



## **Suppression and exploitation in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja***

**Kalpana Agrawal<sup>1</sup>, Vinod Mishra<sup>2</sup>, Poonam Pandey<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Professor, Govt. T. R. S. College, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar Govt. T. R. S. College, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, India

<sup>3</sup> Research Scholar, University Teaching department, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, India

### **Abstract**

The article brings out the sufferings of common people under the name of religion and culture of the South Asian Society as picturised by Taslima Nasrin. *Lajja* is an account of the Religious and social discrimination and suppression which became more virulent with the outburst against the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India on 6 December, 1992. It is a serious indictment against continuous and sustained subjugation of the minority community. Taslima Nasrin convinces the readers that the fundamentalist forces can be stopped if all of us who are secular and humanistic join together and fight their malignant influence.

**Keywords:** Taslima Nasrin, colonial society, religion, Babri masjid, feminist writing, controversy

### **Introduction**

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The emergence of Taslima Nasrin's feminist writings inaugurates one of the controversial moments in the annals of South Asian literature. Taslima Nasrin, a woman writer of Bangladesh, is an award-winning writer, physician, secular humanist and human rights activist. She is known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religious fanaticism.

The paper is aimed at highlighting the plight of common man in the name of religion. Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* has been chosen for discussion. Through this novel, Nasrin. Brings out the sufferings of the common people under the name of religious and cultural practice of the society. By unveiling the patriarchal agenda of subordinating women, and by introducing overt and covert strategies to subvert this agenda, she has pioneered the feminist discourse in South Asian society. *Lajja* is a moving story of protest, passion, principle and persecution. The novel, *Lajja* portrays the horrendous and horrifying experience of a minority family, the Duttas- Sudhamony, Kironmoyee and their two children. Suranjan and Maya have to face so many trials and abuse without any rhyme or reason- just only because of their Hindu identity in Bangladesh.

Sudhamoy an atheist, still believed with a native mix of optimism and idealism that his motherland would not let him down. But the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 triggered a spurt of communal violence in Bangladesh. The Hindus, those like the Duttas, became the victim of religious attack. Sudhamoy's family which is the focal point in the novel depicts the pangs of sorrow and anxiety of their community through the personal suffering of each member of his family.

Sudhamoy's house was completely ravaged and Maya, his grown up daughter was forcefully kidnapped before his very eyes. Helpless Sudhamoy suffered a severe attack of paralysis and his voice became slurred. Kironmoyee, who ran after the kidnappers, was hurt in the head and she fell

down unconscious on the road. Suranjan, the son, brought up with his father's idealism was now at the verge of a helpless desperation and complete frustration. He seeks the help of his friend Haider to trace Maya but realizes that he was of no help at all. All attempts to find his sister were fruitless.

Suranjan realizes that he had been a victim of religious discrimination at every step of his life. He recalls how his brief stint with Parveen came to an end because he was a Hindu. Even his last hope to make up for his wasted life by settling down with Ratna, a girl of his community too was thwarted when she accepts a Muslim husband for herself. Blinded by a fury of frustration, he intends to rape a Muslim girl on victory day, the independence day of Bangladesh. But he only ends up bruising, scratching and raping a poor prostitute Shamima who had to trade her body for a little food.

During all these moments of crisis, Kironmoyee remains poised and nurse her husband as she had done earlier. The mass exodus of 1947 was being repeated once again. Yet she is undaunted and courageous enough to reply to Aleya Begum's suggestion to migrate to India that she wouldn't do so because this was her own identity. Aleya was surprised at her reply but Sudhamoy lying on the bed realizes that the two women can never be equal citizens in this country.

Still further, to his utter dismay, S Sudhamoy finds his youthful son burning all the books of Lenin, Marx. Dostoevsky, Nehru and Azad and many more. One more realization descends on him that his idealist secular minded son has already been forced to the brink of religious fanaticism. He was wounded and full of pain. He had been hurt by his family, society and above all his country and that he was burning himself in the surging flames of an inferiority complex which is typical of every ethnic community striving to survive.

Suranjan was determined now not to cling to his father's empty idealism anymore. The inhuman cruelty and violence that had been heaped on his community at the wake of every

national disturbance must bring sense to his father. He implores him to leave such a nation that has betrayed them again and again.

"However much we call ourselves atheists, however much we call ourselves humanists, these people out there will call us Hindus. They'll call us bastards. The more we love this country, the more we think of it as our own, the more we'll be forced into a corner. The more we love the people of this country, the more they will isolate us" (Lajja 213)

Sudhamoy replies with concern

"It will be a rootless existence..."(Lajja 214).

To which his son's question is emotionally charged.

"What will you do with your roots, Baba? If your roots are so powerful then why are you Hiding behind locked doors and windows? Will you stay this way all your life?" (Lajja 214).

Sudhamoy's reply was a firm No" at the moment:

"Is India your father's home or your grandfather's? From your family, who the hell stays in India? Do you want to run away from your own homeland? Doesn't it make you feel ashamed?" (Lajja, 213).

Later in the darkness of the night awakening of a sinister kind rises inside him and fills his heart with fear and apprehension. Before his very eyes ivory tower of his lifelong idealism and sacrifice had crumbled to pieces. The nation of his blood and hope has let him down. Now he must leave with his wife and son for a life free from worries and anxieties, insecurity, torture and death. He must deliver his battered and bruised family from the clutch of this ever-hunting nightmare. Sudhamoy's decides to migrate to India. Thus, the story of Sudhamoy, Kironmoyee and their two children Maya and Suranjan may be the fictional story of these fictional characters but it may reflect the story of thousands of Sudhamoys, Kironmoyees, Suranjans and Mayas in Bangladesh.

Taslima Nasrin deals with the universal problem of fanaticism and fundamentalism. Though it is not a very well-structured novel, it gives voice to the bold belief of Taslima Nasrin in her own kind of secularism which tells us that if the Hindu and the Muslims are true followers of their respective religions, the communal violence can never, never take place. Her aim is never to exclude religion from her discourse of secularism, but to relate it to the shared cultural and national identity. She seems to believe in Asghar Ali Engineer's words that "Religion, if properly understood and interpreted cannot be antagonistic to healthy secularism"(atd.in Naikar 155) Taslima makes a positive authorial intervention to bring about reconciliation between the two warring communities, the Muslims and the Hindus of Bangladesh.

Injustice against women and their oppression happens to be an equally important theme in Taslima Nasrin's novels. As a woman, she understands how the whole society dominated by males creates paradigms the purpose of which is to subjugate woman and turn her into a subservient individual sans any freedom, sans any free will or choice. She confronts the nasty truth that women are mere passive objects in the matters of sex and other matters too. They are only to be possessed and mastered. With her own experience and the experience of her sisters in Bangladesh and not only Bangladesh but the world over, she realizes the fact that all the inalienable rights prescribed for human

beings are denied to women because of a vicious conspiracy between religion and society in order to subjugate a woman's free will. The texts and sub-texts of all the discourses in Islam regard woman as a very potent agent of corruption. Ironically, there is a parallel stream which presents woman as an erotic object to be possessed and enjoyed but who has no right for equal participation even in this intimate act of union. Thus, she is a double victim - on the one hand, she is taken to be possessed and used as an agent of pleasure, and on the other hand, she is recognized as an agent of corruption and hence is required to be kept under control of man.

Thus, Taslima Nasrin in her novels emerges as a crusader for women's rights, she acts as a champion for women's right of living with honour and independence in the framework of human dignity and equality. She also vociferously advocates a woman's right to have a free choice in matters of love, marriage, sex and in choosing friends. She talks of a woman's natural right to live in peace and harmony in a place which she can call her own. The novel *Lajja* (1993) clearly reveals that she does not believe in the theory that art is for art's sake. She seems to believe that art is for life's sake. She does not write fantasies or romantic stories to entertain an idle reader. She writes with a purpose and the purpose is to oppose and fight against oppression and gender bias. She is with the victim and the marginalized and against irrational authority; it does not matter whether this authority is religious or social. Taslima Nasrin convinces the readers that the fundamentalist forces can be stopped if all of us who are secular and humanistic join together and fight their malignant influence.

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