

Tribhuvan University

Narrativization of Gender Trauma in Taslima Nasrin's *My Girlhood*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

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Kirtipur, Kathmandu

June 2019

Tribhuvan University  
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Approval Letter

This research titled “Narrativization of Gender Trauma in Taslima Nasrin’s *My Girlhood*” submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mandira Timilsina has been approved by the undersigned of the Research Committee.

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## Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to extend to my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor Mr. Khem Raj Khanal, Lecturer at the Central Department of English, for his continuous co-operation, proper suggestion, genuine inspiration, insightful comments and motivation to accomplish this thesis. No expression of thanks can adequately carry out my deep felt appreciation for his cherished advice and splendid guidance during the course of this research work.

I am beholden to head of Central Department of English, Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa for his encouraging advice and granting me to do this research. Similarly, I would like to extend my gratefulness to respected lecturers Badri Prasad Acharya, Raj Kumar Baral, Dr. Anju Gupta, and other Professors as they have contributed enormously to my understanding of the subject. Without their support, this research would not have seen the light of the day.

I am rejoiced to grab this occasion to record my immense gratitude to my parents, Rajendra Prasad Timilsina and Indira Timilsina for their moral, emotional and economic support. I remember my brothers Dinesh Timilsina and Umesh Timilsina for their constant encouragement, grandiose suggestion and profound dedication. I owe them a great deal for what they have done. Above all my friends Sanu Khadka and Prakash Singh Bist deserve the biggest share of thanks from the depth of heart for their help.

June 2019

Mandira Timilsina

## Abstract

*The present research work discusses gender trauma in Nasrin's autobiography My Girlhood. Nasrin critically illustrates problems and issues of sexual violence which leads the author to the traumatic experiences. We can find the author's ceaseless efforts to find her true self beyond patriarchy, religions and belief set by people. When the book was first published in the Bengali language in 1998, it led to controversy. Due to the controversy, this book was banned in Bangladesh. The autobiography offers forbidden glimpses of the veiled life of the Muslim women. Being a subordinate lady in the tyranny of Islamic patriarchy Nasrin is traumatized. Trauma victim can cope with trauma in two ways; one is acting out and another is working through. Narrativization always comes under the working through process. Therefore through narrativization author tries to unveil the root of sexual violence upon women in an Islamic society. This autobiography is the means of scripto therapy for the author, which helps to reduce her trauma and resistance against male attitudes.*

**Key Words:** Trauma, sexual violence, patriarchy, gender, religion

## Narrativization of Gender Trauma in Taslima Nasrin's *My Girlhood*

This research paper explores traumatic experiences of a young girl who is sexually harassed by her own uncles in Taslima Nasrin's autobiography *My Girlhood*. All chapters run after pain and torture of the small girl and how she remains silent because of her tradition and religion. It is not just her story but also the story of her society where she was grown up and made up her family circle. In this research, the researcher will analyze the autobiography *My Girlhood* as a traumatic memory and history. This text tells mainly the stories of a Muslim girl who suffers a lot during her girlhood. This research paper excavates gender trauma, a story of suppression, discrimination, and feminism set between 1962 and 1975 in Mymensingh, Bangladesh.

Nasrin is a Bangladeshi author who has been in exile from her own country since 1994. *Meyebela, My Girlhood*, in translation is the first volume of Taslima Nasrin's autobiography. She is known as a rebellious and controversial writer, who explores into the forbidden reality of Muslim society and highly criticizing her own religion. She presents the psyche of a young girl who is depressed and disappointed by social and cultural operations in society. Hence, the present thesis deals with gender trauma and the primary objective of the study is to analyze the repression of traumatic women in the Muslim community. It also reveals the position of women in Islam. Similarly, it also deals with the extreme sufferings of the author and other characters which is the result of gender bias.

The autobiography *My Girlhood* is divided into nineteen chapters. The story starts with the author's birth date and ends in her adolescence. In each chapter, she

tries to picture the atmosphere where she was nurtured or grown up. She simply explores her living styles, family members and their attitude, culture, religion, tradition that she adopts everything. The whole autobiography seems to be traumatic experiences on how she hides her painful experience at the age of seven. Nasrin portrays her character in all complexities. She draws her readers effortlessly making the audience feel part of her family. She started her story from the very beginning where she enters in this world as a newborn baby.

This autobiography revolves around the women and their rights. Nasrin's psychology is traumatized at the age of seven. She has to tolerate sexual harassment done by her own family elders (uncles). That is so unbearable time for her. She is always restless and feels feeble. At that time, she is totally unknown about sexual assault or bullying. She cannot utter her voice about all these activities that she is tolerating which is done by her own relatives. She is forced to stay silent because of her religion and family atmosphere where she is nurtured. Sexual assault may occur in the great depression and horrible conditions where the victim is facing all kinds of pains and tortures. The writer Nasrin and other characters that represent their own real picture grounded on the causes and consequences of Muslim society. It is based on sexual violence and masculinity Islamic fundamentalist ethos. Nasrin by showing maximum sexual violence raises socio- cultural practices of the Muslim society.

Everyone has a big dream during the teenage. Likewise, Nasrin has also a big dream of being an artist. She has an interest in paintings and sometimes she draws paintings of human beings but her mother always stops her to do so. She never supports her to being different and creates a new thing. Her art is thrown in the trash. Her voice remains silent because of social norms and values. Nasrin's freedom and desires have been locked inside her own psychology. She is severely raped by her

own relatives. Nasrin narrates her life and how she tolerates all the unethical work done by her own relatives. She is not only raped physically but mentally too. We can see traumatic symptoms in women's language, relation and in their activities.

Taslima Nasrin's *My Girlhood* is one of the famous and well-known texts. *Los Angeles Times* has selected this book as one of the best book of 2002. Ever since its publication, critics and scholars have approached the autobiography in various ways. It has received numerous appreciation and criticism from different scholars and critics. Different critics analyze this text differently; however, this research revolves around the gender issue and expresses thoughts on religion, feminism and sexuality that are often controversial in the traditional Muslim society of Bangladesh.

A writer and teacher of English literature Rimi B. Chatterjee comment on Taslima Nasrin's text *My Girlhood*. She says:

This is the world where physical violence by both genders, to women and children, but never to men is an everyday reality. Most things are said with skin in this world: even Nasrin's relations with girl classmates and servants have a physically which would make most of today's parents rush her to the psychoanalyst's. But in the hothouse atmosphere of domestic relations here, where maximum prohibition coincides with maximum opportunity, it is quite understandable. (1)

This extract emphasizes the reality of today's world, where only women are haunted and takes them as sex object. If we revisit history, women have been subjugated and dominated. They are used as means of exploitation. In the name of culture and religion, they are always taken as an inferior and fearful human being.

Similarly, Jessica Rai in her article states that:

Nasrin firmly believes that women should have rights to continue their

education and get financial independence, very important for women's rights. She gained more popularity when she started writing columns for women's right freedom. Unlike many girls in her society, Nasrin grew up in "secular environment" where her father encouraged her for education. And she is thankful to her father who made her study medicine which she loved. (2)

Nasrin's father seems too strict but he always motivates his children to study well. He is a doctor by profession; therefore, he wants to pass his legacy to his babies. This is the reason Nasrin's father always encourage Nasrin to believe in scientific reason. She is grateful to her father to make her a rational person. Nasrin is a controversial writer of Islam. Her stand on gender issues is impressively surprising. She fights for the emancipation of women and highly criticizes her own religion. So, Jessica and Rimi highly appreciated Nasrin's works. Nasrin's work becomes highly praiseworthy for them.

Likewise, another critic Hasan Mahamudul in his journal title "Nasrin Gone Global: A Critique of Taslima Nasrin's Criticism of Islam and Her Feminist Strategy" argues that Nasrin herself misrepresent in front of the world. He believes that adopting another religion to ignore and criticize own is like become an alien to the third world view of itself. He comments:

Embracing a Western secular ethos and denigrating and rejecting their religious and cultural base, a writer who attacked Islam from inside thus become 'alien to the Third World view of itself' and complicit in the west battle against Islam. In return, they receive disproportionate recognition in the dominant media. Nasrin uses a stereotypical representation of Muslims, claiming that illiterate and uneducated people who have no scientific knowledge would believe in religion. According to her believers in Islam do



not have any brain. When it comes to criticizing Islam many of her statements are charged with emotions, offensiveness and break boundaries of respectability and civility. (175)

Hasan directly charges Nasrin as uncivilized. This text *My Girlhood* is considered as an anti-religious text. She only finds problems and obstacles in her religion. But Hasan states that we should not ignore and hate our religion for emancipation. So, Hasan highly criticizes Nasrin's work and thoughts. For Hasan Ignoring own culture is not a way of freedom and emancipation. If we really want to change our society first we need to change ourselves. By saying bad about own religion neither we can change society nor change the world. Instead of saying any bad about one's own culture and religion we should use it as a weapon to change the society.

Similarly, Urbashi Bharat is another critic who reviews Nasrin's text in her article titled "Writing the Self: Taslima Nasrin's Autobiography and the Silent voices of Bengali Feminism." She comments that:

I believe that the violence of the response to Nasrin's autobiography is due not so much to its perceived attacks upon Islam but rather to the discomfort and the fear caused by the way she asserts her right to construct her selfhood herself, by her refusal to accept the patriarchal norms of a society unable and unwilling to accept a woman who with searing honesty exposes male exploitation and oppression in everyday familial relationships in her own life. (215)

Nasrin is always standing against patriarchal norms and refuses to follow certain cultural values. She highly criticizes the unwanted and unnecessary Islamic culture as well. The social and political scenario always brings out the identity crisis.

Nasrin's awareness of the injustice and suffering tolerated by her mother is the cause

to redefine her world. Her growing gender biases lead her towards being a feminist. Her voice is the voice of humanism everywhere. She is afraid of saying whatever happens with her. She never finds any conducive familial atmosphere inside her home, that she can share every fear and doubts. So she makes herself as a strong lady and refuses to accept biased norms and values set by society.

Likewise, another writer S.M Shamsul Alam writes in his article “Women in the Era of Modernity and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Taslima Nasrin of Bangladesh”:

Most Contemporary interpretation of women in Islamic societies argues two sides. First, conservatives and fundamentalists, by using the Quran, hadith and life histories of Muslim women in early Islam, confirm and legitimize women’s subordination and subjugation. Second may feminists argue for gender equality under Islam, citing the egalitarianism of early Islam. (433)

Shamsul has taken Nasrin’s text as a gendered subaltern narrative. According to him, this text creates tension between tradition and modernity. Nasrin advocates free sex and open marriage and also she has taken religion as a great oppressor which we should avoid from the root. So, Shamsul views Nasrin’s text as a critique of both nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

In the same way, Taslima herself reviews to her autobiography *My Girlhood* with the title “Growing up Confused: For a Bengali Muslim Girl, Life Is Full of Contradictions.” In her review she indicates herself as a ‘her’. She says:

This evocation of childhood tracks her awakening to the injustice and suffering endured by her mother and other women and describes the forces that led her to turn from the ways of her family and the community around her in early adolescence and to begin a journey to redefine her world. Her growing

awareness of class discrimination and gender disparities paralleled the broader social and cultural upheaval emerging in Bangladesh and foreshadowed the growth of feminist dissident who would be courageous enough to defy fundamentalist clerics calling for her death. (7)

Through this extract, it is clear that *My Girlhood* is not just the story of Nasrin but of her parents, grandparents and the vast array of friends and relatives who made up her family circle. Nasrin clearly states gender inequality and biases have provoked her to be rebellious. Not only this, she is haunted and tormented by bitter experiences of past days. So, she decided to reflect all her traumatic journey through the text. The government of Bangladesh banned her book and she was charged with becoming disobedient, uncivilized and unethical. Therefore she was forced to flee away to a foreign country, United States. At that time many people who belong to the Muslim community blamed her and highly criticized her work. One of the scholars Meer Nurul Islam shows his sympathy towards Nasrin. He argues:

Within the bounds of our closed society, darkness reigns so strongly, that there is no fissure to let I light or air. If one cannot make a chink through a needle or nail on that wall of darkness, one can only use a spade, or an axe, or a hammer and a chisel bore holes for light. Taslima has used her pen to bring change in society, which is appropriate. (7)

He strongly appreciates the step of Nasrin that she has taken to change the society. If Nasrin ever dares to raise her voice may she still live her traumatic life. When she wrote this book she exhibited her all traumatized experiences. For him, Nasrin's writing is that tool which may help to bring change in the society. So, whatever was done by Nasrin was appreciable and commendable. And it is legitimate to show anger towards bad norms and rules of society.

Different critics and scholars have approached the autobiography in a various way. There is multiple understanding of the autobiography, but none of the critics has thrown light upon the traumatic psyche of the young Nasrin. That is why the perspective of gender trauma helps to picturize the suffering and traumatic experiences of a young thirteen years old girl.

Narrativization is the narrative like elements based on real experiences or events, which is present in terms of a story or narrative. In a simple way, the story which we present or interpret in the form of a narrative is narrativization.

Narrativization always comes under working through process of trauma. Likewise, the word 'trauma' comes from the Greek word, which refers to wound, or hurt and the unpleasant experience which causes abnormal stress. It affects the psychological development of a person. It is a mental injury which hurts repeatedly the human mind from an incident. Trauma is all about past memory. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson says:

People suffering the agonies of traumatic memory are haunted by memories that obsessively interrupt a present moment and insist on their presence. These memories may come to the surface of consciousness in fits and fragments, again and again; despite the passing of years. This haunting of memory is entangled with profound crises in people's lives. Crises of a personal sort, such as a sexual assault, or of a political sort, such as state sponsored torture or imprisonment during the war, maybe speakable only in the halting fragments of traumatic or obsessive memory. (21)

This text is also a past work, where the author is trying to show her worst past when young Nasrin is sexually harassed and traumatized. Seven years old girl has been tolerating sexual violence at a very young age. Sexual violence refers to physical and

mental forceful sexual act from others. When someone forces to involve in such activities it gives a bad impact. It may create a physical and mental disorder. There are always two ways of dealing with trauma victim, working through and acting out.

According to LaCapra:

The processes of working through including mourning and modes of critical thought and practice involve the possibility of making distinctions or developing articulations that are recognized as problematic but still function as limits and as possibly desirable resistance to undecidability, particularly when the later is tantamount to confuse and the obliteration or blurring of all distinction. (56)

Here, LaCapra is trying to figure out about the working through and acting out.

Acting out is to live in the past remembering the traumatic event. In the process of working through the patient break from the past and living in the present. Acting out involves a compulsive and repetitive reliving of the trauma; individuals who act out have difficulty distinguishing between the past and present and struggle with motions of the future. They are haunted by their experience and trapped in the past that wounded them. Likewise, working through is an articulatory practice. A traumatic person is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened then realizing that one is living here and now with an opening to the future. Actually working through deals with three tasks- expressing grief, reconstructing event and history in narrative form and critical judgment. Working through deals with two processes one is verbalization and another is narrativization. Writing autobiography, painting, writing poems etc are come under the narrativization. Here the author has chosen working through to express her pain and anxiety, which she has been tolerating in the past days. Nasrin goes back to her

childhood days and remembers all those traumatic incidents happening with her. She expresses her grief and fear of those nightmares of her life.

Working through requires going back to problems, working them over and perhaps transforming the understanding of them. Here, the author with the help of the story she reconstructs all the events and portrayed her family atmosphere and finally criticizes religion, culture and male dominated society. By saying ‘I am not interested to read Namaz and Arabic language’ she proves that she never believes in religion and all those belief set by people. She says, “All that business about Allah was just made up, I was sure. I was sure that the Quran was written by a greedy, selfish and sex obsessed man” (275). Many times her mother forces her to believe in Allah but she never finds any logic to follow the Allah. She thinks the Quran is written only for oppressed women. So, in this way instead of being a supporter of Muslim culture she uses a stereotypical representation of Muslims and claims that uneducated people believe in a religion that has no scientific reason.

Trauma may be caused by natural events or they may be human caused. Psychological trauma is the result of an extraordinarily stressful event. As we know trauma is always related to our history which is full of traumatic events. Giving a general definition of trauma in Caruth’s essay “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” She says:

Trauma is generally understood as a wound or external bodily injury in general. It is also defined as a “mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effect lasts for a long time. In its later uses, particularly in the psychiatric literature the term ‘trauma’ is understood as a wound inflicted not upon body but upon the mind. (124)

These lines lead us to the basic understanding that during the traumatic happening, a

person suffers from the biological reaction. As a result, he/she remains passive to recall or narrates exactly what happened but rather goes through the process of construction where reality is bent to be twisted. Therefore, Caruth claims that representing trauma is quite indirect and anti mimetic. Furthermore, she adds:

Trauma describes the overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophe events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (181)

This extract makes us clear about the basic understanding that trauma is a mental response and is very overwhelming, repetitive and uncontrollable.

Representation of such a traumatic experience requires an alternative history in the form of trauma. Physical wounds and emotional wounds are types of trauma. Physical trauma may not remain for a long time, but physical trauma may enter into the psyche of a person and that causes people to mentally destroy. Sexual harassment always relates to physical. Nasrin writes; “Uncle lifted his lungi, I saw a big snake raise its head between his legs, poised for attack. I went numb with fear but to my greater horror, the snake did attack, in that little place between my thighs... once, twice, thrice. I remained totally petrified” (91). This is the most immoral work done by her uncle, Aman. Nasrin is raped twice by two different uncles, once by uncle Sharaf and once by uncle Aman. This incident makes her numb and insensible. When Nasrin is sexually attacked, she is always being confused about her uncles’ behaviors towards her. She always thought about what they have seen in- between her two legs. She is

upbringing with so many doubts and confusion. Therefore to come out from these horrible traumatic experiences she uses her pen as a powerful tool. So, she narrativizes all her painful past days thoroughly.

Many times Nasrin is trying to share all these events with her mother. But her mother strictly binds inside a religion that for her asking a question is a sin. Whenever Nasrin tries to ask questions she used to yell by saying, “It is sin to question and to doubt” (138). Therefore, in an upset manner she writes:

Sin, sin, sin! I took three steps backward. No matter what I did, or where I went, I appeared to be in some danger of committing a sin. It was a sin to turn left. And if I turned right, I did sin again. I couldn't ask a question. All sinners would be cast into hell by Allah. They would then be bitten by snakes and scorpion. I was terrified of both. (138)

Nasrin's mother always makes her believe in Allah. It reflects society, where people are fully devoted to God. Whereas Nasrin expresses low opinion remarks on God, she confesses that she is not interested to read Namaz and Islam language. Religion and culture always have been anguish throne in her life. To obey her mother's orders and her strong belief in God, she tries to follow the path which is shown by her mother. But repeatedly she does not find any happiness and pleasure in all these things. She is forcing to think about Allah and all religious belief after seeing men's attitude towards women. Allah never comes near her to remove her fear and agony. Religious views and Muslim culture always affected young Nasrin's psychology. She is being traumatized by seeing illogical reasons and belief of culture.

LaCapra describes working through as an 'articulatory practice' that gradually enables one to make distinctions between past, present, and future. It is not a linear process nor can binary distinctions be made between acting out and working



through. On the contrary, the process of working through is complex and is never tidily resolved. Similarly, Nasrin remembers her terrific past days and she utters:

At any rate, I began to think of myself as a sinner. When uncle Sharaf took me to that empty room and stripped me naked, was that somehow my fault, my sin? Was that why Allah hated me? Perhaps, my heart felt very heavy.

That night, when Ma asked me to go and sleep in Grand Ma house, I did not go. The thought of sleeping with my uncle frightened me. But, of course, Ma had no idea about how I felt. (85)

This line shows how young Nasrin spent her days in a frightening atmosphere. When after uncle sexually assaults her, she always being afraid with her own uncle. She is grown up in a very oppressive environment and her religion and culture make her silent. Like Caruth says, ‘trauma generally understood as a wound’ after many years at least she gets her story out to the world and it works as a medicine to her wound. To heal that wound she utters her voice against those all torture that she has tolerated. By remembering her terrific day she thinks critically over it and raises her voice.

Nasrin uses her pen for the cause of women and their liberation in the patriarchal and religious domination society. We come very close to the Islamic culture while reading this text. Wearing a burqa, reading Namaz for at least three times a day is one of the well known cultures of the Muslim community. Nasrin’s mother always forces her to read Namaz, but Nasrin raises the question about wearing a burqa and reading a Namaz. Her mother always uses to wear burqa before going outside and the author seems against the culture of wearing a burqa. All the time she raises a question to her Ma. She says, “One day, just as Ma was about to leave for Amirullah’s house, her whole body hidden under a burqa, I suddenly asked

her, “Ma, why do women have to wear a burkha?” (137). From a very young age, she is being tensed. Actually, she is growing up by seeing; all religions and cultures are only followed by women. She further says, “At that praise moment one of Ma’s feet was on the last of our front steps, the other on the ground. She dragged the lather back onto the steps and answered my question. I noticed that her eyes were lined with holy Surma. “It is to protect our chastity” (137). After her mother giving an answer, she starts to think, if wearing a burqa is a concern of security and chastity than they should teach children self defense from childhood instead of transforming a culture of wearing a burqa. Therefore, for Nasrin religion and tradition are only made for a woman, which is used as a weapon to control over the women.

Nasrin never finds self- respect and dignity in her religion. She never feels much proud to belong to the Muslim community. Though she traumatized after remembering her horrible and terrific past day we can also find that she is not only traumatized by what her uncles’ done with her. She is disturbed and traumatized by her family atmosphere and religions as well. On that account, through this writing author has revealed her all anxiety and dissatisfaction upon religion. By narrativization her dissatisfaction and doubt upon religion and culture she trying to heal her wound which was given by her own doctrine. She always wants to go beyond the cultural rules and make her own identity, but she up rises in such an atmosphere where she turns to be a rebellious girl.

When we give looks towards Kali Tal in her book *Worlds of Hurt*, she argues that:

The writing of trauma survivors comprises a distinct “literature of trauma.”

The literature of trauma is defined by the identity of its author. The literature of trauma holds at it centers the reconstruction and recuperation of the

traumatic experience, but it is also actively engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the writing and representation of non traumatized authors. (17)

By referring this line Kali Tal trying to pointing that trauma is always defined by the identity of the author. The trauma writing is written always from the victim's perspective. Trauma of gender is experienced within a particular society. She says, "To identify and explicate literature by a member of the survivor group and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experiences" (18). When we go back to the autobiography, Nasrin belongs to Muslim society. Her own uncles raped her who also represents the masculinistic Islamic society.

Nasrin mainly squeezes women's situations through history and particular women's painful experience in a particular society as well as their struggle for existence. We can relate to Kali Tal's idea here. Kali Tal's views are focused on an individual's life that he/she is affected by life threatening events. Through this writing, the author challenges society and gives a place to the audience to understand the girl's problems. To illustrate her nightmarish past days she goes back to the past and jots down all her anxieties and pains into her paper. She adds that:

Psychological trauma is a direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror. (87)

Here, we can apply Kali Tal's concept. Nasrin was totally helpless at the age of seven.

She herself was too young. Her uncle did not see her age and never think about Allah and sin. She is threatened by own family members. That was so intolerable and unacceptable for her.

Once, Nasrin's mother asks her to bring a matchbox with uncle Aman. Nasrin went to the uncle and ask for a matchbox, but he refuses to give a matchbox and starts playing with her body. Nasrin feels so uncomfortable, and she wants to get rid of with uncle's hand but, she is too young to do so where her uncle Aman grabs her and holds very tightly. She can understand the touch even though she is too young. She writes:

In order to lay my hand on the box of matches, I moved nearer to uncle Aman. He pulled me even closer. Then, instead of giving it to me, he started tickling me under my arms and my stomach, laying me flat on his bed. I shrank like a snail. He picked up my tense, curled up body and threw it in the air, as if he was playing *dang- guti*. He was the *dang* I was the *guti*. Then he caught me as I fell, his hand sliding down my body, stopping at my panties. Then it began pulling my panties down. I tried to roll off the bed. My feet were on the floor, my back still on the bed, my panties near my knees, my knees neither on the floor nor on the bed. (91)

We just cannot imagine it. How that small girl tolerated those events, it's just an out of our imagination. Nasrin being the victim of patriarchy is wandering from her inner heart for her security. She is force to survive such kinds of unusual occurrences in her life. She hates the way her uncles use to treat her. Her insecurity and fear of uncles created hatred inside her heart for men.

Nasrin gets mentally as well as physically torture and this is happened due to patriarchy. She does not find the right place to express her painful experiences. That is why she narrates all the events which give her pain inside the paper. One scene which

she describes is so painful. She describes, “The fear of snakes and the fear of men had me petrified in those days. And there is Ma, telling me to go sleep with my uncle! I simply could not bring myself to tell her what the uncles Sharaf had done to me. Someone had stitched my lips with invisible thread” (87). Sexual harassment or rape is an unwished sexual favor, that other sex force to involve in sexual activities. Such type of unexpected events cause psychological trauma. Young Nasrin has no idea about sex, but also she is forced to involving in such activities. This is a perfect example of a male dominated society where women are taken only as pleasure toy.

After the day when she has been forced to be naked by her uncle Sharaf, young Nasrin’s psychology affected very badly. She says “I had no wish to go into a dark room, any dark room” (70). She even does not want to go anywhere without her mother. Every second she is afraid with uncle. “I sat very close to Ma, so much so that she was forced to say, “Don’t cling to me like that. It’s so hot, move away!” But I didn’t stir. Ma herself moved away from me. At once, I began to feel scared and insecure. Every second I felt afraid that someone might pull down my shorts again” (85). Her insecurity is growing day by day. She wants to tell everything to her Ma but due to culture, religion and home’s environment, she remains silent at that time. She mentions, “If I opened my mouth, I would be the one to get thrashed. I was simply supposed to accept without ever asking a question. Whatever the grownups decided to bestow on me, be it punishment or reward. Whatever they did was for my own good. It was something they themselves had taught me to believe” (129). She is being forced to remain silent. She never dares to share anything easily with any member of her family. She has to bear all difficulties alone. She faces intolerable pains, tortures, exploitations and hatred. Nasrin writes:

Was I afraid that, if I did talk about it no one would believe me, they would

dismiss my allegations, say that I was possessed by some evil spirit, or that I was either a liar or totally mad, a trouble maker? No one would then hold me close and kiss me but slap me and hit me hard instead. Or could it be that no one seemed to be my own, no one was close enough to whom I could go and cry my heart out, tell them everything with holding anything back, show them my wounds. Even Ma was not that close, although she was my whole world.

(92)

She wants to open her mouth to share all the events happening with her but unfortunately, she is not able to do so. Her mind is full of doubts and fear that no one is going to believe her words. Instead of being a supporter everyone would beat her hard and start to hate her. She is too young to explain all these unethical works done by her uncles. Her religion never teaches her to go against male so she tolerates all bad activities where she becomes a victim. Therefore, when she is grown up and understands the real meaning of religion she says, 'I don't believe in any organized religion.' Her grandfather and mother are those who strictly follow Muslim culture. Thus later she decided to bring all the hidden reality of her girlhood days through narrativization. She narrated all the events which had happening in her girlhood days.

Nasrin's mother seems so devoted to God. She always believes that if we worship and have faith upon God, he will give us the strength to tolerate everything. Sometimes Nasrin believes in mother's words and prays to Allah for *chum chums*. She says, "Ma was quite wrong. I had learned something else. It was not just true that Allah would give you whatever you wanted. So many times after my Namaz, I had asked for chum chums, or snacks that I had seen uncle Sharaf and others eat, I was never given anything" (176). This false belief of Ma forces her to pray for what she wants when she was too young. One thing always strikes in her mind and that is if

there is really existence of Allah than, why he does not come near to her to protect her from uncles Sharaf and Aman from being raped. She always prays to remove her pain, anxiety and fear of both uncles. She writes in her text, “After what uncle Sharaf and uncle Aman did to me, I wanted them to get leprosy and die quickly. They neither got leprosy nor died” (176). From this line, it makes us clear that how young Nasrin tolerate those all horrible moments. She has gone through so many traumatic events. Her childhood spent on doubts and so many questions inside her mind. She never find that answer what actually she is seeking.

When Nasrin’s mother started to go to Peer Amirullah, she undergoes many behavioral changes. She strongly believes in Amirullah’s words. She starts to obey every command issued by Amirullah. Earlier she had many Hindu friends. She used to celebrate Hindu’s festivals with her childhood friend Amala. Now she is totally against the Hinduism and Christianity. Nasrin says, “Why are you wearing these?” I asked feeling upset. “I will never wear saree now, “ma informed me”, That is what Hindus wear. It is a garment worn by Kafir. If I wear one now, it will be sin” (133). Her behavior and attitude changed day by day. These changes made Nasrin amazed. She says:

I saw that same woman change before my eyes. She stopped joining us at the dining table. We would all sit down to eat together, but Ma would serve her own food on a plate, and eat separately, sitting either on the floor or on her bed, plate in hand. Why, what was the matter? Ma said, “It’s sinful to eat at a table. Jews and Christians do that. (133)

We can see the cultural difference in this text. Nasrin shows her traditional mother who is guided by false conception. Being a Muslim is always challenging or tough for her.

Once Taslima's father Rajiv Ali abandons her brother from home just because he escapes from home and makes marital bonding with a Hindu woman. Taslima's brother also being a sufferer because he marries Hindu girl Geeta. Her religion teaches her to respect elders, even if they do not deserve it. When Nasrin is treated badly by her uncles she just hated them. She wants to punch her uncle's back but she is not allowed to do so. She mentions:

I was not allowed to punch his back when he chanted that rhyme, eat some shit, your tooth will grow. It was because he was older than me. Anyone older than me had to be treated with respect. They could do what they liked, but I could not hit them back, nor tell anyone if they first stripped me naked whenever they fancied, and then swore me to secrecy. Perhaps no grownup would ever believe it if they were told that another grown up could take a child into an empty room on a sad and lonely evening and remove her clothes.  
(129)

By saying these lines Nasrin literally shows the society where she is grown up. We can feel that just being younger; she has no right to punish anyone for their shameful act. Whatever they have done, if they are older, younger should respect them. This kind of religion and culture always makes Nasrin stressful and panic. According to her if older one did ridicule and did unethical work they do not deserve respect by anybody. Wrong is wrong, whoever does it. They deserve punishment rather than respect.

When we talk about another theorist Helen Moglen, she talks about women's subordination, gender biases in her book *Trauma of Gender*. She reflects the issue of radical changes. She notes:

The radical changes were occurring in socio- economic and sex gender



systems, a significant form of self-awareness was created by the development of individualism. Like the class and gender systems, this new structure of consciousness saturated every aspect of social; psychological and epistemological interaction. Self-aware individuals experienced themselves as preeminent in their relationships and were intensely focused in themselves. (4)

Through this line, it makes clear that a sex gender system establishes social roles of masculinity and femininity. According to her, masculinity and femininity came to be defined not just as different from one another but as mutually unshared.

Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which it responds to the events in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of the hallucination and other intrusive phenomena. Traumatic time plays a vital to makes a relationship with memory. Those traumatic or obsessional memories, autobiographical acts can work as a therapeutic intervention. Taslima Nasrin expresses everything about traumatic childhood sexual abuse straightforwardly. She shares her memory in this way:

Even today, sometimes I wonder why I did not tell anyone about those two incidents. Was it because I did not want people to think badly of my uncles? Had anyone put me in charge of protecting their good name? Was it because they were older than me and for that reason alone, worthy of my respect because I had believed them to be good people, and did not want that belief shattered? As if what had happened was just not true, it was a lie from start to finish, no more than a nightmare; or, maybe, those men only looked like my uncles, but were really two different men in their guise, enemies from some distant past! Who struck me dumb, and told me to hide my pain and suffer in silence? (91)

Here these lines highlight the author's time event. People are mostly being traumatized by stressful and painful experiences. In this regard, Jenny Edkins in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* says:

The reinstallation of time as linear and the narrating of events as history is central to the process of reinscription. However, there are forms of memory and memorialisation that do not produce a linear narrative, but rather retain another notion of temporality. These are ways of encircling the real. (15)

Jenny Edkins argues that trauma is not experienced at the moment of occurrence and preserved in memory, but is in fact experienced through memory and throughout time. If we look out to the text *My Girlhood*, young Nasrin has been sexually harassed at the age of seven. At that time she was ignorant about sexual violence but later on after knowing about sex and harassment or violence she is traumatized and forced to write about her girlhood days. The narrator shares about memory and experience of her life throughout the text. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson presented their ideas in the text *Reading Autobiography*. They say "Memories are records of how we have experienced events themselves" (6). Jenny Edkins and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's ideas interconnected to each other. It means memories always guide us to remember experienced events. The author shares the memory and experience of her life through the text.

As the study of the book *My Girlhood* reveals the traumatic experience of a young girl. Through the story of a young, innocent and daring girl the author gives the picture of suffering, tolerating, gender bias, identity and, cruelty of a Muslim community. She also shows how a young girl growing up with the awareness of class discrimination, gender biases. Since childhood, Nasrin always feels bias. Patriarchal oppression creates a psychological wound upon Nasrin. When we see Nasrin's mother

she is also one of the traumatic members of her family. Her mother blindly believes in religion. Religion develops the power to fight with any negativity but ironically here she is the one who suffers more. Nasrin's mother's insecurity and husband's extramarital affairs clearly picture her weak mentality rather than being strong.

Nasrin's mother seems annoying and a disturbed person in the text.

Sometimes she is in a good mood whereas sometimes she shows so anger and is annoying. In one place Nasrin says, "One moment Ma might be in a good mood, but only a second later everything could change. All our domestics' staff lived in a state of perpetual fear" (160). Ma's fear is about the economic condition of a home. The source of family income is one and only the father of Nasrin. Mother's insecurity of father's extra marital affairs with Razia Begum is he may not support the family economically. Nasrin's Ma lacks economic independence. She is fully dependent on Rajiv Ali that is the reason for her swing mood. When she does not find any happiness in her conjugal life she starts to search happiness in the path of spiritualism or Allah. Nasrin clearly mention her Ma's insecurity and disturbed mentality. She writes:

It turned out that Ma met the superintendent periodically, wept and said, "My husband wants to have a second wife. That's why he has sent our daughter away. It's all a big conspiracy. He wants to sell the house and live in a new one with his new wife. Please let me take my daughter back home. Neither of my sons lives with me anymore, but if at least I have my daughter, maybe I can stop him from marrying again. If she's at home, I'll see how he sells the house!" (222)

This line shows how much her mother is traumatized because of her father's behaviour. Nasrin loves her father but she cannot accept him completely thinking the

injustice has done to her mother. She thinks her father is so rude and he may not love her mother.

By illustrates, Nasrin's father's behavior upon her mother Nasrin directly attacks the Muslim's ethics and morality in the text. If he loves her mother then why he has an extramarital affair with another woman. Once her mother tells Nasrin about her father's action, "Your father had fallen in love with Razia Begum. Nearly every day when I took his shirt to wash it, I found a love letter from her in his front pocket. You were still a baby sometimes rolling off your bed and falling down. When you cut your head, I did not pay you any attention. I could not concentrate anything at all. Each night your father came home late" (28). The mother seems so religious and who always obeys cultural rules of wearing a burqa, herself betrayed by her own husband. She is the one who always prays to God but the question is her Allah never comes to her to console and relieve her trauma. Nasrin wants to ask everything about all these to her mother and father but she cannot do that. She has no other friend to share her emotions, which remains inside her. She is disturbed and traumatized by her family atmosphere, religions and activities. Many questions rise in her mind. Those questions and the traumatic situation came out in the form of writing and that process is called working through process.

As we already discussed working through is seen as the process of repeating, elaborating and amplifying interpretations. Likewise, trauma theorist LaCapra says- All that essential and interesting in the writing of history is not to be found at the level of the individual statements but at that of the politics adopted by historians when they select the statements that individuate their "picture of the past"... Saying *true* things about the past is easy- anybody can do that – but saying *right* things about the past is difficult. That truly requires historical

insight and originality... I have elsewhere called these “pictures of the past” narrative substances. (44)

The author revisits her early years and creates a scene of violence. Bringing a reality which is based on truth in front of the world is not easy. We must have strong guts to do that. Here, Nasrin shows her that guts and creates a story of her life. She has been criticized by many people. Instead of all these difficulties, she brings a real picture of her society where she lived. *My Girlhood* is an autobiographical piece of Nasrin which is based on historical insight and originality.

To be exact this text explores the Nasrin’s girlhood days and how she suffered at a very early age. Class, gender bias and culture tortuously bind the author. Therefore she is forced to face terrific incidents in her life. Here, the title *My Girlhood* is meaningful itself. She is in pathetic situations and she charges herself as I am a little girl, fearful and cannot do anything. This book is inspiring and has lots of moral message to all people who stated themselves as a religious person. The author succeeds in showing the relatives and makes the world feel situation of the child. Lisa Cooper writes, “Child sexual exploitation is one of the key safeguarding issues that can affect any child or young people irrespective of their age, ethnicity, religious belief or social background” (1). It means sexual violence leads any age group towards a bad situation. Sexual violence is a major social problem in contemporary society. Women become especially means of exploitation and become victims of violence from the men. The numbers of events of masculinistic Islamic fundamental ethos are against the women that such ethos sexually exploits women in Muslim society. Sexual harassment is increasing day by day in any society. Nasrin is one of the vivid examples of those women who are tolerating such deceitful work done by a so called male. They do not find the right place to express such kinds of

painful experiences. We can see sexual exploitations begin as a practice from own home. Nasrin's uncles Saraf and Aman are those who shamelessly give torture to Nasrin, who are Nasrin's family members of her own home.

Nasrin's suffering and anxiety forces her to raise her voice against male's brutality. She has been facing many tortures but she is bound to hide all these things. She faces partialities and discrimination between her siblings. A sense of inequality, domination, and hatred to the woman by the male dominated society makes her cross the boundaries made for a woman. Nasrin finds many partialities between son and daughter. Sometimes she felt being a woman is cursed to her. Couple of time she wishes to be a male. She writes:

I felt swallowing poison and ending it all. The world was such a cruel place better to die than live in it as a woman. I had read in a magazine that somewhere in the world, a girl had become a boy. I longed to wake up one day and find that something similar had happened to me, that I had turned into a boy. That there were no unseemly mounds of flesh on my chest. That I could wear a thin, transparent shirt and roam all over town. That when I returned home late at night after having seen a film and smoked a cigarette with my friends, Ma would serve me the biggest piece of fish just because I was a boy, her son, the one who would carry forward the family name. No matter what I did Ma, would forgive me. No one would order me to cover my chest with urna, with a veil, wear a burkha, or stop me from standing at a window or going up to the roof. (243)

These lines show how Nasrin's mind has been affected badly by the discrimination. Even her Ma loves her son more. Nasrin describes women are often marginalized on account of their gender. Wearing a burqa, covering chest with a shawl is like

women's duty to keep her hidden from the male's gaze. In spite of such hurdles she never shows her dissatisfaction and anger in front of her family.

Nasrin wants to get cure physically, mentally as well as socially in the infected life caused by the patriarchal society. She is infected within the patriarchal religious and norms. She is not free and supported by anyone to share her tensions and pain. She has a great threat in her mind if she shares everything that she may be punished. Therefore repeatedly she is traumatized by remembering those scary moments. In this regard Caruth says:

In modern trauma theory as well, there is an emphatic tendency to focus on the destructive repetition of the trauma that governs a person's life. As modern neurobiologists point out, the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be re-traumatizing; if not life threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration. (63)

When we connect this text to this line said by Caruth we find the text *My Girlhood* is the result of her traumatic flashback. Nasrin's struggle for surviving and her fear of her uncle makes her always panic. Repetition of traumatic events forces her to open her mouth and finally she decides to make friends with writing and share all pain and agony through writing. Sidonie and Watson say, "For those sufferings from traumatic or obsessional memories, autobiographical acts can work as a therapeutic intervention, what Suzette A. Henke calls "scriptotherapy". Speaking or writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable" (22). This text work as a therapy to Nasrin's life. Her text or voice is the voice of voiceless. Through this writing she is showing her anger towards the patriarchy and challenges society and their wrong

belief.

According to Smith and Watson, “Consequently, we tend to read autobiographical narratives as proofs of human agency, relating actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretation of their lives and express their ‘true selves’ (42). It means, depicted by own experiences Nasrin is trying to give information about her life to readers. Being a girl is not much easy for Nasrin it becomes like a curse for her. She contextualizes many horrible experiences in her text. She records vivid pictures of sexual violence in many places. Here one incident is one of them:

Uncle Sharaf laughed and threw himself down on me. Then, with one hand he removed my shorts once more and with the other, took off his own, pressing his willie hard against my body. My chest felt heavy, I could not breathe. I tried to push him away. ‘What are you doing, uncle Sharaf? Let me go!’ I shrieked, pushing with all my might. But I could not move him an inch. ‘Didn’t I tell you I would show you something interesting? This is it.’ He was still grinning and biting his lower lip. ‘Do you know what this is called? It’s called fucking. Everyone in this world does it. Your parents do and mine.’ Uncle Sharaf pushed himself harder against me. It looks so ugly to me; I covered my eyes with my hands. (69)

This scene reflects how she has been treated by uncle Sharaf. She is raped by her uncle, but poor Nasrin does not know what is happening with her. At that time she even does not know about sex and sexuality. Her childish mind being confused and she felt what has been done by uncle is wrong. She bears all pains given by Sharaf.

Nasrin explores her living styles, family members and their attitude, religion, and tradition that she adopts everything. We can feel empathy and burst into tears in



many scenes. She describes sexual stories in many scenes. She explores bitter truth before the world and removes the veil of Islamic culture which is covered by hypocrisy. An uncle who forcefully unclothes her, she prays many times to happen something bad to him but her prayers never happen true, so from those girlhood days she never believes in religious books and religion. She always wants self-respect, security, and solidarity among the family members.

Nasrin's autobiography (volume I) covers the time from her birth to the age of thirteen. Therefore she reveals her first experiences of menstruation. When she got menstruation, her Ma stops her to go outside and play.

I simply couldn't bring myself to accept the situation why should I leave my games and sit at home with a long face, just because I had started to menstruate? How I had longed to grow up, grow so tall that I'd be able to reach the bolt on top of the door! I could reach that bolt if I stood on tiptoe, but this business of bleeding put an end to my childhood so quickly and placed such a high barrier between me and the world that it frightened me. (241)

Above given lines show the restrictions only for girls to play a game outside, these all things simply could not be understood by Nasrin. This bias makes her cross all the boundaries which society creates only for girls. She suffers from domestic violence. She wants to go outside and play with her friends but her desire suppresses her. Later on, that suppression comes out and bursts into her personal diary.

Nasrin is criticized both the Islamic fundamentalist and Islam itself. Many critics criticize her work because she directly attacks Islam. The text *My Girlhood* shows how a freedom-seeking woman and educated like her would have to struggle in every step of her life. She illustrates how family members fail to understand their children thus making it more difficult for those girls to bear all those painful

experiences. If they do not get the chance to share those problems then it will affect the child's mind very badly and later on it may lead to a big psychological problem. Nasrin dares to bring out such a cruel and horrible reality in front of the world. Her intention is just to explore the reality that adolescents are tolerating.

In conclusion, this research paper focuses on the exploration of traumatic experiences of the author and her mother in the context of culture, religion, patriarchal norms in contemporary Muslim society. The author's girlhood was in the background of a struggle for independent Bangladesh. She reproduces problems of society like ethics and morality. This book *My Girlhood* reflects the economic instability or political condition of Bangladesh during her girlhood. She sees her hardships as well as an unhealthy relationship between parents. There are many events that made Nasrin traumatic and how she tolerated all those pathetic situations. Nasrin tries to confess her experience of traumatic past life. She tries to come out of trauma by narrating those events in the book.

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