



DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN TASLIMA NASREEN'S *LAJJA*

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ABSTRACT

Women have played a variety of roles in all cultures, including wives, sisters, and mothers, all while being oppressed by paternal society. In Indian culture, the father or eldest male is the family's head. This head is assessed during the male line, and as such, it becomes dynamic with conjugal issues exclusively in joint families. The aim of this paper is to examine the portrayal of women in Taslima Nasrin's novel Lajja. The misfortunes of female characters are depicted in the integrated book, either as a result of religious commitment or as a result of male dominance in the home.

Keywords: *Depiction, numerous, misfortune, domestic and conjugal.*

INTRODUCTION

Men are portrayed as reasonable, capable, defensive, and decisive beings in a socio-cultural setting, while women are portrayed as emotional (irrational), helpless, caring, and submissive. Thus, women are pressed to fit into this enclosure, where they are inferior to men in terms of intellect and value their individuality. As a result, women remain behind a mere entity or men's belongings. Taslima Nasrin contributes significantly to feminist considerations as a result of her personal experience with childhood sexual abuse and the deteriorating situation of women in Bangladesh. Nasrin substantiates feminist leanings in all

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of her writings by delineating roles related to women's marginalization and subjugation by men who have a paternalistic approach.

The female characters in Nasrin's novel *Lajja*: Kironmoyee, Maya, and Shammima Begum are all inhibited from achieving their goals according to patriarchal norms, with Nasrin aiming to highlight the situation of women from Bangladesh's minority Hindu community, who went through a traumatic period following the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India. A critical feature of this novel is the double marginalization of women on religious grounds on the one hand, and their gender identity on the other.

Taslima Nasrin is an example of a woman who defies patriarchal authority and is thus mistreated. To exemplify,

“In 1993, a fundamentalist organization called Soldiers of Islam issued fatwa against her. Rather than supporting her, the government sided with the fundamentalists and confiscated her passport, asked her to cease writing and banned her book Lajja (Shame) in which she depicted atrocities committed by Muslim fundamentalists against Hindus” (42).

Lajja tackles a number of feminist topics. Nasrin, in particular, outlined the ways in which patriarchal mindsets undermine women's individuality and self-respect. She says in one of her interviews, “everything she has written is for the oppressed women of Bangladesh.” She further stated, “She has wrung her heart out into her words” (Quigley, 24). One of the most critical feminist issues addressed in the novel is the treatment of women by patriarchal structures such as the family, culture, and state, all of which are led by a patriarch who either looks down on or marginalises women.

Kironmoyee is supposed to be a gentle, respectful, and considerate mother. In order to hold the family together, she is supposed to tolerate issues including her husband's infertility, physical ordeals, and intense hunger: “Kironmoyee did not eat herself but kept Maya's share of food for her” (*L*, 100). When it comes to her kin, a woman's interests are unimportant; she is supposed to sacrifice to keep the pot boiling. Similarly, in the case of Kironmoyee too “[h]er latest sacrifice involved selling a pair of her gold bangles to Dr. Haripada's wife. After all, gold was not so valuable that it could not be sold if the need arose” (*L*, 113). Her urge to visit her relatives in India at such a perilous time (due to the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition) went unnoticed. All she could do was cry in secret and submit, which is symbolic of the patriarchal system, in which the family leader is a man who is all-powerful and centralized. The female participant, on the other hand, is tyrannized and forced to act in accordance with patriarchal norms.



The presumption is that a woman lacks her own identity. Her reliance on her family's men, whether it's her aunt, brother, husband, or son, has been well-expressed in the novel. Sudhamoye, for example, compliments his wife Kironmoyee and daughter Maya by saying to Maya:

“You feed me, your mother massages my body, presses my temples... Will I get so much of love and care once I am well?” (L, 146)

Since patriarchal expectations prevent women from achieving their goals, Kironmoyee had to suppress her deep inner desires, which gradually turned into virtual "deprivation" and thus became a way of life. To paraphrase the text:

“When Sudhamony’s friends came to visit, and they sat around talking, their shadows would sometimes fall on Kironmoyee’s lap, and almost involuntarily she would wish that those shadows were real... Kironmoyee’s physical cravings did not last very long. Her body soon became used to the deprivation” (114).

A woman is usually conditioned to suppress her desires and fit into the socio-cultural system at the expense of her family. As a result, Kironmoyee devotes her life as a “patriarchal woman”, “who has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, which can be defined, in short, as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles” (Tsyon 85). As a result, Nasrin portrays Kironmoyee as a gracious, selfless, and self-sacrificing mother and wife. She is also submissive to her husband's and son's demands, as her primary concern is the well-being of her family, and her personal preferences are unimportant.

She accepts her celibacy as an existential granted as a result of her husband's genital mutilation and never addresses it as a major problem. She also submits to the demands placed on her by Bangladesh's collective atmosphere, accepting a new identity under the assumed Muslim name San. It's important to remember that both family and culture conspire to keep women on the margins. Kironmoyee devotes all of her financial and mental energy to keeping her family connected and free of conflict. She puts up a valiant battle against her daughter's kidnappers. She cooks beef against her will to satisfy her husband, and she also accepts her son's Muslim girlfriend Parveen as her daughter-in-law. Her second point of contention is her inability to accept financial assistance from her son after her husband suffers a paralytic assault, which appears to portray her as a patriarchal victim. To quote from the text: “Kiranmoyee had stopped using *sindur* in the parting in her hair and *loha* and *sankha* on her wrist as was expected of every married Hindu woman” (L, 97).



Kironmoyee had to sacrifice and act in accordance with the ruling class's exerted authority at every turn. It emphasizes the male version of the female universe, which is focused on women's marginalization. It's ironic that the so-called People's Republic of Bangladesh, which grants citizenship to its citizens, then deprives those same citizens of basic fundamental rights due to orthodox religious considerations. The desecration of the Babri Masjid in India resulted in the brutality and torture of Hindu families in Bangladesh, especially women, who were not only humiliated but also brutalized, abused, and raped inhumanely. Even the brutal treatment of Hindu men had a negative impact on Hindu women's lives, as they were left to fend for themselves in the face of vengeful Muslim fanatics.

Any feminist writer will condemn the use of women as desire artifacts, as well as physical and psychological violence. Nasrin does the same in *Lajja*, depicting how women are sexually abused, kidnapped, and subjected to various forms of torture, some of which can result in death. The novelist shows how abductions of Hindu girls are popular in Bangladesh, and how the thugs are unconcerned. They could kidnap a woman and brutally rape her whenever they wanted. It was for this reason that the majority of Hindus sent their daughters to India for education and safety. To quote an instance from the novel:

“Manju Rani Seal, a student in the ninth standard... was abducted at 8 p.m., on the evening of 4 December 1988 by Abdur Rahim and his goons. Her distraught family registered a case the next day at the Laksam police station. There is no trace of Manju Rani. Her abductors threatened Premanand Seal and his family, but the police took no action when informed. Hindu families in the area are now terrified of sending their daughters to school ... In Parkumira village of Tala sub district in Satkhira, Rabindranath Ghosh's young daughter, Chhanda, a third standard student... her School teacher abducted her with the help of some young hooligans. They took the terrified little girl to garden nearby and raped her... a case was filed...no one was arrested.” (Lajja, 48-49).

Thus, as depicted in the book, females are nothing more than tools used by male predators to satisfy their desire. Women's bodies are defiled and desecrated in an effort to retaliate for the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India, as they become extensions of the political body known as India for religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh. *Lajja* portrays a group of men seducing young Hindu girls for their own amusement while mocking Hindu families. Maya's kidnapping when she was six years old exemplifies this.



This incident severely traumatizes the girl and has such a devastating impact on her psyche that she is unable to function normally for two months. She slept in fits and starts and would wake up in the middle of the night. The family is never safe after that, as they continue to receive threats in the form of anonymous ransom letters threatening to abduct Maya again. Maya grew up to be a teenage 9-year-old girl when the fateful day of December 11, 1992 arrived. A gang of seven hooligans broke into Sudhamoy's home, where he had recently been paralysed, and started destroying his belongings. They were all in their twenties or thirties. Caps, pyjamas, and kurtas were worn by two of them.

Sudhamoy and Kiranmoyee tried everything they could, but they couldn't stop seven hooligans from abducting Maya. Maya cried out for help, but no one responded because she was a Hindu girl and the kidnappers were Muslims. She only screamed to her mother for help saying::

“Ma ... please help me, Ma ...” She fought with her captors as she was dragged away, looking back in pain and terror, hoping against hope that her mother would be able to save her” (Lajja, 148).

Sudhamoy's family's hopes and aspirations were dashed by this inhumane act. The family, as communists, did not believe in any faith, Hindu or Muslim, and humanity was their only religion. As a result, they plan to travel to India.

When societal institutions such as religion, the state, the family, and society, which are supposed to provide a conducive and safe environment for people in general and women in particular, regardless of their religious background, turn against them, the situation becomes extremely bad. Suranjan's actions are just as bad from a feminist perspective as Maya's kidnapping because in both cases, the woman is humiliated, physically and psychologically violated. The oppression of Hindus by Muslims, the kidnapping of Maya, and Suranjan's sexual abuse towards the Muslim girl all fall into the category of inhumanity and violence.

Another example of patriarchal mentality is how women are seen as good or bad. This trait is also evident in the novel *Lajja*, where patriarchal structures frame women as good or bad. As in the case of Kironmoyee, one who happily accepts patriarchal norms and adapts to their demands is branded as "healthy." She is depicted as an ideal wife in the book, who serves her family and makes all necessary sacrifices to keep the family afloat.

An attempt has been made to explore the marginalization of women as well as religious minorities as portrayed in *Lajja* through the above-mentioned discussion. Clearly a protest book, Nasrin places it in the form of religious fanaticism that erupted in Bangladesh in the



aftermath of India's 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid. The treatment of female characters by Muslim male fundamentalists and Hindu males at the level of family, culture, faith, and country, as well as the fate they eventually face, are some of the points of discussion that make the text worthy of feminist analyses.

Thus, the novel's anti-fundamentalist stance encircles anti-patriarchal resistance, in which gender identity is prioritised over religion, particularly when Nasrin delineates atrocities against women in the same way that religion (Islam) supersedes nationalism when it comes to religious minorities' rape (Hindus). As a result, in the book, gender extremism and religious fundamentalism go hand in hand, subjecting female characters like Maya to barbaric violence before she dies.

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