



# Humanism As Religion: A Critique Of Nasrin's Lajja

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## Abstract:

The paper aims at bringing out the thread of satire in Nasrin's Lajja through the representative case of Dutta family. Nonetheless, the attempts will also be made to justify the liberal stands of the novelist who vouches for humanism by exposing religious lunacy and reluctant fundamentalism.

**Keywords:** *atheism as crime, cat as metaphor of free will, religion as existence, humanism as religion*

Taslina Nasrin rose to worldwide prominence with the publication of her very controversial novel "Lajza. The novel honestly narrates the horrifying experience of Duttas-Sudhamoy, Kironmayee, and their two children, Suranjan and Maya, who are subjected to serious insult and abuse for no rhyme or reason – simply because Sudhamoy, an atheist, believes "with a naive mix of optimism and idealism that his mother land will not let him down." The explanation is that they do not want to leave the country they adore; they only want to demonstrate respect and sympathy to all religious people. In tone and temperament, the author seeks the scorching now rather than yearning for a golden past or a beautiful future. However, the hot issue of religious extremism in Bangladesh today is the clash that developed between Hindus and Muslims after the Babri Masjid was cruelly demolished by a group of Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. The book's jacket cover, "Lajja," correctly observes:

"Unremittingly dark and menacing, the novel exposes the mindless blood thirstiness of fundamentalism and brilliantly captures the insanity of violence in our time."

"Ljja" is a religious satire on the bigotry and extremism of religion. But here the satire is not mild and indirect like that of "Macflecknoe" in which Dryden changed the rough to refined, the vulgar to aesthetic, and a low to sublime; the satire here is rather very harsh, poignant and denigrating like that of Alexander Pope who used decisive and abusive language to expose the hollowness of Dr. Arbuthnot.

Lajja begins with the unrest of a terrified Hindu family in Bangladesh following the horrific abolition of a Great Masjid known as the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Maya, Suranjan's sister and the novel's protagonist, is terrified and want to quit the nation. Suranjan, on the other hand, was in a defiant attitude. He snarls and mutters like an enraged tiger:

"Why should he flee his home simply because his name was Suranjan Dutta? Was it necessary for his family - Sudhamoy, his father, Kironmoyee, his mother and Nilanjana (Maya), his sister — to run away like fugitives just because of their names? Would they have to take refuge in the homes of Kamal, Belal or Haider just as they had done two years back? ... Why did he have to run away from his, own home? And wasn't this country as much his as it was Kamal's? Then why was he seemingly deprived of his rights; and why was his motherland turning her back on him?"

Sudhamoy, the father of Suranjan, recollects some past events in a stream of consciousness method. He remembers how in 1947, all his aunts and uncles and other relatives had begun to leave Bangladesh one by one; how in 1952, the people of this country specially, the young, brave and politically conscious Bengalis of East Pakistan rose in protest against Urdu language imposed by Jinnah; how in 1969, Pakistani Strongman, Ayub Khan, passed standing instruction to fire at processions; how in 1971, he witnessed wave upon wave of bloodshed and trouble.

It is to be noted here that Suranjan, though a Hindu, possesses only a little sense of Hinduism in his heart. He is a man who believes that all religions, however, different they may be, are one and the same. He has no grudge against any Muslim friend. But the irony lies in it, that in spite of his neutral and secular nature, he had to face so many untold miseries, abuse and taunts. According to the novelist, he was a man who believed that no religion had created barriers. He wanted to see his people away from communal barriers and live together in perfect harmony. Moreover, he was also a staunch patriot who preferred dying in the soil of his country to take shelter in India. But in spite of all these things, his family has to be enmeshed in the net of bigotry and communalism. Suranjan thought why people tried to avoid him and excluded him from their groups. He felt like a fish of water. He thought that 'only human beings had racial and communal differences and only they had temples and mosques (p. 59). He also meditated those cats have no communal differences. She goes to the kitchen, of both Hindu and Muslim alike :

"Suranjan attention was drawn to the animal. Hadn't the cat been to the Dhakeshwari temple today? Which community did the cat belong to? Was it Hindu? Presumably it was Hindu, since it lived in a Hindu home. It was a black and white cat and there was a softness about its eyes. It seemed to pity him. If it had the ability to pity, the cat must be Muslim! Must be a liberal Muslim! ... The cat got up and left. Perhaps it was going to the Muslim kitchen next door, since there wasn't much food being cooked in this house" (p. 59).

Well, religion is the part and parcel of man's life. A race without religion is just like a flower without fragrance, a body without heart. There have been degraded religions as well as lofty religions producing evil as well as good. But so far as man's journey to peace and prosperity, purity and spirituality is concerned, religion has accompanied man at every stage of time. In short, religion is an organising idea and it is the cohesive force in man's social structure. It is the greatest and most immediate need of human being. Mahatma Gandhi rightly holds the view :

"No man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason or by instinct or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle and associates something good with its observance and something bad with the non-observance."

But the greatest irony lies in it that in spite of the perennial significance of religion, most of the fanatics of the world don't understand the real purport of religious spirit; they begin to hurl insult and abuse on other's religion. As a matter of fact, all religions of the world, however, different in form they may be, are essentially the same. Though their creeds, practices, rituals, customs and rites, differ immensely from one another, yet if one dives deep into the soul of it, one finds a cohesive and universal unity among them. So if a Hindu tortures a Muslim on the ground of religion, it is greatest foolishness and vice-versa. We should always bear in our mind that all religions project and express the same Eternal Truth - God is one; He is our Father or Mother or Friend. Or He is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. Or in the tent of God, all creatures are equal. In short, all religions of the universe are the small rivers and rivulets which are flowing to die deep into the bosom of the Almighty Sea. S. Radhakrishnan has rightly quoted the observation of Bohme in his famous book, "The Hindu View of Life" :

"Consider the birds in our forests, they praise God each in his own way, in diverse tones and fashions. Think you God is vexed by this diversity and desires to silence discordant voices? All the forms of being are dear to the infinite Being Himself." Moreover, Kabirdas was also dead against the hypocrisy and artificiality of rituals. He lashed out the Hindu who used to worship the stone blindly without caring for his own inner purification. On the other hand, he also exposed the hypocrisy of those Mullah who practised just the otherwise of what they taught. So, no religion is good and no religion is bad.

All religions are perfect in their own jurisdiction. Any attempt to falsify or disparage other religious belief will surely lead to fanaticism which cannot be called good at any cost. What is needed today is not to degrade the belief of the other but to peep into the inner chamber of oneself and to eradicate the plants of fanaticism if it is gaining ground. Religious extremism in any form mustn't be tolerated at any cost. Why? Because it is just like a poisonous insect which eats into the vitals of a healthy religion or it is a disease of the rose which slowly but steadily rots the beauty of the flower. So, both the Hindu and the Muslim should never develop a sense of hatred and jealousy to each other. Rather they should try their best to admire and appreciate their different beliefs though they are not different at all in the depth. In Radhakrishnan's opinion roots of all religion ultimately lead to humanity as its final destination.

The power nexus tends to operate through its ideological apparatuses. Narratives are set to tune of continuous manifestation of their agenda through masked mediums. It's beyond the layman's capacity to comprehend and decode beguiled ends of those who are in power. They co-opt to continue lies as real. Therefore, as Chomsky puts, 'intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyse actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions.' Taslima Nasrin as true intellectual of the twenty-first century, cooks the human soul for betterment by enthroning and imbibing in them zero intolerance towards any religion. Lajja tends convey explicitly that we as a human should envision to vaccinate soul against all ill-practices that put human under the erasure. Nasrin implies that humanity is the only religion that we as a human should accept. Her prescriptive narrative marks departure from Matthew Arnold's theory i.e. religion as machinery. Therefore, in order to establish and filter beauty and peace in society, the focus should be shifted to human excellence that renders human being better than yesterday.

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