

# SENSE OF ALIENATION IN TASLIMA NASRIN'S *LAJJA*

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**Abstract:** The conflict and alienation towards a particular group in society is widely written in literature of all kind. The writers may have either experienced or imagined the instances of people being marginalized and oppressed because of certain conflicts. Taslima Nasrin is a human rights activist and a doctor by profession. Her famous novel- *Lajja* (1993) has a plot narrating the events of thirteen days after the demolition of Babri Masjid in India. The novel is about sufferings of a Bengali-Hindu family amidst the Hindu Muslim riots. In the preface of the novel, Nasrin says “*Let Another Name of Religion be Humanism*” rightly to fit in the backdrop of the novel. This paper aims at the analysis of characters portrayed in the novel *Lajja* using Marx's Theory of Alienation. The psychological anguish of a person caused by society's hostility which creates the feeling of alienation and fragmentation from the society is analyzed. The paper also seeks to sensitize readers about inhumanity done to people.

**Indexed terms:** Alienation, Hindu- Muslim riots, Struggle for Survival,

## Introduction

The theme of conflict and alienation of a particular group in society is wide spoken in utmost all the genres of writing. The writers had either seen or imagined the instances of people being marginalized and oppressed because of certain conflicts.

Taslima Nasrin is a human rights activist and a doctor by profession. She fights against inhumanity towards women in Bangladesh and portrays oppression of women through her novels. Writing more than thirty works including poetry, novels, essays and memoirs in Bengali, she has also won Ananda Purashkar award in 1992 and 2000. Her works include *Sikorey Bipul Khuda* (1986), *Nirbachito* (1991), *Oporpokkha* (1992), *Sodh* (1992), *Nimantran* (1993), *Lajja* (Shame) was translated by Tutul Gupta in 1993.

Taslima Nasrin wrote *Lajja* within seven days of sensing the horrendous event of Babri Masjid Demolition on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1992 and published it after facing much negation from the government of Bangladesh. There were many discussions over this incident in the elite club rooms of Bangladesh but it was Nasrin who outgrew them and published *Lajja* for which she was shamed nationally.

The Author feels sorry for such turn of events in Bangladesh and condemns this act of religious extremism towards a particular sect of people. In spite of being a banned book, *Lajja* has a plot narrating the aftermath of the events in the life of a Bengali-Hindu family amidst the Hindu Muslim riots.

This paper deals with the estrangement of the Dutta family from the enraged society of Bangladesh; where their family once commanded respect. The author in the novel writes about the impact of religious fundamentalism on a minority group of Hindus. The plot surrounds Sudhamoy Dutta and his family; he had been proud citizen of

his motherland but was now facing difficulties day after day. The demolition caused an adverse effect throughout the world, criticizing the Indian fanatics. In Bangladesh riots broke out, vandalism of temples/shrines increased and many innocent people were killed.

The protagonist's (Sudhamoy Dutta) idealistic and optimistic vision that his country will protect him and others like him during the extremist wave in society was shattered by the growing rage that engulfed many innocent lives. Seeing these events, his hope for peace in society crippled and was forced to opt for migration to India to save his and family's life and their cultural identity.

The Duttas' had never felt so helpless about the situation of 1992 December, though they had survived the communal clashes of 1990s by hiding in Muslim household. The author uses the flashback technique to show the seriousness of the situation in the past, where the Hindus could no longer bear the alienation from society, which they once considered their motherland.

Sudhamoy reviewed the demolition telecast on television, went into a reverie of his life as a young man with nationalistic fervour and was proud of the nation he was born into. He was angry with the people who were leaving the country sensing the forth-coming situation of communal clashes, quoting from the novel:

As the steam trains pulled out from Mymensingh on their way to Phulbaria, the guard's whistle would invariably be accompanied by the heartbroken wails of people leaving the only country they knew. As their neighbours left, they would call out to Sudhamoy's father...he would say, 'If there is no security in your own country, where in this world can we go looking for it? I cannot run away from my homeland. You go if you want to. I am not leaving the property of my forefathers.' (Nasrin 6).

Any nationalist would give his life for his country, but he fell into a dilemma when he had to choose between family and country. Sudhamoy wished to fight it out and claim his right to live in his country but he gradually failed to protect himself and his family. He was also maimed of his male organs. The kidnapping of Maya (Nilanjana), his daughter by some mobsters became an alarming call for Sudhamoy to leave his wealthy ancestral land to the Muslim usurpers and move to Dhaka; hoping to provide a meager living also live peacefully with his family. Having little hope to survive in this situation, he looked forward that his son- Suranjan will protect and take care of the family.

Karl Marx in his theory of Alienation explained the effects of alienation of a capitalist society in people and says how several people are deprived of social bonding with other men making communal existence nearly impossible. (M.Monalisa) Here in the novel, the Duttas question their right to live in the society. Both father and son had the same opinion and ask why they should go into hiding from danger, change their names to that of Muslim friends; as even their mere names became a hindrance.

Sudhamoy held on to nationalistic ideals even though his friends had moved to India, a few other Muslim acquaintances had refused to help him. Like his father(Sukumar Dutta) he thought - " 'why should I leave my homeland and go somewhere else? If I live it will be on this soil, and if I die it will be in the very same place.' " (Nasrin 7). He found it difficult to maintain his seniority at work in Dhaka after moving from his native, Mymensingh. After waiting for long and bearing it out with the office politics, he retired.

The Duttas were alienated again through loss of their cultural identity. Kironmoyee stopped wearing kumkum and shakun, the only evidence of being a married Bengali woman. She saw her farms, fruit orchards being usurped, torn into bits as they were chased away from their ancestral home by the Muslim neighbours. Maya opposed of Suranjan's being idle at home, not making any efforts to look for a place where they could hide temporarily from the risk of being cited by any Muslim agitator.

Nasrin brings out a strong female characterization through her novels. Here in the novel, Maya's priority was safety of herself and her family, as Suranjan failed at giving protective environment to his family. She left the house to stay with her Muslim friend- Parul. Kironmoyee understood her daughters' predicament who was protective of her children and begged Sudhamoy to leave the place.

Marx's theory of estrangement stresses that alienation is the main cause of dehumanization. Suranjan became vulnerable to the situation and refused to run away from the country like his other friends. He was also alienated from his Muslim friends' circle and refused to give into communal violence. He knew about the risk of going out, but his feelings begin to shift after a terrible tragedy struck the family. An unknown group of vigilantes kidnapped Maya and her whereabouts were unknown till the end of the novel. Suranjan searched for her in and around Dhaka and feeling defeated asked his father to migrate.

Sudhamoy finally said: " 'Come, let us go away.'... And his voice cracked as the shame swept over him. But he had said it, he had forced it out, he had compelled himself to say that they would go; and he had realized that that was the way it would have to be because the strong mountain that he had built within himself was crumbling day by day." (Nasrin 216).

Rousseau says that alienation of any sect of people can be eradicated only when there is a development of new and informed society of diverse thinking and people. On this basis alienation can be reduced considerably. (M. Monalisa). Through this paper, readers are sensitized about inhumanity to people, as both dehumanization and alienation are curses to society.

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