

THE IMMERSION



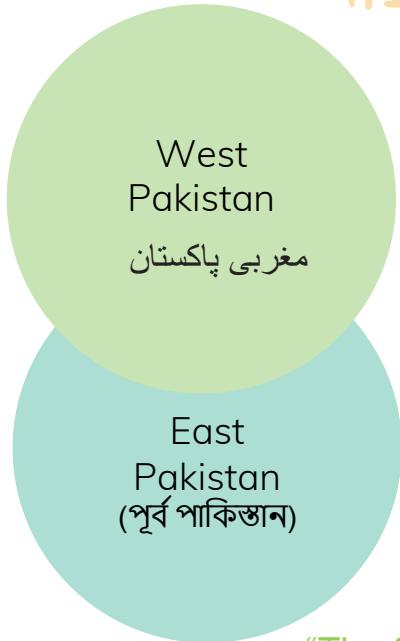
Dhanvin
Mayank



DILARA HASHEM

Bangladeshi (former East
Pakistani) novelist, musician
and newscaster

HISTORICAL BACKDROP



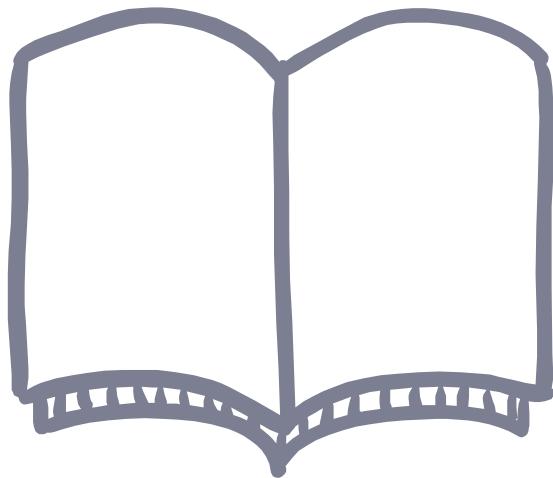
1971

"The Secession of East Pakistan"
"War of Liberation"

HASHEM'S BODY OF WORK

- stories of “repeated personal uprooting, relocations and emigration”
- pioneered the contemporary urban Bangla novel in her novel Ghor Mon Janala (1966)
- “culturally gifted”: performed classical music for Radio Pakistan, worked as a broadcaster for the Voice of America

SUMMARY



PHYSICAL SETTING – THE CITY

DHAKA
capital of
Bangladesh, with
chaotic traffic
(Rickshaw Capital
of the World),
narrow lanes and
modernity.



Narinda borough

'THE VILLAGE'
anonymous. Two-
hours away from
the Rickshaw City.

PHYSICAL SETTING – THE VILLAGE

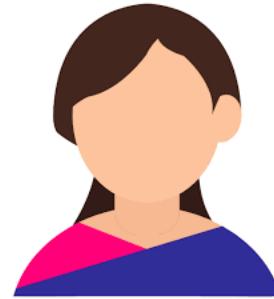




BADAL
protagonist.
Mentally-
challenged youth,
born to an affluent
Bangladeshi
family.



MA, BABA
Badal's
parents.



MOINA
Badal's cousin.
Lives in the
Village.

PLOT (TL;DR)

- revolves around Badal's yearning (i) to be **understood** by those around him (ii) for peace (iii) to fulfil his desires
- starts with Badal “walking, tripping, jumping” alone
- trails off to reveal slices of his familial interactions, his dreams and frustrations
- Around halfway, a dramatic incident → Badal breaks down at his sister's marriage. out of fear of losing face, Baba sends him away to his cousins' place: **the village**

PLOT (TL;DR)

- Encounters Moina, his cousin sister, and is immediately attracted to her
- Overcome by sexual desire, tries to rape Moina → flees the house.
- The story then reunites with Badal walking alone. He dashes to the river in the village, and flings himself into the waters.
- Concludes: “He was attired in peace, in quietness – finally at rest. He was adorned in the beautiful robes of peace.”

THEME 1: NATURE



BADAL

- Depicted as the embodiment of Nature – as if he belongs to it, and it belongs to him.
- Badal is **possessed**, fascinated by the river
- **Wilderness trope** used to paint his physical appearance **and** mental condition. Thus, a sort of raw, wild nature belongs to him as well.

BADAL & THE RIVER

- His name means ‘cloud’ in Bengali. Hashem first uses the extended **cloud metaphor** to indicate a symbiotic relationship with the river.
 - Clouds burst and feed a scorched summer river with water
 - a source of vitality, renewal.
 - “staring at the barren river – that charcoal-etched river with no water – he would dribble urine over it and be overcome with joy”

BADAL & THE RIVER

- On the flipside, literally, the river feeds the cloud with water vapour. Badal derives immense joy from the mere sound of a river, and dreams of it as well. Hashem **personifies** the river and treats it as an equal to Badal.
 - “whenever he strained his ears to hear the **splashing laughter** of the river, Badal too, without any reason, would burst out into merriment”

BADAL & THE RIVER

- **Parallels** with the river also explain Badal's idiosyncratic behaviour, such as his
 - Delight at a can of pebbles. Rivers **laugh** when they flow over a pebble bed, and this is mirrored in Badal as well
 - Hatred of oil, and of short baths
 - Love of mirrors. Clouds and the blue sky are always reflected in clear river waters – and this is why Badal enjoys looking at his reflection.

BADAL & THE RIVER & THE WILDERNESS

- Finally, besides feeding Badal's joy, the portrayal of the river is Hashem's first way of feeding the wilderness trope that surrounds Badal's character:
 - **border-less, untouched:** "the river was too wide, an extraordinarily vast expanse"
 - **a sanctuary, place of authenticity:** "he did not like ponds or lakes or enclosed bodies of water – natural, gushing flowing water had a magical hypnotic effect on him"
 - "he would drown within a melancholy tone that would carry him over the vast open wilderness"

BADAL & THE WILDERNESS

- This wilderness trope is employed by Hashem in myriad ways, to underscore Badal's closeness with nature.
 - Physical appearance
 - “dark, wavy mane of hair”
 - “limpid eyes”
 - “aquiline nose”
 - “chiselled cheekbones”
 - employs transferred epithet

BADAL & THE WILDERNESS

- This wilderness trope is employed by Hashem in myriad ways, to underscore Badal's closeness with nature.
 - Image of a caveman
 - “to be unfettered - without clothes - felt most natural to him”
 - cave: his room was “dark,” “almost bare”
 - crude paintings: “Badal would take the charcoal ... and draw ... many weird strange shapes on the floor”

BADAL & THE WILDERNESS

- Diction: verbs used to depict Badal's actions connote animals or caged beasts, sometimes quite literally
 - “Badal **sprang** out of the room,” “**flew** like the wind,” “**gnashing** his teeth,” “he **pounced** on the girls”, “**crept** into the room”
 - “the monster that resided within him”
 - “those butterfly-like girls stared at him as if he was a chimpanzee or baboon”
 - “Badal needed to smash things occasionally”

IN SUM: BADAL

- Badal is thus presented as an embodiment of wild nature, a man who hasn't shed his natural instincts and who truly belongs to the wild – akin to Mowgli or Tarzan in popular culture.



MOINA -THE BIRD

”

- “Moina” means a bird (Mynah) in Bengali.
- Literally compares herself to the **moon**:
 - “ ‘...Dwarf – how dare you reach out to the moon?’”
- The moon is the **embodiment of tranquility and muliebry** in various cultures/religions.
 - Greek Mythology: Artemis (the moon Goddess) influenced midwifery, childbirth and protection.
 - Roman Mythology: Diana, a Woodland deity who protected nature and women.
 - Christianity: Virgin Mary is sometimes represented by a moon.
 - Buddhism: Guan Yin, the ~~Matron~~ of Childbirth. She is associated with purity, grace and kindness.

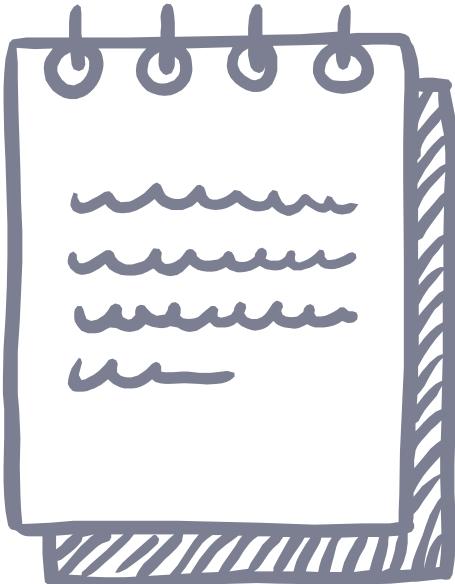
MOINA – THE BIRD

- Physical appearance is very **stereotypically feminine:**
 - Voluptuous: "... rounded buttocks ..."
 - Long haired: "... untamed tresses ..."
 - Sari clad.
- Moina symbolizes the **Pastoral Trope:**
 - village girl (unlike Badal, a city boy) – a hallmark
 - "... rounded like a ripe mango."
- This trope exemplifies **nature as relaxing:**
 - Badal feels relaxed in Moina's company:
 - "Moina peeped into the room...Badal felt like a cool breeze flowing over his body."

NATURE – FLUID, FLOWING

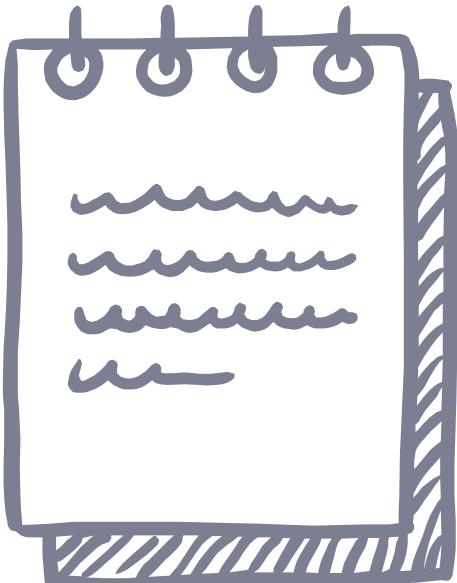
- Hashem portrays both Badal and Moina as expressive, emotional, characters who subscribe to, or consider themselves analogous to, elements of nature - such as rivers, clouds, birds or celestial bodies. All of these are intertwined with **motion, fluidity, cycles** and a soothing, relentless rhythm.
- But how does Hashem connote this nature of nature?
 - one device she employs is the narrative structure (or lack of it) in the story.

DECONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE



- The story abhors a linear, rigid plot, and instead meanders, alters its pace, sometimes contradicts itself, repeatedly diverts the reader to slices of the (mostly silent) protagonist's life, - much akin to a river's course.
- This deconstructed narrative lends a sense of the whole being greater than its parts, and possibly even overwhelms the reader – making the reader feel **immersed** in the story.

DECONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE



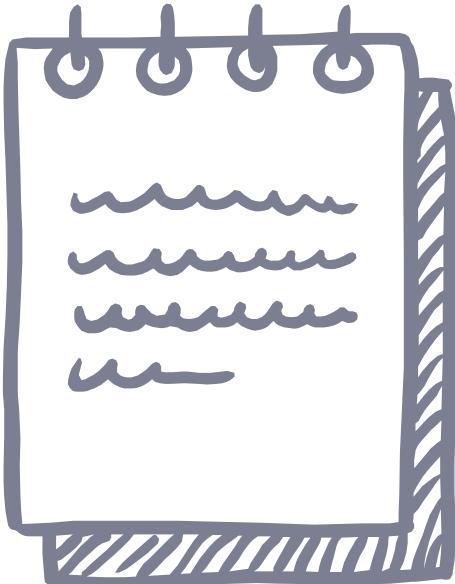
→ The narration and reporting of direct speech in third-person is reminiscent of an all-knowing, revealing Nature:

→ “Baba interrupted her pleas in a voice that echoed with helplessness, ‘No, Shireen, no...’”

→ “His mother, agitated and sorrowful, would cover her eyes with both hands and plead with him, ‘Oh my lovely son, my golden boy, my precious!’”

→ “‘All right, don’t go,’ said Dada, trying to appease the boy.”

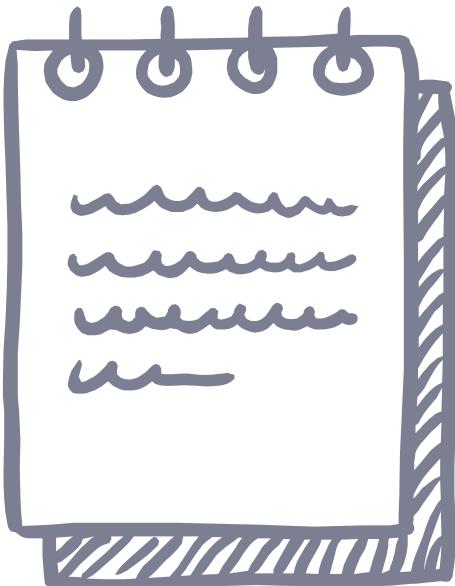
DECONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE



→ Hashem also chooses to sprinkle key questions after major incidents. These double as Badal's frustrations and as rhetorical questions from a voice of reason, and blur the line between a narrator's reflection and a character's internal monologue. This underscores the **fluidity** of the narrative.

- “Why could they not love what they saw in him?”
- “Why did their faces loose all expression – turn to stone – when they beheld him?”
- “What was keeping Ma so busy the whole day?”

DECONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE



→ Finally, the plot **cycles** back to the scene of Badal walking in the village, and completes Badal's immersion in nature. This champions the journey that Badal makes to peace – his beloved river. This cyclical nature, coupled with the fragmented episodes, frames the story as the frenzied flashbacks of a youth on his way to his deathbed.

→ this lack of a linear Bildungsroman also underscores the post-modern credentials of the story's genre.

THEME 2: CULTURE



CULTURE – BABA, MA AND ABDUL

- All apart from Moina and Badal i.e. **Baba, Ma and Abdul are “immersed” in the realm of Culture.**
 - Have been **socially conditioned** to regard Badal’s behavior as **unacceptable**.
 - Ma and Baba lament Badal’s condition/behavior.
 - ” ‘Allah, Allah! Give my child some peace, O Lord.’” - Ma
 - “ We shall lose dignity and face. What will they think?” – Baba
 - “... appeared from nowhere and planted himself in front of him. ” - Abdul

CULTURE- CONTRAST TO NATURE

- **Static:**

- "The mother's body would stop trembling and become rigid and motionless."
- Rebecca Bu's wedding is an artifact of Culture.

- **Lifeless:**

- " Stricken faces ... inhuman look... lifeless mannequins"
- "Why did their faces lose all expression – turn to stone – when they beheld him?"
- "Their pale, bloodless faces..."
- "... grandfather's old decaying, three-storied house in the narrow alley in Narinda."

- **Restrictive and controlling:**

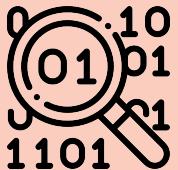
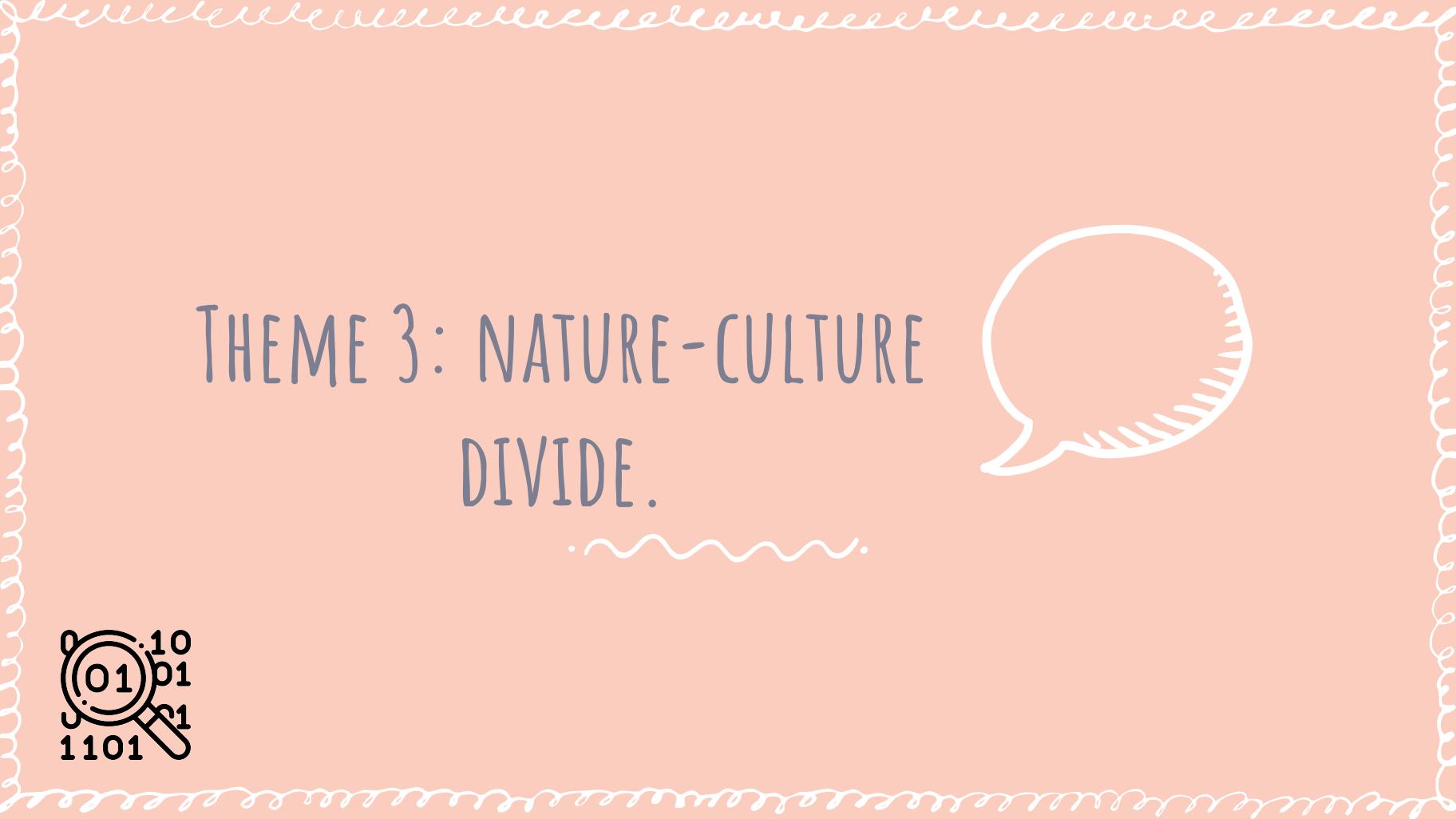
- Badal was literally locked in his room by his parents. Compared it to a “prison.”
- Do not allow Badal to venture out on his own.
- Abdul would “march” into his room twice a day. Regimentation used to restrict Badal.

- **Stifling:**



- “Badal wanted to hide from his father’s gaze....Badal wanted to escape...escape from these searching eyes.”
- “The girls’ looks seemed to fell him to the floor.”

THEME 3: NATURE-CULTURE DIVIDE.



AT A GLANCE

- Constrained, entrenched and immersed in culture, Badal's family make repeated attempts to understand him. Close family would reasonably be expected to understand Badal the most.
- However, his parents' repeated attempts to understand Badal within culture's strictures ends up counterintuitively driving Badal further away from them. With each such futile attempt, they further lose chances of understanding him and his desires.

WHY THE DISCONNECT?

- The crux of this discrepancy lies in the fact that Badal's parents (and society at large) view him from an ego-centric point of view i.e as delusional and unsustainable. This ego-centrism emanates from culture, as shown before in the story.
- However, Badal, being an embodiment of nature, cannot be pigeonholed within the framework of culture.

WHY THE DISCONNECT?

- The crux of this discrepancy lies in the fact that Badal's parents (and society at large) view him from an ego-centric point of view i.e as delusional and unsustainable. This ego-centrism emanates from culture, as shown before in the story.
- However, Badal, being an embodiment of nature, cannot be pigeonholed within the framework of culture. This tendency of culture to subject nature to its reasoning is the cause of the **nature-culture divide** in the story.

HOW IS THIS DISCONNECT SHOWN?

- Juxtaposition
 - Badal's "rapturous laughter" and cathartic joy is juxtaposed with his mother's straitjacketed, melancholic demeanour ("Ma would biter her lower lip and with a wan face try to curb her emotions"). This is unnatural for a mother-son relationship.

HOW IS THIS DISCONNECT SHOWN?

- Juxtaposition
 - This implies to the reader that Ma is concealing her true emotions and thoughts. In fact, the halt in fluidity in both our plot and character jars the reader, and hints to the fact that Ma's happiness is conditioned not on her son's spontaneity but on whether his behaviour matches what she expects him to be.

THE AFTERMATH

- After Badal's breakdown at Rebecca's marriage, his parents **physically distance** him by sending him away to the village – a place he doesn't want to leave. A key incident here is the farewell of Baba and Badal.

FAREWELL

- A rhetorical device used here is the **recurring contrast** in the emotions of the two characters.
 - Each adjective denoting tears, crying or despair by Badal's father is almost immediately succeeded by one of surprise – “astonishment,” “amazed,” “overcome with joy” by Badal himself. Even Badal's tears are not an impact of the farewell – it is a response to the novel sight of his father crying for **the first time**.

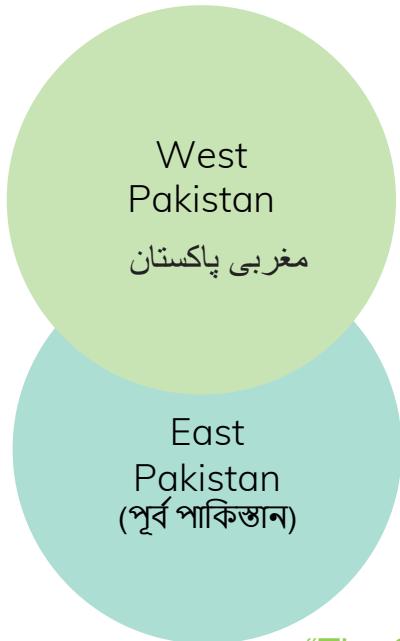
NATURE – FLUID, FLOWING

- Hashem portrays both Badal and Moina as expressive, emotional, characters who subscribe to, or consider themselves analogous to, elements of nature - such as rivers, clouds, birds or celestial bodies. All of these are intertwined with **motion, fluidity, cycles** and a soothing, relentless rhythm.
- But how does Hashem connote this nature of nature?
 - one device she employs is the narrative structure (or lack of it) in the story.

PARALLELS WITH BANGLADESH'S HISTORY



REMEMBER THIS?



1971

"The Secession of East Pakistan"
"War of Liberation"

- Having discussed how culture is depicted in a negative light in the story due to its inability to understand and nature for it truly is, we now try to situate the story within the context of Bangladeshi culture and geography.
- At first glance, we see several hallmarks of Bangladesh's national identity through the story namely – nature, rivers and gold (**shona**).

NATURE, RIVERS AND GOLD

Bangladeshi culture frequently extolls nature – especially since it is a geographically gifted country with 700 rivers, dense forests and wildlife. The national Anthem of Bangladesh (*Amar Shonar Bangla*) reflects this– revolves around nature and *shona* (which means both gold and beloved).

- “golden boy” and “golden stretch”, “would the waters of the golden-etched river provide him with the desired peace?”, “golden gliding river”

SO WHAT?

- This doesn't just show the inspirations that a Bangladeshi writer draws from her home country. It also portends a deeper meaning.
 - **What is this deeper meaning?**

CONTRAST IN DEPICTION OF CULTURE

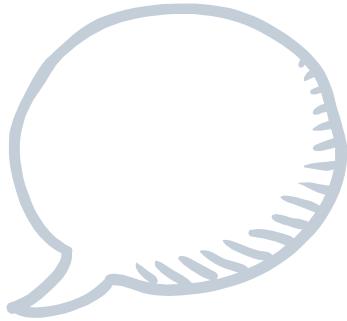
- By highlighting Bangladeshi hallmarks of nature and national identity, Hashem offers a contrast between culture as portrayed in the story (unable to accommodate nature into itself) and the ideal of Bangladeshi culture that embraces nature and champions it. This places Bangladeshi culture on a pedestal, and offers hope from what seems to be a melancholic story.

NATURE-CULTURE DIVIDE: HISTORICAL

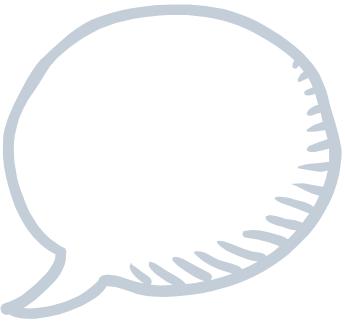
- Alternatively, we might even choose to read the story as an allegory of Bangladesh's history
 - East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was subjected under West Pakistani rule. Much like Badal and his parents, it was distant – the duo were separated by over 2000km and an entire subcontinent.
 - The more Pakistan tried to pigeonhole Bangladesh into its Islamized, Urdu culture, the more the rift opened up – and finally led Bangladesh to fight for its absolute freedom in 1971.

DISCUSS :))





DO WE SEE CULTURE HAVING A PLACE IN NATURE, OR VICE-
VERSA? OR ARE THEY INTRINSICALLY INCOMPATIBLE?



Q & A

