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THE AGONY OF MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH PORTRAYED IN THE NOVEL OF TASLIMA NASRIN' "LAJJA"



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ABSTRACT

This research deals with the agony of minorities in Bangladesh portrayed by the world famous author Taslima Nasrin through her most controversial novel 'Lajja'. She didn't want to criticize or favour any religion through the novel. The novel succeeded to attract worldwide attention because of the burning issues of the minorities of Bangladesh. The fundamentalists banned the novel in Bangladesh within 6 months and issued a fatwa against her. She was exiled from the country but she didn't take back her stand. Through the novel, Nasrin wanted to give a very strong message to a majority community to respect the people of minorities. She also wanted to remind the government that it's the prime duty of the government to protect all the citizens besides their caste and religion.

Nasrin starts her novel with 'let humanity be the other name of religion'. She perfectly portrayed the agonies and suffering of minorities in the different parts of Bangladesh during the various movements, in the name of religion. The Muslims and Hindu of Bangla were brought together by their Bengali identity

and fought together for their liberation. But the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Masjid inflicted a series of barbaric tyranny in Bangladesh against the Hindu minority, who were soon labelled as 'others'. Hindus were maltreated in Bangladesh and a part of its citizen was tortured only because they belonged to Hindu community. The focus of the novel is limited to Datta's family. Who were nationalists and loved their country like their mother. The family sacrificed a lot, many of the relatives told them to leave the country but they didn't agree. At last, the Sudhamoy was helpless and agreed to leave for India. This paper reveals the agonies and the sufferings of the Hindu minorities and the problems of identity crises they suffer.

KEYWORDS

Minority, Discrimination, Fanaticism, Atrocities, and Communalism

RESEARCH PAPER

INTRODUCTION:

In the novel '*Lajja*' Taslima Nasrin strongly opposes and criticizes the people who separate the society based on religion. It reveals religious fundamentalism which is mainly responsible for the agonies of the Hindu community in Bangladesh. The novel also reveals the heights of insensitivity of man in the name of religion. Taslima Nasrin a thought-provoking novelist gave a voice to the people of a minority who were suffering deeply but dared not to express and oppose the system and atrocities against them.

The novel has a background related to a shameful extremist incident in India when Babri Masjid Ayodhya was destroyed by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. (Preface to ix). This incident hurt the feelings of the Muslim Community all over the world. Bangladeshi Muslims started to torture and dominate the Hindu minority. The novel deals with the mistreatment of the Bangladeshi Hindu minority by the Muslims who were in the majority. The novel highlights the communal face of the government of Bangladesh and its people in the outrage of humanity. The novel deals with the various historical incidents since the partition of 1947 and reveals the cruelty of major communities in the name of religion.

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* has been translated Bengali to English by Anchita Ghatak and also translated in several Indian and foreign languages. Through the story of a Hindu Bengali family of Sudhamoy, Nasrin portrayed the suffering and agony of the Hindu minority in their own motherland, Bangladesh. In the preface to her novel *Lajja*, Nasrin states the purpose of writing this novel:

I wrote Lajja when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack Hindus. It all happened in December 1992. The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction of the Babri Masjid by attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh, during their homes, destroying their temples and shrines, and raping Hindu women. (Preface to *lajja*, ix)

The story begins with a miserable condition of a Bengali Hindu family of Sudhamoy Datta, a doctor, his educated but jobless son, Suronjon. His wife, Kironmoyee, and a lovely daughter Neelanjona, lovely called her Maya. The story mainly covers the periods from 1947 to 1992. Thousands of Hindu families suffered a lot from the partition period to the incident of demolition of *Babri Masjid*. But the family of Sudhamoy became a victim of the riot after the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* in December 1992. Sudhamoy and Suronjon were very proud of their motherland and they participated in various nationalistic movements of Bangladesh and believe in their country. He participated in the Bengali language movement and the Bangladesh liberation war. Sudhamoy was forced to sell out his ancestral home and land for a paltry sum to their Muslim neighbour. He had to shift to *Dhaka* and stayed in a small rented flat. His family was harassed and tortured on different occasions but he never accepted the idea of leaving the country like his father, Sukumar Data. Many of his friends and relatives requested him to leave for India but he didn't agree. When Nomigopal, a relative of Sudhamoy said,

'We cannot carry on living in this country, Dada. Our daughter has grown up and we live in dread of something horrible happening to her.'....'please don't talk to me about leaving,' said Sudhamoy. (Nasrin, p.284)

There was no limit to harassment of the minority Hindus in Bangladesh. There was great discrimination in promotion and equal opportunities in government jobs. Sudhamoy was due to get his promotion; his juniors got theirs, but not Sudhamoy. Sudhamoy was entitled to be an Associate Professor but retired as Assistant Professor. On the occasion of his retirement ...*His colleague Madhob Chondro Pal whispered in his ear as he placed a garland of marigolds around Sudhamoy's neck, as they bade him farewell, 'in a country of Muslims, we should not expect too many opportunities for ourselves. Even what we are getting now is a favour.* (Nasrin, p.30)

Like Sudhamoy, Suronjon had also to face the same injustice as he had a master degree in physics but didn't get any government job. The Muslim candidates scored less than him but got good government jobs.

Being a woman from the Hindu minority was really difficult to survive in Bangladesh. Kironmoyee was a good singer but she had to stop singing as the Muslims considered it shameless behaviour to sing in public. She also stopped using *Sindur* in the parting of her hairs. Maya was abducted while coming from school when she was only six years old. She returned herself after two days had behaved strangely and used to wake up at night. The family used to receive the anonymous letters that threatened to kidnap her when she was nineteen years old. She was usually insulted in the school being a Hindu girl. She had to go to her friend Parul's to hide and had to disguise as a muslim girl to protect herself. But in the end, she became the victim of the riots. She was kidnapped before her parents by some Muslim boys around 21 years old. It seemed that after being raped, she was killed and thrown in the river nearby.

Hindu students were forced to attend the Islamic classes and chant their prayers. Even, the young children were filled with hatred for the Hindus. They simply refused to play with Hindu children.

There was no safety of the Hindus and their property in Bangladesh, especially, in the riots after the demolition of the *Babri Masjid*.

A group of men had set the Dhakeshwari temple on fire. The police stood by and did nothing to stop them... The seven shops at the mouth of Shakhari Bazar that belonged to Hindus were robbed, barbershops, shops selling tires, laundries, Mita Barble, Saha Cabin, restaurant- nothing was left... Twenty-five houses were burgled by two or three hundred communal terrorists... In Sutrapur, they robbed the shops that belonged to Hindus, ransacked them, and then changed the Hindu shop names to Muslim names. (Nasrin,p.7,8)

Hindus were beaten badly till their death. Many of the Hindu families were forced to abandon their houses and they became homeless. The rape of Hindu women repeatedly was common and even the young girls were raped before their parents and were killed later. Even in the time of difficulties, Muslim friends didn't help the Hindu friends. Hindus were called and considered 'Others'. Hindus were not able to get a loan from a bank unless they have any Muslim partner in the business. The property of Hindus who had left for India was considered the 'enemy property'. The Hindu names of Roads, Schools, and Cities were changed into Muslims. The police were also not taking any strict action against the Muslim criminals. Suronjon loved a Muslim girl, named Parveen and wanted to marry her but her family told him to convert to Muslim for it. After the marriage of Parveen to a Muslim businessman, Suronjon wanted to marry a Hindu girl, named Rotna, but for the safety and secure future, she got married to a Muslim, named Humayun. Maya also loved a Muslim boy, named,

Jahangir but could not marry her, and afterward, she was kidnapped and probably gang-raped and killed.

CONCLUSION:

The Bengalis saw the endless bloodshed and trouble from the partition to the liberation war of 1971. Sudhamoy was deeply involved in all those movements and had sacrificed a lot. Suronjon was also a great nationalist and continued the same path as his father and denied leaving his motherland. But during the riots, he realised that he was considered as 'Others'. Like Sudhamoy many Hindu Bengalis participated in the freedom struggles of Bangladesh. Datta's family represents a large number of Hindu families which became a victim in Bangladesh.

The country was formed on the principles of Nationalism, Secularism, Socialism, and Democracy. All were equal irrespective of their religion. But the fundamentalists and politicians converted the country into a Muslim country.

Mujib Ur Rahman, introduced at the beginning of the Constitution the Arabic words- "*Bismillah ir Rehman ir Rahim*" (In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful). Archana has declared the same in '*Intersection of Religion and Politics in the Persecution of Minorities in Taslima Nasrin's 'Lajja'*' that *the citizens who were earlier called "Bengalis" were now called "Bangladeshis"*. General Ershad who succeeded Zia Ur Rehman went a step further by declaring Islam as the State religion. Gradually, the secular forces weakened and Communists became communalists. The Hindus were discriminated against and victimized in every walk of life - in the army, services, business, and academic institutions. The condition of Hindus became worse than second-class citizens with no citizenship rights except to vote the Muslims in order to make them their masters, who in return did not provide them any facility to have a peaceful life and equality in the society.

Nasrin presents the figure of the minorities, due to the anarchy of Muslim communities Hindu people started to migrate to India. It turned to decline hindu community in Bangladesh continuously as *The figure of 1901 said that 33 percent of the population of East Bengal was Hindu... and in 1974 they were 13.5 percent...according to the 1981 Census... They were 12.1 percent of the total population.* (Nasrin, P.15) All these figures highlight clearly that no government of Bangladesh was succeeded to stop the atrocities on the Hindu minority and to stop the migration of the Hindu minority from Bangladesh. Thus, Taslima Nasrin, through her novel, strongly portrayed the agony and suffering of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh.

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