

# Taslima Nasrin's Lajja: A Failure of Communist Ideology

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**Abstract:** *An in-depth analytical study of Taslima Nasrin's Lajja (Shame) reveals that religious fanaticism plays a very derogatory role in dividing human beings on the basis of religion and inciting them to destroy their lives. She depicts a Hindu family which believed in communist ideology and cherished a number of hopes for security, liberty and equality in East Pakistan. Suranjan, the mouthpiece of Nasrin and the incarnation of Jimmy Porter, is a leftist intellectual; dreaming of humanity for Hindu Minority in Bangladesh. But he found that Hindus' lives were badly impacted by the events between 1947 to 1992 during which social taboos and religion became the basis of politics and the country became an Islamic state marginalizing the minorities mostly Hindus. He gathered a number of persecutions in his heart and mind; and never retaliated till the abduction of his real sister. This incident brought out his hidden anger and hatred for Muslim Majority and he retaliated against them. He joined the Hindu organization to demolish the mosques and raped a Muslim whore very brutally to take revenge of his sister's abduction. His family suffered such irreparable losses that it was forced to leave Bangladesh for India. Nasrin dares to condemn the Muslim fanatics and makes a universal appeal to human beings to live with love, peace and harmony thwarting political manipulations in the name of religion.*

**Keywords:** *Taslima Nasrin's Lajja, Communist Ideology*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the life circle of human beings, youth is supposed to be the most volcanic age, having energy and strength of body, mind, and heart. People in this particular age have vigor to differentiate between right and wrong, true and false, philanthropic and misanthropic activities. They praise the right things and boldly oppose the wrong and try to establish rules and regulations of the society and culture for betterment. In *Lajja* (1993), Suranjan is the protagonist and believes in humanity. He makes best of his efforts to establish a utopian society in Bangladesh free from bias based on religion, caste, language and prosperity. He considers humanity as the only religion and Bangladesh his own motherland. But when he finds his countrymen against his secular notions, he tries his best to protest but failed. His ideology and humanity were shattered badly by religious fanaticism. He, his parents and his sister Maya, all had to face inhuman treatment by fanatic Muslims as well as biased Govt. in Bangladesh. Social dissatisfaction and detest has been a recurrent theme

in twentieth century literature. John Osborne in his play '*Look Back In Anger*' (1956) heralded this issue and showed his own anger through Jimmy Porter, the protagonist in the play, against the class discrimination in Britain i.e. lower class and upper class. Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi angry young woman, in her controversial novel *Lajja* which showed the effects of Babri Masjid's destruction in India in 1992 and its consequences in Bangladesh where Muslims persecuted Hindus very cruelly, expresses her feelings of frustration and anger through Suranjan, a young man of twenty-nine years.

## MAIN TEXT

Suranjan is the protagonist in the novel and all the characters and the incidents of the novel revolve round him and his family, which consists of four members – Suranjan, his sister Nilanjana alias Maya, Dr Sudhamoy Dutta, his father and Smt. Kiranmoye Dutta, his mother. Like his father

Sudhamoy Dutta and grandfather Sukumar Dutta, Suranjan is a leftist intellectual, having firm faith in secularism, humanity and his motherland. The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, resulted into genocide of minorities in India and Pakistan (East & West) so the minorities in both the countries had to leave their motherland for a country of their own religious majority. The contemporary Govt of Jinnah in Pakistan declared the safety of Hindus. His promising words showed a number of dreams of Utopian Pakistan to Hindus. The text of Lajja (1994) witnesses,

Let's forget about our historical connection to India; in Bangladesh we must remain faithful to the secular ideals we have fought for. From this day onwards, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists will not be identified by their respective religion, but by their identity as Pakistanis. (Nasrin 87)

Several Hindus including the parents and grandparents of Suranjan trusted Jinnah and determined to stay in Bangladesh to serve their motherland. The same current of love for motherland was flowing in the blood of Suranjan who followed the fundamental ideology of his father, "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 this very same place." (7)

Suranjan possesses even stronger feelings for Humanity and his motherland. Being a Marxist, he does not join any Hindu organization of youths and even scolded Pulok, Nirmal, Kajal, and Debartha etc. for having ardent love for Hindus. He also cherished a number of dreams and feelings for equality and liberty for Hindu minority in Bangladesh but soon he found a great difference in the attitude of Bangladesh government and Muslims towards Hindus who had actively participated in National Language Movement (1952), and Independence Movement (1971) in hope of, "A state of Bangladesh founded on the basis of four major principles: Nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism." (42) Through his parents, books, and magazines, he came to know about the atrocities on Hindus by Muslims in the riots in 1947, 1952, 1964, and witnessed himself in 1971, when a number of Hindus were killed and forced to convert their religion and his father's penis was also mutilated resulting into permanent impotency

He found Hindus to be harassed and haunted at every level. Hindu students were compelled to recite *Kalama* in the prayer of their school. Suranjan could not forget the humiliation which he faced in school when he studied in seventh standard and his friend Faurakh

made him eat beef deliberately to violate Suranjan's religion. The administration as well as the judicial system in Bangladesh had a biased approach toward Hindus and other minorities in favour of Muslims in admissions, employments, business, citizen services and promotions. Sudhamoy, a physician in Govt. hospital in Mymensingh, was working on the post of An Assistant Professor and his promotion as Associate professor was due and ignored deliberately for last few years. He fulfilled all the eligibilities for the promotion but his promotion was denied deliberately because he belonged to Hindu community. Nasrin comments, "Had he been Muhammad Ali or Salimullah Chaudhary there would hardly have been any obstacles in his way. (22)

Suranjan, a brilliant young man, having Master's Degree in Physics, could not get even a simple job of clerk because of his religion. His faith in system was shaken when he found that the Muslim applicants who clicked their tongues in disappointment in interview, were selected in Govt. services while he along with other minority young men, was unemployed. Not to speak of the Govt. services, Hindus were not allowed to start their business or trading alone because, "It was essential for him to have Muslim Partner...no establishment with a purely Hindu name was given license to operate. Even more crucial was the fact that no nationalized bank... was willing to help a purely Hindu establishment." (22)

Looking at the brief history of Bangladesh/ East Pakistan, Suranjan found that the contemporary Pakistani Government had forgotten the promises and the so-called secular pact. Hindus were segregated and killed brutally in Pakistan while Muslims were secured and gaining more power under biased policies of the Indian Government. In East Pakistan, Government started acquiring the properties of Hindus under Enemy Property Act. Even the Judiciary system was bias, and indirectly helped Muslims against Hindus who like Suranjan's father had to sell their properties to Muslims for pittance in fear of usurpation of his property. Suranjan, at that time a college student, disagreed with his father act of selling the property and argued for doing something but useless. He cannot forget his birthplace full of pleasure and happiness, "All those lush green fields in which they used to run about, the orchards full of mangoes, jamun, jack-fruit, guavas, betel nuts and coconuts....(14) but now they had no property not only for farming but also for residence and they had to live in a small house on rent.

Since, most of the members in assembly were Muslims; they brought several amendments in the constitution of Bangladesh for assigning Muslim more powers and rights to marginalize Hindus minority. The narrative witnesses, "In 1978, the commencement of the constitution of 1972 was changed to '*Bismillahir Rahmanair Rahim*'.... the word '*Secularism*' was removed..... After the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1988... 'The State religion of the Republic is Islam.'" (181-183)

Suranjan was very much astonished at the biased amendments and understood the real situation of Hindus "as swine or dog" (25) They had become the second-class citizens in the country so "it was foolish, he thought, to try and see themselves as equal to the Muslims who were the first-class citizens of this country." (63) Ultimately, the government unofficially supported fanatic Muslims to get the Hindus converted to Islam. If anybody refused to convert his religion, he was killed brutally, his family members were tortured and the female members were raped before them. Its result, he witnessed in the riot of 1990, when Muslims hooligans killed several innocent Hindus, burnt their properties, abducted their girls, and raped them in the broad light of day. Suranjan along with his family had to take shelter, under Muslim pseudo names, in his friend, Kamal's house to save his entity and life but he did not think of retaliation against Muslims because he believes in the theory of Marxism. But now in the riot of 1992, which was in response to the destruction of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, all the Muslims in Bangladesh had decided to uproot the Hindus completely. They had demolished thousands of houses, commercial establishments, and temples. Their religious slogans "Let us catch a Hindu or two, eat them in the morning and evening too "(17) were echoing in the streets so that most of the Hindus could listened.

Suranjan found his own Muslim friends ignoring him. Kamal, Bilal and Haider did not visit his home for his well being. When he went into the street, his neighbour and Muslim friends shouted out, "catch him, he's a Hindu" (27) Suranjan could not imagine such kind of inhumanity with himself because he had no difference between Hindus and Muslims; and always values humanity above. He was shocked and frustrated with such kind of behaviour by the people of his own motherland and his frustration resulted into total indifference towards humanity and even his own family. When his sister requested her to make an arrangement for the security of the family in any of his friend's house, he ignored her request and decided to stay in his own house to face the consequences. His anger came on the surface and he asked:

Why did he have to run away from his own home? Kamal had never had reason to do so. And wasn't this country as much his as it was Kamal's? Then why was he seemingly deprived of his rights, and why his motherland turning her back on him? Why could he not say to her, I am a son of this soil, please see that no harm comes to me! (1)

He thought that the life of Hindus in this country is useless so it is better to commit suicide than to be killed by Muslim hooligans. He wandered into the street aimlessly in anger ready to face the consequences. At his home, he came to know that Maya has gone to somebody's house for her safety; he snubbed his parents saying that he had more reasons of her safety than the Muslims people. He busted in anger, "It's just not possible to trust Muslims. You may think someone is your friend, but it wouldn't be surprising if he suddenly came and chopped your head." (73) He thought that Maya went outside not for her security rather to get a chance to meet her Muslim lover named Jahagir who would cheat her surely as he himself was cheated by a Muslim girl named Praveen, who asked Suranjan to convert his religion into Islam, if he wanted to marry her. Suranjan was first shocked, but later he laughed in disappointment and said, "You know very well I don't believe in religion...I don't want to be a Muslim just for that." (102) At last, she was married to a Muslim person and Suranjan was cheated because of being Hindu. The same thing happened with Maya who was left alone by Jahagir when he went abroad.

Being frustrated and disgust, Suranjan was totally indifferent towards everybody and did not want to speak even to his parents. On the sixth day of the riot, Maya was abducted from her home in the presence of her parents who tried their best to save her but useless. Nobody helped them. When Suranjan came to know about this inhuman incident, he shuddered in a terrible dilemma and fear. He requested Haider in a very heart touching way to help him in searching of Maya. He tried his best but failed to search Maya whose wait was being done by his parents also. An unbearable pain was growing in the heart of Suranjan and his parents. Now Suranjan had lost control over his feelings and emotions. His situation was like Prince Hamlet, the protagonist in Shakespeare's play entitled *Hamlet*. As Hamlet was in confusion what to do or what not to do, Suranjan was also in confusion what he should do. His mind echoed the voice of Hamlet:

To be or not to be, - that is the question  
 Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer,  
 The slings and arrow of outrageous  
 fortune  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 (Hamlet, 54-55)

He heard Kiranmoyee sobbing, "Why couldn't the three of them take poison and kill themselves? At least their pain and suffering would not continue to pierce and chop them into even finger pieces. (157) Suranjan like Hamlet also thought to commit suicide because he found his life worthless even not to help his parents and sister. But soon he rejected this idea as it is the work of the cowards. Finally, he came to the decision of taking arms against inhumanity by adopting the policy of tit for tat. He had strong desire for revenge and urged Debabrata:

'Come, let's go and set the Tara masjid on fire tonight!.... 'There are twenty million Hindus in this country. If we had wanted to, we could even have burnt up Baitul Mokarram!'

'You have never claimed to be a Hindu, why start today?' (Debabrata asked)

'... yes, I used to call myself a human being, and I believed in humanism. But these Muslims did not let me stay human. They made me a Hindu'... We can at least prove that we too can destroy...we too are capable of being angry. (163)

Suranjan was disgusted and his ideology as a Marxism was shattered into pieces. He wanted to take revenge on Muslims by catching and killing Muslim boys and rape their girls. His mind is full of Maya's thinking and pain she had been tolerating somewhere in hooligans' custody. He soliloquized,

Maya must be inside a locked room somewhere, screaming for help but no one could hear her... she was probably inside a locked room begging and crying in front of a pack of animals. Where was Maya? Was she in a garbage bin or in a whorehouse, or had she been thrown into the Buriganga? (201-202)

He was filled with anger as well as fear, his blood was flowing fast in the veins and trying to come out of them. He, in frustration, searched a Muslim prostitute named Shammima whom he thought the daughter of a

Muslim to take his revenge. He brought her to his room, switched off the lights and quickly jumped upon the naked body of her like a wild animal upon its prey. He dug his nails into her whole body, bit her breasts and ultimately raped her mercilessly for his savage satisfaction. The prostitute cried with intolerable pain and tried her best to save herself, "just as the deer tries to escape the tiger." (201)

This act did not fit the personality of a good human being like Suranjan who took it as his success against Muslims that had abducted his sister and some other girls. Kanwar Pal Singh in his research paper titled '*Taslima Nasrin's Lajja: A Shame on Religion and Politics*' (2013) rightly comments, "He (Suranjan) had done inhumanity with a girl who had nothing to do with the demolition of the temples, usurpation of the Hindus property, and persecution of the Hindus and the abduction of Maya." (8)

## CONCLUSION

The author has successfully portrayed the enigma of Suranjan and millions of Hindus in Bangladesh where the only religion was Muslims and others were treated like animals to be tortured. Suranjan in disgust, tried to take his revenge on a Muslim prostitute was not a sign of humanity. Ms. Amrita Mazumdar comments in this context: "The attempt of Suranjan, the Marxist, to revenge himself for his sister's rape by raping a Muslim prostitute, is a shabby anticlimax as it is intended to be." (SPIEL, 100) But Suranjan, being a good human being and having a kind heart, rued on, and cursed himself for the heinous crime he had done with a Muslim girl because revenge is a wild justice and that was not the solution of the problems faced by millions of minorities in Bangladesh or any other country having biased ideology. At last, he along with his parents, decided to leave Bangladesh for India. In praise of Taslima Nasrin's attempt in the book *Lajja*, Ms Amrita Mazumdar is right to say,

Nobody who has read the book can help admiring the courage of a young woman of 33, who dares to challenge single-handedly such a formidable monster as Islamic fundamentalism in a state of officially declared an Islamic Republic.... She deserves the highest praise that is possible for an Indian to give viz. she is a spiritual heir of Gandhi. (SPIEL, 99-100)

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