked the beginning of the Hindu-Muslim strife (Karim, 2004, p.48). During the colonial period, Muslims endured deliberate discrimination in all spheres of administration, education, arts, and economic activity since the British considered them the direct descendants of the Muslim rulers who had been overthrown. On the contrary, a newly emerged English-educated middle-class Hindus who developed close ties with the British rulers took the positions of Muslims within the social system and attained socio-economic ascendancy. This disparity between Hindus and Muslims that prevailed in the 19th century accelerated the Muslim desire to form a middle class, which ultimately led to the formation of a separate Muslim nation in the 20th century (Akhtar, 2014a). Besides, Karim (2004) states that the lives of Bengali Muslims witnessed substantial transformation with the division of Bengal in 1905 and the founding of the Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906. Despite its reunion in 1911, numerous developments took place as well as communal politics grew more heated in Bengal during that time (p. 26). On the other hand, an Islamic reformist movement (Faraizi

movement) was founded by a Puritan Wahabist, Hazi Shariat-Ullah, to purify Islam from all subsequent unification politicized the mind of Bengali Muslims. All these events generated a new consciousness among Muslims as a community and encouraged the establishment of a separate nation-state within British India based on their Islamic identity. As a result, in 1947, a historic partition took place that divided India into two states based on Hindu and Muslim nationalism- India and Pakistan.

In interstate colonial Pakistan, dictatorship triumphed over democracy, and the state was established as an instrument of exploitation rather than the recognition of rights. Although Pakistan was founded on religious grounds, West Pakistan's rulers believed that the Muslims of East Pakistan had converted from low-class Hindus to Muslims and that their Islam had its roots in Arabia. To make Bengalis real Muslims, the West Pakistani government replaced Bengali with Urdu as the state language in the name of national unity. Right away, widespread agitation, particularly among students, started to emerge. This incident precipitated the Language Movement in 1952, which claimed the lives of several East Pakistani students. The historical Language movement inspired East Pakistan Bengali Muslims to consider themselves separate from Pakistani state consciousness and forge a new *imagined identity* known as *Bengali*. This ethnolinguistic identity, which was secular and culturally unique, served as the key motivator for the mass uprising against West Pakistan's discrimination and finally led to the formation of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971. Following independence, Bengali nationalism came to be recognized as the identity of this nation, while secularism was enshrined in the constitution as one of the fundamental principles. However, under President Ziaur Rahman's rule, he introduced the concept of 'Bangladesh' nationalism and changed the constitution to replace secularism with 'Absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah'. Furthermore, Hossain and Khan (2006) noted that the then-military government allowed right-wing religious parties, banned after the Liberation War by the Awami League government, to re-enter the political sphere. Citing Riaz (2002), they say this shift in national identity from Bengali to Bangladeshi was 'an attempt to incorporate religion into national identity'. This incident resulted from the 'Bangladeshi... Military rulers, who came to power in 1975', utilized Islam as a tenet to gain public support and address the legitimacy crisis. It also applied to 'Ershad, the military ruler who seized power after the murder of Zia' (Riaz 2003, as cited in Hossain and Khan, 2006). Consequently, the debate regarding whether the country's citizens identify as Muslims or Bengalis has resurfaced, perpetuating a contemporary identity problem. Employing the

above historical context as a foundation, the present study will examine how Bengali nationalism and identity approaches are displayed in Ahmed's *Fagun Haway* (2019).

Additionally, this study uses film narratology as the theory of textual analysis of the film to clarify the validity of the concept of nationalism and identity discourses in Ahmed's film. Introduced by formalist Tzvetan Todorov for literary analysis, the term 'narratology' was later used by many scholars for the study of film texts. It could be used to analyze texts as both a theory and a research method. According to Cutting (2016), film narratology enables viewers to explore how a film's story and narrative design influence our perception, cognition, and feelings toward the outside world. In this approach, "a narrative can be thought of as a chain of events occurring in time and space and linked by cause and effects" (Thompson, 1999, p. 10). To bind the visuals and sound into a cohesive whole, every film narrative requires a structure that gives the narrative meaning upon closer examination. Therefore, it is necessary to study narratology as a theory and research approach for describing the various narrative agents and levels of Ahmed's film systematically.

Literature Reviews: Identity issues as portrayed in Bangladeshi films

Studies on Bengali nationalism and identity construction in relation to film's aesthetic form have proliferated in the past two decades. Some Bangladeshi scholars and filmmakers address these issues in their works as the central theme. Scholars have analyzed different films, especially independent art house films, to identify the identity approaches imbued in Bangladeshi films.

In this regard, Akhter (2019) states that independent films of Bangladesh largely focus on building national identities for Bangladesh through the depictions of history, myths, customs, and memories. These independent films also placed a strong emphasis on portraying Bangladesh's cultural legacy and indigenous traditions. In her analysis, Akhter (2014b) examines the first nationalistic film of Bangladesh, *Jibon Thekey Ney* (1970), directed by renowned filmmaker Zahir Raihan. She found that this pre-independence film metaphorically portrays the repressive regime of Ayub Khan through a family melodrama, encapsulating the exploitation and national experiences of Bengalis. Akhter opines that the film, 'by presenting contemporary facts and ...shared narrative of Bengalis' (2014 b, p. 291), plays a significant role in constructing a sense of national identity. Thus, it could be seen as Bangladesh's first example of 'national cinema'.

To analyze the films during the 1980s, Akhter (2019) further looks at Morshedul

Islam's short film *Agami* (1984). She notes that the film evokes a collective sense of struggle and desire for change, countering the then-state-propagated narrative about the evolving Islamic identity and the Liberation War. Moreover, the Liberation War theme is heavily emphasized in these alternative films as a way to shape the national identity. Referring to films like *Agami* (1984) and *Nodir Nam Modhumoti* (1996), researcher Bulbul makes a similar argument that independent filmmakers from the mid-1980s onward considered Bengali nationalism as the spirit of the Liberation War and to resist religious communalism in the name of Islam (2011, p. 17).

To explore how *popular* and *art* cinema contributed to the creation and reconstruction of various concepts of the relationship between national identity, Islam, and modernity in contemporary Bangladesh, film scholar Raju (2011a, p. 94) examines two films from the 1970s, *Dost-Dushman (Friend and Enemy, 1977)* and *Surya Dighal Bari (The Ominous House, 1979)*. He found that these two cinematic discourses employ various, sometimes antagonistic interpretations of religion. In contrast to art films, which represented Islam as opposed to secular-nationalist and globally contemporary forces, mainstream cinema portrayed Islam as a popular, apolitical force that is supportive of global modernity. Likewise, Raju (2011b) examines the work of two of Bangladesh's most well-known filmmakers, Tanvir Mokammel and Morshedul Islam, to determine how art cinema discourse contributes to Bangladesh's identity disputes (p. 49). Their works, according to him, portray Islam as a traditionalist and hostile force to the contemporary, secular Bengali identity. The two directors' films advocate Bengali identity as the only identity for Bangladeshis, rejecting Muslim identification by depicting Islam as nothing more than Islamic fanaticism. In this context, Raju (2011a) claims that the conflict between secularism and Islamism—or, to be more precise, between secular cultural nationalism and religious communalism—has allegedly gotten worse in Bangladesh over the past three decades.

Haq's (2020) research similarly highlights this noteworthy pattern in Bangladeshi cinema, with certain secular-modernist filmmakers advocating for *Bengaliness* over *Muslimness*. His analysis shows that independent Bangladeshi films, such as Tanvir Mokammel's *Nodir Naam Modhumoti* (1996) and *Lalsalu* (2001), as well as Morshedul Islam's *Brishti* (2000) and *Khelaghor* (2006), emphasize *Bengaliness* while indirectly portraying *Muslimness* with negative connotations. This portrayal tends to be divisive, fueling tensions within society and deepening the divide between secular and Islamist identities in Bangladesh.

The only variation in the representation of Islam or Muslims on screen, as Raju (2008) observes, is projected by the veteran director Tareque Masud as his *Matir Moina* (*The Clay Bird*, 2001) strives to advance and resolve the conflict between Islam and Bengali culture (p. 127). The film depicts Islam as a diverse religion and Islamic education as a loving and compassionate approach to learn about variety. Taking insights from Raju's work, Ohlmacher and Pervez (2014) add that Tareque Masud, through his films *Matir Moina* and *Runway*, goes beyond simply attempting to resolve the tension that exists between Islam and Bengali culture (p. 159). The researchers claim that Islam processes a variety of voices, including folklore localization, mystic and devotional appeal, and conservative Puritan ideology in Masud's films. Together, these factors show how Muslim identity is at a crossroads because it is being renegotiated in a way that takes into account politics, culture, and everyday life. Scholar Haq (2020), echoes similarly by saying that *Matir Moina* (*The Clay Bird*, 2001) deliberately explores the syncretic identity by introducing the *popular religious identity* approach. On a relevant note, he mentions films like *Joyjatra* (2004) and *Shyamol Chhaya* (2004) that offered an alternative, kind, and positive portrayal of Muslim characters in contrast to the past representations.

Through the textual analysis of the selected films, Haq (2022) shows that while trying to depict *Bengaliness* as the prime identity and *Muslimness* as the other identity, existing 'further other' identities are not portrayed at all in Bangladeshi cinema. Referring to *Mor Thengari* (*My Bicycle*, 2015), a Chakma-language film that portrays the ethnic Chakma community in Bangladesh, he states that because of the dominant representation of *Bengaliness* and *Muslimness*, weaker identities have been homogenized (p. 191). Raju (2006) previously addressed the issue of "weaker identities" to comprehend how these identities were treated in Bangladeshi cinema. He contends that the cultural identities of minority groups living in Bangladesh, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts indigenous communities, are blatantly undermined in the films of Bangladesh. In a recent work, Hill and Chakma (2020) state that on one side, films have been used to impose different subjectivities on indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, but on the other side, however, on a short scale, indigenous groups themselves have used film to actively construct their distinct subjectivities to resist the imposition of identities (p. 78). They contend that indigenous cinema can serve as a catalyst for the development of a more diversified national identity.

Although these academic studies provide incisive evaluations of how nationalist notions and identity approaches are depicted in Bangladeshi cinema, they mainly

concentrate on films that are inspired by the Liberation War or contemporary art films. As a result, there is still a shortage of information on the representation of nationalism in films based on the Language movement. In addition, Tauquir Ahmed's works have also gotten no recognition from the scholarly community despite his continued contributions to the Bangladeshi film industry. This essay is an initial attempt to fill the knowledge gap within the realm of film studies, particularly with regard to Bangladesh.

Method

Employing film narratology as a technique, this study analyses the text of Ahmed's film *Fagun Haway* (2019) in accordance with the research's objectives. In his study on fiction narrative, film theorist and historian David Bordwell (1985) offers three key components that help to understand a narrative structure: *fabula*, *syuzhet*, and *style*. *Fabula* refers to a story that includes the action as a chronological cause and results of events taking place during a specific time and place. On the contrary, the actual organization and presentation of the *fabula* in a film is called the *syuzhet*, also called the plot. It contains "events, scenes, turning points, and plot twists" to illustrate a story. The third component, *style*, describes the technical requirements for filmmaking, including cinematography, composition, sound, and editing. According to Bordwell (1985), whereas *style* represents the film as a technical process, *syuzhet* represents it as a dramaturgical one. Thus, the narrative occurs as *style* and *syuzhet* coexist, offering the viewers a variety of clues for the development of a story (pp. 49-51). This paper critically analyzes the construction of nationalism and identity approaches in *Fagun Haway's* narratives (2019) while taking into account the narratological components and offers analytical remarks in view of the conceptual and historical dimensions of Bengali nationalism.

Analysis

Representing nationalism and identity approaches

Fagun Haway's (In Spring Breeze, 2019) narrative features a Pakistani police officer, Jamshed Khan (Yashpal Sharma), who is punished by being transferred to Chandranagar, an outlying area in Khulna. Nasir (Siam Ahmed), a student of Dhaka University, and a Hindu girl, Dipti (Nusrat Imrose Tisha), who attends the Dhaka Medical College, board the same launch in which he is travelling from Dhaka to Khulna. Jamshed raises his hand on a Baul when he hears him singing in Bengali. Nasir protests right away. Jamshed appears as a terror for the people of Chandranagar. He considers the Bengali language and culture as his archenemy.

Declaring Bengali a Hindu language, Jamshed swears to eradicate it from the village. Urdu is used on all Bengali signboards, and locals are given Urdu lessons by a Muslim priest (Mawlana). On the other hand, the local theatre troop prepares to stage Dinabandhu Mitra's anti-British play *Nil Darpan* as a protest against the exploitation of Bengalis by West Pakistanis. In that theatre group, Nasir and Dipti get to know each other and eventually fall in love. Meanwhile, Jamshed's persecution of the Bengali language and Bengalis increases. In this situation, the villagers demand that Bengali becomes the state language. At last, Jamshed runs away from the village in fear of dying.

The film consists of a series of sequences set in the early 1950s, depicting the coexistence of Bengali and Muslim identity approaches as well as the nationalist consciousness within Bengali nationalism. On the morning of December 23, 1951, during the winter, the narrative begins with an extreme long shot of Sadarghat being accompanied by a launch horn. Immediately afterwards, viewers are introduced to the male protagonist Nasir, wearing a loose shirt-pant with a half sweater, carrying a suitcase and a cloth-made bag. Nasir departs for Chandranagar to board the launch from Sadarghat. On the way, he encounters a bird vendor and asks the vendor if the birds sing in their native tongue. The question serves as the director's first attempt to imbue a sense of Bengali nationalism in the psyche of the viewers. In this context, Anderson (2001) argues that one of the tenets of nationalism is the idea that each true nation is marked off by a distinctive linguistic and literary culture that together conveys the historical brilliance of its people. In the next scene, Dipti and her grandfather bump into Jamshed while boarding the launch. There, Jamshed scolds them angrily in Urdu and raises his hand on a *Baul*. Nasir immediately protests and requests the *Baul* to sing the *Marfati* (mystic) song again. But once he refuses, Nasir begins singing Lalon Shah's song *all ask of what caste is Lalon* (Ahmed, 2019, 0:5:40). From the perspective of our identity approaches, *Baulism* is hailed as a well-known cult for its synthesis of three liberal religions philosophy-*Buddhists Tantrism, Vaishnavism, and Islamic Sufism*. Likewise, Lalon Shah is considered the most prominent philosopher and lyricist of *Baulism*. The *Bauls* propagate their mystic beliefs through songs in rural Bengal. According to Osmany (1992, p.54), these secular traditions of song, dance, and music have long amused and inspired the Bengali people. As a result, the folk genre became ingrained in the *animist beliefs, agrarian practices*, and the way of life of the people of this nation. Ahmed epitomizes this profound religious synthesis with another *Marfati* (mystic) song in the later section of the film: *the day when Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, caste or creed will no remain, when will the day arrive*

for such a human society (Ahmed, 2019, 1:06:01). The religious forbearance and spiritualism that are a part of Bengali identity are expressed in both songs. In fact, the reflection of this adherence to the non-communal principle has been one of the inherent vitality and strength of the rich cultural traditions of Bengali nationalism. Likewise, the love affair between Muslim boy Nasir and Hindu girl Dipti as well as the brotherhood among the Hindu and Muslim residents of Chandranagar, are other examples of how religious harmony exists within Bengali nationalism.

On the other hand, through the character of the lead protagonist Jamshed, director Ahmed portrays the political conflict and the story of the Bengali nation, which was denied the fundamental right to freedom of speech and blatantly tortured under the West Pakistani dictatorship. The narrative symbolizes police officer Jamshed as a representative of the entire West Pakistani dictator who is intolerant of Bengali language and culture, overly communal, corrupted, and considers himself the purest adherent of Islam. To portray this, the film contains numerous *mise-en-scène* and cinematic statements. For instance: when Jamshed arrives at the police station, he scolds the other soldiers for failing to meet him there. Jamshed remarks that *you Bengalis are lying* (Ahmed, 2019, 0:13:00) even after learning that the rest are unaware of his arrival. Jamshed thus views the Bengali nation as subordinate to the people of West Pakistan from the beginning of the narrative. In a subsequent scene, he told the Bengali soldiers that *Pakistan is the holy land for Muslims. Those who are not Muslims are infidels* (Ahmed, 2019, 0:31:04), and everyone in Chandranagar shall speak the sacred language of Urdu since Urdu is the language of Muslims and Pakistan. He reprimands everyone who speaks Bengali. When nearly everyone at the police station avoids talking to him because they do not speak Urdu, a Muslim priest (Mawlana) is brought in to teach everyone Urdu. In order to add a stylistic feature to the narrative, Ahmed uses a bird as a metaphor to represent the incident. An Indian Cuckoo, known locally as *Bou Kotha Kou*, is heard singing nearby while the priest (Mawlana) teaches Urdu to the Bengali-speaking village people. The bird has given its name because of the tone of its voice, which is remarkably similar to the Bengali expression *Bou Kotha Kou* (dear wife, please speak to me). Knowing the meaning behind the bird's name, Jamshed shoots at it and being failed order to catch it. Afterwards, we see Jamshed trying to teach the imprisoned bird Urdu by playing an Urdu song on the radio. The film thus symbolizes the conspiracy of the West Pakistani leaders, making Urdu the official language of Pakistan, which led to turmoil among Bengalis from all socioeconomic groups.

As *Fagun Haway* (2019) portrays the religious harmony that exists within Bengali nationalism, its narrative also addresses the existence and the contentious interaction between the two identities- *Bengaliness* and *Muslimness*. The character of the Muslim priest (Mawlana) serves as a strong representation of *Muslimness*, who considers East Pakistan as the homeland for Muslims and exhorts every *Malaun* (Hindu) to immigrate to India since that country belongs to Hindus. *Malaun* is a derogatory word for Bengali Hindus that is most frequently used in Bangladesh. The term originated from an Arabic phrase that means “accused” or “bereft of God’s mercy”, and Muslims in this region exercise it as a racial epithet and hatred towards Hindus. He advises *Malaun* (Hindu) shopkeeper Foni to rename his business Ammijan Sweet and Tea Shop rather than Krishna Kumari House because the word Krishna Kumari is derived from Hindi, and Krishna is one of the principal deities in Hinduism. Similarly, he refers to *Baul’s Marfati* (mystic) song, a song of the *Kafir* (unbelievers), as the folk genre rejects all forms of organized religion and worships humans instead of the Almighty Allah. The metaphorical usage of these phrases leaves the viewers with vivid images of the religious rift of the time and the strong presence of Islamic identity amidst our nationalism.

Precedents of this identity approach are also found in another character, Obayed, a theatre member and follower of the local Muslim League leader Azmat. He believes that Muslims require the state of Pakistan. Strong support for the Pakistani regime is voiced by Obayed in a scene while the drama’s cast members discuss the significance of performing *Nil Darpan*.

Obayed: A country for the Muslims was needed.

Nasir: Dividing a country on the basis of religion. Now the Pakistanis are dictating us.

Obayed: The Bengalis are lagging behind. They have to progress more.

Manju (Nasir’s cousin): But we have to be given that opportunity.

Obayed: I don’t agree. Those who are capable shall rule. (Ahmed, 2019, 0:17:40)

His willingness to support Pakistanis, who oppress and discriminate against Bengalis, established his personality as a West Pakistani ally. Some consecutive scenes are shown throughout the narrative to strengthen his metaphoric image as a pro-Pakistani. We initially see his contented expression in a mid-shot as Pakistani officer Jamshed forces Urdu on everyone. During the conversation with the theatre members, shopkeeper Foni informs that Obayed and other Muslim League

members are attempting to seize his land to erect a party office. He advises Dipti's grandfather, in an authoritarian manner, to sell his property to Azmat vai and migrate to India as they are Hindu. In a subsequent scene, when Jamshed informs Obayed and the local leader Azmat that Pakistan's prime minister has declared Urdu the country's official language, they both erupt in jubilation. Obayed refuses to participate in the play *Nil Darpan* because of its anti-government themes. Even he succeeds in stopping the play from being staged by ejecting the crowd and the entire theatre crew with the help of the police. From the historical backdrop, as stated by Karim (2004), *Fagun Haway's* (2019) narrative thus establishes a link with the communalism that developed under British Rule as well as the politicization of the Islamic identity that took root and gave rise to a new Bengali ethos at that time. In the final section of the narrative, Obayed exhibits extreme brutality as he kills Nasir's cousin Manju with a knife to stop the village youth group from painting anti-Pakistani graffiti. The scene comprises several dark, claustrophobic close-ups and medium shots with low-key illumination, top lighting, and jerky framing that augment the tension and cruelty of the narrative. Ahmed thus illustrates the enormities carried out in the name of Islam by Bengali accomplices of West Pakistanis.

To expound the nationalist consciousness and *Bengaliness* in viewers' minds, Ahmed employs various cinematic techniques and symbolic codes from the beginning of *Fagun Haway* (2019). The film opens with an interpretation "In 1947 Indian subcontinent was divided on the basis of religion, and Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan. The next 24 years are an era of deprivation and suppression. The people of Bangladesh, with a strong cultural heritage and history, were pressured to change their culture and language. On 27th January 1952, the Pakistan Government again declared that Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan" (Ahmed, 2019, 0:0:56) - which serves as a chapter heading and directs the viewers' attention to these aspects of the narrative. As the narrative progresses, Ahmed uses birds as a metaphor to connote this subjugation of the Bengali nation. In the film's opening section, during a scene on the launch, while Dipti is handling a bird, Nasir questions her about the benefit of caging a wild bird. The caged bird echoes the plight and helplessness of freedom-loving Bengalis in East Pakistan. Another scene counteracts the incident where several *Bou Kotha Kou* birds attack Jamshed in his dream, expressing the Bengali nation's rebellion against West Pakistanis. Likewise, to heighten patriotic resistance, Ahmed deftly utilizes traces from Bengali literature and songs in *Fagun Haway* (2019). The film features Tagore's songs in Dipti's voice and encompasses one of the well-known

anti-British poems by eminent Bengali poet Sukanta Bhattacharya-*Deslai Kathi* (Matchstick). At the beginning of the narrative, Dipti and her grandfather recite the poem as they discuss the oppression of Pakistanis. Later, certain lines from the poem are used by the village's youths as part of graffiti against Jamshed's rule. Incorporating these literary masterpieces aims to instill in the viewers' minds a sense of collective Bengali identity, nationalist consciousness, and resistance to Pakistani tyranny. Historian Schendel (2009, p.112) states that every Bengali letter may be successfully employed as a symbol in the cultural guerilla war. In this film, the use of each piece of Bengali literature serves as a means to manifest the aspirations of protest and the formation of a free, independent *imagined nation* that is Bangladesh. Similar to this, Nasir, Dipti, and their theatre group are seen deciding to perform Dinabandhu Mitra's anti-British play *Nil Darpan* to draw attention to the domination of Pakistanis. During a rehearsal scene, the tyrannical British ruler attempts to assault Khetromani, the play's main female character, a Bengali woman. On the other hand, Jamshed is seen assaulting and raping sweeper Chander's mute daughter Jumur in the same way, causing her to become pregnant. Finally, she kills herself so that no one can disparage her character. This juxtaposition immediately leads the viewers to consider the atrocities committed by West Pakistanis against countless women in Bangladesh. The theatre group symbolizes the vibrant culture and unwavering identity of Bengalis. One of their group members, Nasir, is a reflection of the young Bengali students who fought for the demand of Bangla as the state language in 1952. Nasir's courage comes from his martyred father, who fought against the British ruler. To highlight Nasir's past, while his mother recounts this story to Nasir, Ahmed utilizes a close-up shot of his father's old photo underlying their devotion to the motherland. Dipti, the female protagonist, is similarly constructed with elements of modernized Bengali middle-class women wearing traditional handloom saree, acquiring medical education, being permitted to sing Tagore songs, and participating in cultural play. In order to portray the love scene between Nasir and Dipti, Ahmed again makes an exception by employing long and medium close-up shots coupled with a melodious Bangla song instead of the conventional Bangladeshi film style, which uses lip-synch song and dance sequences to construct the romantic sequences. The leitmotif is yet another crucial technique used in the film. Leitmotif is a recurrent compositional motif representing a particular person, concept, or emotion in an opera or film ("Leitmotif", 2023). This technique, which has its roots in romantic music, allows composers a quick way to express emotion and develop character (Scheurer, 2008, p.41). In *Fagun Haway* (2019), each time a specific piece of music plays in the background when Nasir and Dipti are seen falling in love, expressing their feeling

to one another. Besides, Ahmed employs a yellowish chromatic tone throughout the film to establish a look and feel of the past. The set design and costumes are also planned in a way to retain that aesthetic with only a few exceptions. Ahmed, for instance, uses old structures to create the police station, the local college campus, and Nasir and Muslim League leader Azmat's homes. However, the interior of Dipti's grandparents' home often seems inappropriate when considering that time. The uses of the Volkswagen car at the beginning of the narrative also complement the 1952's setting. Likewise, the male characters of the narrative are depicted in loose shirt-pants or punjabis, while the female characters are dressed in cotton sarees in an attempt to maintain the historic environment. Additionally, the police cap and the metal epaulets bearing the emblem of the former East Pakistan lend credibility to the story.

The final section of the narrative shows an extreme manifestation of the Bengali nationalist spirit. Jumur's suicide and Manju's death due to the stabbing of Pakistani ally Obayad unite all Bengalis in Chandranagar. As a result, on February 21, 1952, they staged a mass procession demanding Bangla as the state language and surrounded the police station intending to depose Jamshed. Jamshed asks the Bengali soldiers of the police station to save him since he is a Muslim. However, when the soldiers join the masses, Jamshed flees Chandranagar in fear for his life. In this context, Gellner (1983, p.1) mentions that "Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle". According to him, there is one type of violation of nationalist principles to which nationalist sentiment is particularly sensitive: if the rulers of a political unit belong to another nation, this, according to nationalists, constitutes a flagrant violation of political rights. It can occur through incorporating a national territory into a larger empire or through the local domination of an alien group (Gellner, 1983, p.1). Gellner's comment is significant for the present situation of the narrative, not merely because it establishes a strong connection between human sentiment and nationalist principles but also because it connects sentiment to awareness of domination by foreign entities and a conviction to stand up against that domination.

Like Gellner's comment, the film's ending scenes signify the mass protests that occurred during our language movement, with Manju and Jumur serving as metaphors for our language martyrs. In order to arouse nationalist sentiment and a sense of *imagined community*, we are shown images of the characters in mid and close-up shots holding placards in their hands with slogans such as "We want Bangla as our state language," "Our pride, our hope, our Bangla language". The high-pitched, Western tone of a war drum beat accompanies the shots. Besides,

during the procession, Nasir is seen wearing Manju's blood-stained punjabi. The cinematic technique is used to provide the impression of a collective narrative instead of a specific character so that we can observe their camaraderie, non-communalism, patriotism, and desire to burn like *Deslai Kathi* (matchstick) in the name of the mother tongue, Bangla, and an *imagined* independent nation, Bangladesh. The film ends with some stills of the language movement and the soundtrack '*Amar bhaier rokte rangano/ Ekushe February/Ami ki bhulite pari?*' With this cinematic style, Ahmed makes one final attempt to engage the audience in the collective act of remembering the language movement and, thereby, in our Bengali identity formation.

Conclusion

The history of Bengali nationalism is an epic story about the people of this country and their historical struggle to establish a common identity. Tauquir Ahmed, like many Bangladeshi filmmakers, depicted a portion of this epic in his film *Fagun Haway* (2019). Made under the context of the language movement, the film, from the start, sets nationalist consciousness as a keynote for the viewers, not only through its cinematic atmosphere and depiction of the characters but also by emphasizing the connection between our history of nationalism and identity discourses. The narrative presents the cohabitation of Bengali and Muslim identities and the debate of both identities inside our culture at that time. The inclusion of religious harmony within our culture into the narrative reflects our generosity and openness to assimilating numerous institutions and practices into our nationalist consciousness. Contrarily, by portraying *Muslimness* as an extreme religious identity, Ahmed outlined the growth of religious nationalism in our history when allegiance to the Islamic community overrode other attachments. Nonetheless, when the question of the state language turns into a contentious political one and a battle for our very existence, *Bengaliness*, our linguistic and cultural identity, takes precedence over all other identities. *Fagun Haway* (2019) thus attempts to concur with Anderson's (2006) claim that "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, nor with self-consciously held political ideology, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which as well as against which it came into being" (p.12).

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