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Violence against Women in Taslima Nasrin's Lajja

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ABSTRACT: Bangladeshi English literature consists of all those literary works written in the English language in Bangladesh and by the Bangladeshi diaspora. Some of its prominent writers are Rabindranath Tagore, Begam Rokeya,Tehmima Anam, Taslima Nasrin and so on. The name of Tagore shows that the origin of Bangladeshi literature can be traced to pre-independent Bengal. The writers of Bangladesh use English as a medium to connect to the rest of the world. It is used as a medium to contribute to the world literature. They also find it a tool to show the real conditions of Bangladesh to the world. Writers like Taslima Nasrin details many of the issues of the nation in her magnum opus Lajja. One of those issues is the violence against women in Bangladesh. In one of her interviews, she states that everything she has written is for the oppressed women of Bangladesh. She further stated that she has wrung her heart out into her words. She has consistently been criticizing the patriarchal society of the nation for its bad treatment of women.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Bangladesh, Diaspora, Violence, Patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION: Though, the novel largely shows the cruelty and sadistic actions of one religious group for another one in Bangladeshi society.it has been shown effectively with the background of the demolition of the Babri Masjidin Dec., 1992 by some Hindus in India. Bangladesh is a neighbour of India and this incident in India has a negative impact on the psyche of the Bangladeshi citizens, particularly the Muslim population. Without any fault on their part, Hindu Bangladeshi citizens are given the punishment of being murdered ,raped and exiled forever. A whole community of the Hindus bear the consequences. The men as well as women suffer a lot. The demolition of the Babri masjid had witnessed so many deaths and tortures to the Hindu males and especially the women were inhumanly brutalized, tormented and raped. In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the violence against women and its effects on the national life of Bangladesh.

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Lajja chiefly revolves around the Dutta family where Sudhamoy lives with his wife, Kironmoyee and his two children, Suronjon and Nilonjana. The Dutta family has contributed a lot by participating in the events of national importance. But they are considered as "OTHERS" by the Muslims of their own nation. They are the representatives of sufferings of the Hindu families. The men and women suffer but the suffering of women is many folded. At the first level, they are tortured by the males of different religious groups and at the second level, they are tortured by their own family members. The women of marginalized groups are assaulted on the third level by the females of the majority community. Even the cruel treatment of Hindu men folks eventually affected the Hindu women more negatively as they were left alone to the tortures of the Muslims.

In the novel, Nasrin intensely depicts how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to various kinds of tribulations that may even result in their death.

"Shiuli, the fourteen year old daughter of Sudhanshu Kumar Haldar of Purbojalabari village of Sorupkathi, was raped on the way to her uncle's house by a man called Rustam Ali. (p. no.66)

The novel is full of such incidents. Women are sexually assaulted everywhere. They are kidnapped and raped irrespective of their age. By doing the heinous act, the culprits show off their strength and power. They also find it a way to satiate their lust and physical hunger. It is the trait of an animal to kill another living thing and eat it. But an animal kills only to feed itself. Here, these people lower themselves below animals. They rape the women for their sadistic pleasure and then leave her at her own to be suffered. In such cases, women die either of injuries or commits suicide. People choose women for physical violence because they think them to be weak and a soft target.

A civilized society should have law and order. But in this society, no fear of law and order is seen. Police completely fail in its duty to ensure the safety of all the citizens. In spite of helping the victims, the police target and torture them. They take it as an opportunity to grab as much money as they can.

"In Bastukathi village, Minoti Rani, a worker of the sub-district health department was on her way with her brother and sister in law to meet her friend, Chhobi Rani. They were

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captured and kept in the temporary police camp and threatened with torture. They were released after a thousand takas from them." (66)

Even the government is not willing to help the victims. If any law breaker is arrested by the police, they have to release him because of the pressure of the authorities.

Maya is the representative of these unfortunate women who face the violence. She has to go through the attack for two times. At the age of six, she was abducted by some people. Luckily, she came back after two days but was badly terrified.

"She behaved unnaturally for two months after that incident. She would repeatedly start in her sleep." (21)

As she grows up, she manages to avoid recalling those memories. But it certainly leaves an impact on her mind. When the riots break on 8th December, 1992, she again deals insecure. Due to her past experience, she requests her brother to take the family away to some safe place. After Suronjon's denial, she steps out of the house to seek refuge at her Muslim friend's house. There, also, she remains restless for two reasons. On one is that her friend's relatives watch her suspiciously and ask the family to get rid of her. The second reason of her restlessness is her identity. She has to use a Muslim to introduce herself to anyone. It hurts her self- confidence. In her childhood, her abductors hurts her innocence. This time, the Muslim people hurts her emotionally and mentally. She is a brilliant student and an independent girl. She performs very well in her academics. Unlike her brother she does not depend economically on her family. Instead, she gives tuition to a number of students. With the tuition fee, she fulfils her needs and also contributes in the household expenditures. She made her identity with her hard work. And now, her identity is at danger. This is a blow to her dignity as a woman.

Soon after her arrival to her own house, some Muslim goons enter the house and kidnap her. She cries for help and put all her power to save herself but in vain. One can easily guess what would have happened with her. But her suffering does not end here. The novelist gives a clue at one place that Maya is no more. Her family realizes it after hearing the news of a girl's dead body looking like Maya. No one go to identify her body. She is a Hindu and it is said that one will get peace after death only when its funeral rites are performed by the

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family. It is the right of every person to get a funeral according to their religion. Nothing of this happens with Maya. This is also a kind of violence. But this time, it is done by her own family.

So, Maya is a representative of the women in Bangladesh who have to suffer violence of various kind. They suffer directly and indirectly. Since ages, injustice is done with women. They are termed as 'good' or 'bad' women. A women is good if she acts according to the norms of the patriarchal society like Kironmoyee. She devotes her entire life to her family. She does whatever the male members said her to do. She gives up wearing conch shell bangles and vermillion. She also gives up worshipping and performing religious rituals because her husband is a non-believer of religion of any kind. She cooks beef against her wishes because her husband asks her to do so. Sudhamoy becomes impotent after getting injured by Pakistani army at the time of liberation war. She has to give up her physical desires and show her loyalty and devotion to Sudhamoy. He hardly invites his friends at home as he fears that Kironmoyee might find in any of them her desired partner. She runs the house with the meagre amount that Sudhamoy earns by treating the patients.

She acts as a woman who is considered perfect by the society. According to the society, a woman should be submissive, caring and understanding. She should sacrifice her life for the welfare of the family. She is not permitted to have any desires of her own. In this case, the society make her an idol, made of stone devoid of emotions and desires.

On the other hand, the novelist introduces Shamima begum. She is called 'slut' and 'whore' in the novel.

"Suronjon heard Sudhamoy whimpering. Was he aware that his illustrious son had come home with a whore?" (p.no. 294)

She is termed as "bad" woman just because she does not fit in the frame of a good woman created by a male dominated society. The society itself is responsible for making her bad.

"She was poor and sold her body for food. The wretched mores of society were not pushing her to dark alleys instead."(p.no. 296)

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Suronjon hurts, ravages and rapes her. He does so to take revenge on the Muslims for her sister's rape and death. To punish them, he becomes one of them. Of course, he regrets over his action later on, but it cannot decrease his crime. This is how the patriarchal society is. Men target women for their lust. They use them for revenge. They use them to humiliate their family as they believe that women can not retaliate. She shall bear the torment silently.

Sudhamoy stops Kironmoyee from meeting his friends because of his fear but he said nothing when his son brings a woman to the house and rapes her. He might have heard some sound from Suronjo's room but does nothing to stop him. He said nothing even the next day. This is the tendency of the society. It always practise its power on women and never ask for explanations to a male for his actions. Muslims of Bangladesh attacks Hindus with their power. When Suronjon finds someone less powerful than him, he makes her a prey.

In the beginning of the paper, it was said that women is triply marginalized. A woman form minority community have to suffer at the hands of a woman form a majority community. They make themselves superior by showing their possession of jewellery and expensive clothes. Aleya begum lives in her neighbourhood. She comes to visit Kironmoyee. She knows the condition of Dutta family. Still, she comes wearing a big smile, dazzling sari and bright jewellery to show herself superior to Kironmoyee. She asks her to leave the country but here Kironmoyee comes with an answer that silences all her questions. She says that they don't leave the country because it's her country.

Kironmoyee may have stopped Aleya Begum in her attempt to humiliate her but Sudhamoy realizes that differences between Aleya's and Kironmoyee's situations. The novel Lajja is an attempt by Taslima Nasrin to express her contempt over the system of male dominated society and men's attitude towards females.

Maya and many other woman were raped and killed because of their being Hindu. Suronjon raped Shamima after knowing that she is a Muslim. If it was not their religious identity, they might be safe and alive. The same is said by Nasrin in one of her interviews that laws should be based on equality, not on religion." (The Hindu)

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The first two lines of the book says:

"To the people of the Indian subcontinent.

Let humanity be the other name of religion".

If the humanity will be the religion of all, there will be no struggle and no sufferings. The sadistic nature of a person does not differentiate between a man and a woman. It just need an opportunity to raise its head. However, women became a soft target to bring out this tendency during 1992-93 riots in Bangladesh. Women are marginalized on the name of religion and gender as shown in the novel. The representation of female characters, their suffering at the hands of the society, family, neighbours and nation justifies the text to be a work of feminism. It questions the limits of liberty that come along in the moment of crisis. It asks a question. Are daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, friends or any female to be abducted, harassed, raped and used as objects during these times?

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