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Loss of Faith in Nationalism in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

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Abstract

In the novel, *Lajja*, by Taslima Nasrin, Sudhamoy, the main character, has deep faith in nationalism. He loves his country so much that he never thinks of leaving his country (Bangladesh) despite very adverse environment in contrast to other Hindu neighbors. But the existing religious fundamentalism reaches such an extreme that his faith is dismantled. So, at last, he decides to leave his country with ineffable pain in his heart. But he himself is also accountable in making his belief a terrible failure. He should not have been too nationalistic as it was quite contrary to the undefeatable reality outside but he had a way to save his faith. It is by shifting to India as his friends suggest. But, he does not do so till his daughter becomes a victim of Muslim fundamentalism. This shatters his belief. He should have thought that he could save his love and faith in nationalism even by living out of the geographical boundary of his country. So, his own sense of nationalism has to be blamed as it is extreme, idealistic and absurd as well. Thus, the existing communalism collides with his nationalism and this incompatibility results in complete loss in faith. This loss in faith becomes intolerably painful to him. The ideal he professes is so high that the ultimate erosion in that belief is absolutely devastating --a fall that mentally shatters him to pieces!

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Taslima Nasrin was born in August 1962 to a Muslim family in Mymensingh, East Pakistan. As the area became independent in 1971, her city of birth is now in Bangladesh. Her father was a physician and professor at the government medical college. She studied at Mymensingh Medical College. Growing up in a highly restrictive and conservative environment, Taslima was fond of literature while she also excelled in science. She started writing when she was 15 years old, beginning with poetry in literary magazines, and afterwards herself editing a literary organization while studying in medical college, where she staged many cultural programs. Earning her medical degree in 1984, she worked in public hospitals for eight years.

Her first book of poetry was published in 1986. Her second book became a huge success in 1989, and editors of progressive daily and weekly newspapers asked her to write regular columns. Next she started writing about women's oppression. With no hesitation she criticized religion, traditions and the oppressive cultures and customs that discriminate against women. Her strong language and uncompromising attitude against male domination stirred many people, eliciting both love and hatred from her readers. In 1992, she received the prestigious literary award "Ananda" from West Bengal in India for her "Nirbachito Kolam" (Selected Columns), the first writer from Bangladesh to receive that award. Despite allegations of jealousy among other writers about this, the topmost intellectuals and writers continued to support her. Islamic fundamentalists launched a campaign against her in 1990, staging street demonstrations and processions. They broke into newspaper offices that she used to regularly write from, sued her editors and publishers, and put her life in danger,

the danger that only increased over time. She was publicly assaulted several times by fundamentalist mobs. No longer was she welcomed to any public places, not even to book fairs that she loved to visit.

She has spoken out in favor of equal rights for women and has expressed opposition to the oppression of non- Islamic minorities in Islamic societies, such as in her home country Bangladesh. In her autobiography, Nasrin mentions that she was sexually assaulted by her relatives and other men in her early years. These incidents had a strong influence on her later life to become a staunch feminist. She initially gained fame as a poet and columnist. However, later she gradually became familiar for being a courageous woman through a series of books that she wrote. Some of her critics believe that part of the reasons of Taslima's popularity is because of her critical views on religions, especially Islam.

She has expressed her strong ideas against Islamic society where women are treated as objects. She criticizes the tendency of using women in advertisements in Bangladesh. They appear in advertisements with their physical seductiveness, dress and makeup presented in such a way that the women become more important than the product itself. Taslima opines that these women are not actually doing anything in these advertisements; they are just being used and the society considers that their primary task is to be used. Through her writing, she desires to awake the women from their sleep by helping them know their follies. She wants to alert those who think that their identity is given by their husbands; they are incomplete without them and their likes and dislikes are to be determined by males. These women themselves are accountable for their weak condition in the society. Whenever two women talk to each other, they talk more about their husbands than about themselves. A woman, while making an acquaintance with

another woman, does not ask even her name; she just asks a number of questions about her husband. Moreover, men deprive women of their rights. Women are not behaved as human beings at all. But women tolerate all types of exploitations without any complaint. Nasrin wants such women to be bold and conscious of their rights. She further argues that if a woman wants to be a human being, she first has to be bad in the eyes of such a society; if she is not willing to be bad, she will never be a truly strong, independent and free person. On September 12, 1994 she gave an interview to the New Yorker, in which she said:

Why shouldn't I write about what I've seen? I'm a doctor, remember! Do you know what's it like to see a woman crying out in the delivery room. When she gives birth to a girl, terrified that her husband will divorce her? To see the ruptured vaginas of women who've been raped? The six and seven year olds who have been violated by their fathers, brothers and uncles – by their own families? No, I will not keep quiet. I will continue to speak out about these women's wretched lives. (*EBSCO Publishing*)

It shows that she was determined to write about women's miserable condition in Muslim societies without caring at all what misfortune may happen to her. Her comments about religion made people angry. She said that Islam oppresses women and is against humanity. She criticized verses in the Koran that treat women as property, as slaves, and as sexual objects. She said, "According to the Koran, woman's heaven is to be like our Mother Earth which man should irrigate in order to make her fertile (*View Full Version*). So, she was determined to write against the Koran for the rights of women and humanity and as she wrote, she was charged of going against the Koran. Due to the rising intolerance of the

Islamic clergymen she was forced into exile in Sweden. Abdul Malick remarks "She has insulted our religion: she must die!" (*View Full Version 1*). Since then she has been suffering a lot from the Muslim fundamentalists.

Lajja is a famous novel originally written in Bengali by Taslima Nasrin. The word *Lajja* means 'shame' in Bengali and many other Indic languages. It has been translated into several languages. The book was first published in 1993 in the Bengali language, and was subsequently banned in Bangladesh, and a few states of India. Taslima Nasrin, the writer of the book, has dedicated the book "to the people of the Indian subcontinent", and has announced the beginning of the book with these words: "let another name for religion be humanism." The novel is preceded by a preface and a chronology of events. Janet Ingraham writes:

A seething indictment of oppression and religious fundamentalism couched precariously as a novel, this important work is impassioned but difficult to read. More reportage and protest than story, it is recommended more for its historic than its literary value.

(Library Journal 1)

So, for Ingraham this novel has more historical significance than literary value.

Similarly, Tutul Gupta writes:

Lajja, the controversial novel by Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin, is a savage indictment of religious extremism and man's inhumanity to man. Unremittingly dark and menacing, the novel exposes the mindless bloodthirstiness of fundamentalism and brilliantly captures the insanity of violence in our time. (*Lajja, Afterword*)

According to him, this novel displays the terrible effects of religious fundamentalism: loss of humanity, birth of violence and so on.

The novel is a response of Taslima to anti-Hindu riots, which erupted in parts of Bangladesh, soon after the demolition of Babri Masjid in India on 6th December 1992. The book subtly indicates that communal feelings were on the rise, the Hindu minority of Bangladesh was not fairly treated, and secularism was under shadow. Taslima writes in the preface:

I detest fundamentalism and communalism. This was the reason I wrote *Lajja* soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992. The book, which took me seven days to write, deals with the persecution of Hindus, a religious minority in Bangladesh, by the Muslims who are in the majority. It is disgraceful that the Hindus in my country were hunted by the Muslims after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. All of us who love Bangladesh should feel ashamed that such a terrible thing could happen in our beautiful country. The riots that took place in 1992 in Bangladesh are the responsibility of us all, and we are all to blame. *Lajja* is a document of our collective defeat. (Preface ix)

So, this book mainly deals with the religious issue. It displays the persecution of the Hindus by the Muslims in Bangladesh soon after the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in India. In other words, it is about the domination of the majority over the minority.

The story of *Lajja* centers on a Hindu family of Bangladesh, the Dutta family of four members, a young man named Suranjan, his father Sudhamoy, his

mother Kironmoyee, and his sister Nilanjana. The story of Lajja recounts an environment of communal frenzy with the help of these four characters. In a far off place in Ayodhya, in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, on 6th December 1992, Babri Masjid was demolished, and the demolition has repercussions even in Bangladesh, a different country, and a far off place from Ayodhya. The fire of communal rioting erupts, and the Dutta family also feels and faces the heat of the communal hatred. Each member of the Dutta family feels about it in his/her own way. Sudhamoy, the patriarch of the family, feels that Bangladesh, his motherland, shall never let him down. Kironmoyee as a faithful wife stands by her husband's views. Suranjana, their son cares very little about the events, sleeps passively, does not feel any necessity to take refuge in the home of one of his Muslim friends, and believes that events in a far off foreign place in India should not affect his countrymen. Nilanjana curses her brother's apathy and coaxes him to take the family to a Muslim friend's house for safety.

Lajja was published in February 1993 in Bangladesh and sold over 60,000 copies before it was banned by the government five months later – its excuse was that it was disturbing the communal peace. In September that year a fatwa was issued against her by a fundamentalist organization and a reward was offered for her murder. There were marches on the streets of Dhaka by communalists clamouring for her life. Similarly, the government confiscated her passport and asked her to quit writing if she hoped to keep her job as a medical doctor in Dhaka Medical College Hospital. She was, thus, forced to quit her job to continue her battle against religious persecution, genocide and communalism. She writes in preface:

The disease of religious fundamentalism is not restricted to Bangladesh alone and it must be fought at every turn. For myself, I am not afraid of any challenge or threat to my life. I will continue to write and protest persecution and discrimination. I am convinced that the only way the fundamentalist forces can be stopped is if all of us who are secular and humanistic join together and fight their malignant influence. I, for one, will not be silenced. (Preface x)

It shows that she was ready to go through fire to continue her writing against persecution and discrimination. At the same time, she asks all those who are secular and humanistic to join together arguing that it is the only way to stop the fundamentalist forces.

According to Taslima, the religious scriptures are out of time and out of place. Instead of religious laws, she maintains that what is needed is a uniform civil code that accords equality and justice. Her views caused fourteen different political and non-political religious organizations to unite for the first time, starting violent demonstrations, calling general strikes, blocking government offices and demanding her immediate execution by hanging after she was quoted in Statesman stating that " [...] [T]he Koran should be revised thoroughly." The government, instead of taking action against the fundamentalists, turned against her. A case was filed by the government charging that she hurt people's religious feelings, and a non-bail-able arrest warrant was issued. Deeming prison to be an extremely unsafe place, Taslima went in to hiding. Salman Rushdie, in his open letter to Taslima writes:

As you know, Taslima, Bengali Culture- and I mean the culture of Bangladesh as well as the Indian Bengal – has always prided itself

on its openness, its freedom to think and argue, its lack of bigotry. It is a disgrace that your Government has chosen to side with the religious extremists against their own history, their own civilization, their own values. It is the treasure-house of the intelligence, the imagination and the word that your opponents are trying to loot. (*New York Times 1*)

This was the view of Salman Rushdie who underwent almost similar type of plight like Taslima. He strongly reacted against the government's siding with the religious extremists and its disgraceful decision.

In the meantime two more fatwas were issued by Islamic extremists, two more prices were set on her head, and hundreds of thousands of fundamentalists went to the streets, demanding her death. The majority who were not fundamentalists remained silent. Regardless, some anti-fundamentalist political groups did protest against the fundamentalist uprising but did not defend Taslima as a writer and a fellow human being who should have the freedom to express her views. Only a few writers defended her rights. Shirin opines:

I really don't understand why people get so worked up when someone says something unpleasant about the Koran. It's a great book, and any amount of mud slinging can't and won't change that fact. Even if they defaced a copy of it, its truth is eternal and powerful. No one I know would do it but let's be a little rational and a bit less emotional about this! It's not a "magic" book in the sense of "jadoo", it's miraculous for the things it says and the way it guides us. (*View Full Version 3*)

In this way, he strongly supported and praised Taslima's *Lajja* as a great book for displaying the truth, which is eternal and powerful and shows his astonishment at people's reluctance to digest reality and to call a spade a spade.

Salman Rushdie further argued:

You are accused of having said that the Koran should be revised though you have said that you were referring only to Islamic religious code. And even if you did say that and even if every Muslim man in the world were to disagree with you, it would remain a perfectly legitimate opinion. (*New York Times 4*)

Thus, Rushdie considers Taslima's opinion legitimate and indirectly asks her not to lose determination and boldness.

The international organization of writers, and many organizations beyond the borders of Bangladesh, came to Taslima's support. News of her plight became known throughout the world. Some western democratic governments that endorse human rights and freedom of expression tried saving her life. After long miserable days in hiding, she was finally granted bail but was also forced to leave her country. Swedish officials welcomed Ms. Nasrin, whose plight has drawn comparisons to Salman Rushdie's years in seclusion. Culture Minister Birgit Friggebo said, "The author was forced to leave her country for using her natural rights to write and say whatever she wants" (*New York Times 3*). Thus, he sympathizes Taslima for her plight.

Wherever Taslima lived, she fought for human rights and women's rights. In 1998, without the government's permission she risked a return to be with her ailing mother. Again, fundamentalists demanded her murder. When her mother --

a religious Muslim-- died, nobody came from any mosque to lead her funeral, her crime being that she was the mother of an 'infidel'. A case again was filed against her on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people. After a few weeks of staying, Taslima was forced to leave her country once more. Taslima was desperate to see her father when he was ill but the government did not let her go to Bangladesh. Her passport was not renewed; her rights as a citizen had constantly been violated by the government authority.

She has written eight books of poetry, essays, novels, and short stories in her native language, Bengali. Many have been translated into twenty different languages. Her applications to the Bangladesh government for her return to her homeland have been repeatedly denied. One Bangladesh court sentenced her in absentia to a one- year prison term. The Bangladesh government has recently banned three other of her books, *Amar Mayebela* (My Girlhood), *Utol Hawa* (Wild Wind), and *Seisob ondhokar* (Those Dark Days). She now lives in between three cities on three continents, Kolkata, Stockholm, and New York.

The numerous prestigious awards she has received in western countries have resulted in increased international attention to her struggle for women's rights and freedom of expression. She has become a symbol of free-speech. She has been invited to speak in many countries and at renowned universities throughout the world. Her dreams of secularization of society and secular instead of religious education are becoming increasingly more accepted and honored by those who value freedom. When she is asked what kind of society she dreams of, she replies, "A society should not be called Islamic or Christian. A society should be secular and multicultural. I believe in a modern Socialist society where people

are equal" (*View Full Version1*). But it has not been so easy for her to translate her dream into reality as well as for those who have the same dream.

II. NEW HISTORICISM

Traditional Historicism Versus New Historicism

New historicism is a loosely defined literary theory that emerged in the early 1980s. Although both- traditional historicists and new historicists deal with past events, there are a lot of differences between them as Lois Tyson says:

As you can see, the questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different, and that's because these two approaches to history are based on very different views of what history is and how we can know it. Traditional historians ask, "What happened?" and "What does the event tell us about history?" In contrast, new historicists ask, "How has the event been interpreted?" and "What do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?" (278)

Traditional historians have the view that history is a series of events that have a linear, causal relationship: event A caused event B; event B caused event C and so on. They also believe that we are perfectly capable of uncovering the facts about historical events through objective analysis and those facts can sometimes reveal the spirit of the age. Indeed, some of the most popular traditional historical accounts have offered a key concept that would explain the world view of a given historical population, such as the Renaissance notion of the Great Chain of Being – the cosmic hierarchy of creation, with God at the top of the ladder, human beings at the middle, and the lowliest creature at the bottom – which has been used to argue that the guiding spirit of Elizabethan culture was a belief in the importance of order in all domains of human life. Finally, traditional historians

generally believe that history is progressive, that the human species is improving over the course of time, advancing in its moral, cultural and technological achievements.

New historicists, in contrast, do not believe we have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history. We can know, for example, that George Washington was the first American president and that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. But our understanding of what such facts mean, of how they fit within the complex web of competing ideologies and conflicting social, political, and cultural agendas of the time and place in which they occurred is, for new historicists, strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact. Even when traditional historians believe they are sticking to the facts, the way they contextualize those facts determines what story those facts will tell. From this perspective, there is no such thing as a presentation of facts; there is only interpretation.

Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, for a number of reasons, difficult to produce. The first and most important reason for this difficulty, new historicists believe, is the impossibility of objective analysis. Like all human beings, historians live in a particular time and place, and their views of both current and past events are influenced in innumerable conscious and unconscious ways by their own experience within their own culture. Historians may believe they are being objective, but their own views of what is right and wrong, what is civilized and uncivilized, what is important and unimportant, and the like, will strongly influence the ways in which they interpret events. For example, the traditional view that history is progressive is based on the belief, held in the past by many Anglo-European historians, that the so-called 'primitive' cultures of native people are less evolved, and therefore inferior

to, the so-called 'civilized' Anglo-European cultures. As a result, ancient cultures with highly developed art forms, ethical codes, and spiritual philosophies, such as the tribal cultures of Native Americans and Africans, were often misrepresented as lawless, superstitious, and savage.

Another reason for the difficulty in producing reliable interpretations of history is its complexity. For new historicists, history can not be understood simply as a linear progression of events. At any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. And any two historians may disagree about what constitutes progress and what does not, for these terms are matters of definition, i.e. history is not an orderly parade into a continually improving future, as many traditional historians have believed. It is more like an improvised dance consisting of an infinite variety of steps, following any new route at any given moment, and having no particular goal or destination. Individuals and groups of people may have goals, but human history does not.

Similarly, while events certainly have causes, new historicists argue that those causes are usually multiple, complex, and difficult to analyze. One can not make simple causal statements with any certainty. In addition, causality is not a one-way street from cause to effect. Any given event -- whether it be a political election or children's cartoon show -- is a product of its culture, but it also affects that culture in return. In other words, all events -- including everything from the creation of an art work, to a televised murder trial, to the persistence of or change in the condition of the poor -- are shaped by and shape the culture in which they emerge.

In a similar manner, our subjectivity, or selfhood is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born. For most new historicists, our individual

identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive and dynamically unstable. Thus, the old argument between determinism and free will can not be settled because it rests on the wrong question: Is human identity socially determined or are human beings free agents? For new historicism, this question cannot be answered because it involves a choice between two entities that are not wholly separate. Rather, the proper question is: What are the processes by which individual identity and social formations such as political, educational, legal and religious institutions and ideologies create, promote, or change each other? For every society constrains individual thought and action within a network of cultural limitations while it simultaneously enables individuals to think and act. Our subjectivity, then, is a life long process of negotiating our way, consciously and unconsciously, among the constraints and freedoms offered, at any given moment in time, by the society in which we live.

According to new historicists, power does not emanate only from the top of the political and socio-economic structure. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, "Power circulates in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times" (1143). And the vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending proliferation of exchange. A discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience. Although the word discourse has roughly the same meaning as the word ideology, and the two terms are often used

interchangeably, the word discourse draws attention to the role of language as the vehicle of ideology.

From a new historicist perspective, no discourse, by itself, can adequately explain the complex cultural dynamics of social power. For there is no monolithic spirit of an age, and there is no adequate totalizing explanation of history. There is, instead, a dynamic, unstable interplay among discourses which are always in a state of flux, overlapping and competing with one another in any number of ways at any given point in time. Furthermore, no discourse is permanent. Discourses wield power for those in charge, but they also stimulate opposition to that power. This is one reason why new historicists believe that the relationship between individual identity and society is mutually constitutive: on the whole, human beings are never merely victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public lives.

For new historicism, even the dictator of a small country does not wield absolute power on his own. To maintain dominance, his power must circulate in numerous discourses -- in the discourse of religion, in the discourse of science, in the discourse of fashion, in the discourse of the law and so on. What is 'right,' 'natural' or 'normal' is the matter of perspective or presentation of discourse. In different cultures at different points in history, homosexuality has been deemed abnormal, normal, criminal, or admirable. The same can be said of incest, cannibalism and women's desire for political equality. In fact, Michel Foucault has suggested that all definitions of 'insanity', 'crime', and 'sexual perversion' are social constructs by means of which ruling power maintains its control. We accept these definitions as 'natural' because they are so ingrained in our culture.

Just as definitions of social and anti-social behaviours promote the power of certain individuals and groups, so do particular versions of historical events. New historicism views historical accounts as narratives that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, of those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases--that is, the more 'objective' they think they are-- the more those biases are able to control their narratives.

New historicists consider both primary and secondary sources of historical information as the forms of narrative. Both tell some kind of story, and therefore, those stories can be analyzed using the tools of literary criticism. Indeed, we might say that in bringing to the foreground the suppressed historical narratives of marginalized groups such as women, people of color, the poor, the working class, gays and lesbians, prisoners, the inhabitants of mental institutions, and so on new historicism has deconstructed the white, male, Anglo-European historical narrative to reveal its disturbing, hidden sub-text: the experiences of those people it has oppressed in order to maintain the dominance that allowed it to control what most Americans know about history.

In fact, a focus on the historical narratives of marginalized people has been an important feature of new historicism that some theorists have asked how new historicists can accept narratives from oppressed people any more readily than they have accepted narratives from the patriarchal Anglo- European power structure. One answer to this question is that a plurality of voices, including an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups, helps ensure that a master narrative-- a narrative told from a single cultural point of view that, nevertheless, presumes to offer the only accurate version of history--will no longer control our historical understanding. At this point in time, we still do not

have an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups. And even as the historical narratives of some groups are becoming more and more numerous, such as those of women and people of color, those narratives generally do not receive the same kind of attention as patriarchal Anglo-European narratives do in the classroom, where most of us learn about history. Therefore, new historicism tries to promote the development of and gain attention for the histories of marginalized people.

In addition to its focus on marginalized historical narratives, new historical analysis involves what is called thick description, a term borrowed from anthropology. Thick description attempts, through close, detailed examination of a given cultural production such as Baptist practices, ritual ceremonies, games, penal codes, works of art, copyright laws, and the like to discover the meanings that particular cultural production has for the people in whose community it occurs and to reveal the social conventions, cultural codes, and ways of seeing the world that has given that production those meanings. Thus, thick description is not a search for facts but a search for meanings, and as the examples of cultural productions listed above illustrate thick description focuses on the personal side of history-- the history of family dynamics, of leisure activities, of sexual practices, of childbearing customs--as much as or more than on such traditional historical topics as military campaigns and the passage of laws. Indeed, because traditional historicism tends to ignore marginalized private life as subjective and irrelevant, new historicism tries to compensate for this omission by bringing issues concerned with private life into the foreground of historical enquiry.

Finally, new historicists' claim that historical analysis is unavoidably subjective is not an attempt to legitimize a self-indulgent, 'anything goes' attitude

towards the writing of history. Rather, the inevitability of personal bias makes it imperative that new historicists be as aware of and as forth-right as possible about their own psychological and ideological positions relative to the material they analyze so that their readers can have some idea of the human 'lens' through which they view the historical issue at hand. This practice is called self positioning.

Foucauldian Perspective on Power and Discourse

Foucault's theory of power and discourse owes to the theory of German Philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche argues that all knowledge is an expression of the "Will to power" (qtd. in Selden 100). He believes that nobody can speak of 'absolute truths', that is all linguistic activities are related to our will to power. Foucault developed a theory of discourse in relation to the power structures operating in the society. His main concern is that discourse is involved in power: "It is in discourse that Power and Knowledge are joined together" (*Sexuality* 100) He views that discourses are rooted in social institutions and that social and political power operate through discourse. The discourse, therefore, is inseparable from power because discourse is the ordering force that governs every institution. This enables institutions to exercise power and dominate others. Those who possess the authority to define discourse exclude others who are not in power. M.H. Abrams in *Glossary of Literary Terms* writes:

Discourse has become the focal term among critics who oppose the deconstructive concept of a "general text" that function independently of particular historical condition. Instead they conceive of discourse as social parlance, or language-in-uses and

consider it to be both the product and the manifestation not of a timeless linguistic system, but of particular social condition, class – structures, and power relationships that alter in the course of history. (241)

Foucault believes that we can never possess an objective knowledge of history, "because historical writings are always entangled in tropes" (qtd. in Selden 102). Discourses are produced within a real world of power struggle. Discourse is used as a means to gain or, sometimes even to subvert power. For Foucault, discourse is a central human activity. He is interested in the process how discursive practices change over time.

Discourse, according to Foucault, is produced in which concepts of madness, criminality, and sexual abnormality and so on are defined in relation to sanity, justice and sexual normality. Such discursive formations massively determine and constrain the forms of knowledge, the types of normality and the nature of subjectivity, which prevail in a particular period. Foucault argues in his essay "Truth and Power" that, "[T]he rules and procedures, which determine what is considered normal or rational, have the power to silence what they exclude" (qtd. in Adams 1142). His main point, here, is that meaning of any discourse depends on who controls it. For example, the scientist who first claimed "The earth revolves around the sun" was punished and his truth was ignored because for the people who were in power had another version of truth: "The sun revolves around the earth". So truth can be proved wrong by power.

People recognize particular piece of philosophy or scientific theory as true, only if it fits the description of truth laid down by the intellectual or political institution of the day, by members of ruling elite or the existing ideologies of

knowledge. Every system of knowledge, we may say, establishes rules for exclusion or discrimination and it always implies taking sides. The discursive practices, however, have no universal validity but are historically dominant ways of controlling and preserving social relations of exploitations.

Foucault's interest is in historical dimension of discursive change. Systems of knowledge establish rules and procedures governing the particular epoch by exclusion and regulation. Foucault regards the nature of discourse as an event in time since it is not only that which represents struggles or systems of domination, but also the object through which and with which we struggle, the power we seek to possess. For him, as for Nietzsche, any attempt to produce and control discourse is will to power. Every instance of discourse embodies the power struggle, as Foucault himself argues, "[D]iscourse is a violence that we do to things" (qtd. In Selden 60). Truth itself becomes not an unchanging universal essence but a perpetual object of appropriation and domination.

In "Truth and power" Michel Foucault revisits the major theoretical trends and questions on his career. He is a thinker who knows no bounds of subject or field. His ideas stretch from literature to science, from psychology to labor and so on. Foucault spends much of his career tracing the threads of truth and power as they intertwine with the history of human experience. He specially loves to study asylums and prisons because they are close to an encapsulated power structure. Using techniques gathered from psychology, politics, anthropology, and archaeology, Foucault presents a highly politicized analysis of the flow of the power and power relations:

The way power was exercised-- concretely and in detail -- with its specificity, its techniques and tactics, was something that no one

attempted to ascertain; they contended themselves with denouncing it in a polemical and global fashion as it existed among the 'others,' in the adversary camp. (qtd. in Adams 1137)

Foucault also discusses about the structure of history. Foucault is ardent in asserting, "I do [not] see who could be more of anti structuralist than myself " (1137). He claims that structures, formed by the rulers of society, have led to the devaluation of the 'event' in their rage to order the general tide of history. Structuralist historians ignore aberrant even that do not fit into those beautiful structures that are so orderly, intelligible and transparent to analysis Foucault says that the study of history has been based on a model of language that focuses on meaning. He recommends a different way of evaluating eccentric historical events rather than writing them off as simply trivial as structuralist historians have attempted:

Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great modal of a language (langue) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language relations of power not relations of meaning. (1137)

Foucault believes that the seemingly chaotic occurrences of history are conflicts of power. He states that there is an "intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts" that can enlighten us to the reasons behind actions. (1137)

Foucault sees every action and every historical event as an exercise in the exchange of power. He spent a large bulk of his career analyzing the ebb and flow of power in different situations and with relevance to different aspect of human

life. Structure organizes and broadens the web of power. The overall volume of power rises with each individual involved in the play. The society is a huge web, and much of the power tends to be concentrated towards the higher echelons.

Foucault sees the exchange of power in very active terms: "[I] sn't power simply a form of war like domination?" (1141) It is difficult to sort out just who is fighting the war, since Foucault seems to lean towards the war of all against all notions.

Power flows simultaneously in different directions and different volumes according to the various forms of 'power relations' in the 'network' of power exchange. Regarding power and truth Foucault states:

Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientific or truth and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truths are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false. (qtd. in Adams 1139)

He states that power is not only repression; it is something positive. Sometimes power needs to prohibit unnecessary and negative things. To control bad manner and attitude Power is required. If power is positively applied it would create order, justice and equality in the society or country. Similarly, if the power is forcefully applied it would face the problems of domination, violence and disorder as he opines:

In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies Power with a law which says no. Power is taken above all as carrying the force of a

prohibition [...] what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does [not] only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (qtd. in Adams 1139)

The basic problem for non-west is that power, as west has exercised is juridical and negative rather than technical and positive. Foucault's ideas gravitate toward the ultra-highly complex and similarly politicized, leaving one to wonder what the real-world impact of his notions might be.

The interviewers apparently shared this inquiry, and asked how all of Foucault's analysis of power relations could be used in life, and specifically, what is the role of the intellectual? Foucault responds with a discussion on the role of the intellectual, who he says has gravitated from a 'Universal' intellectual to a 'specific' intellectual. Foucault sees scientists and scholars who remain cloistered to their field as specific intellectuals, and cites the writers of old age as the universal intellectuals: "The intellectual par excellence used to be the writer as a universal consciousness, a free subject, he was counterpoised to the service of the state or capital technicians, magistrates, teachers" (1142).

Even writers have been co-opted in modern society by the structure of the 'regime' the group that rules the society, including government and business. The society now looks to the university for its knowledge because of the intersection of multiple fields of study. This had incorporated even written expression into the structure of society and led to the devaluation of two writers of genius and the elevation of the absolute servant. The absolute servant" along with a handful of other, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the state or against it, powers

which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life" (1143). Writers who are sanctioned by a powerful structure now affect reality rather than simply tromping around in ideological terrain. It would seem that an intellectual could not be effective without the support of some structure, but Foucault makes an argument for individual efficacy.

Michel Foucault while defining truth and power points out that these two are interwoven and attached. They are not in isolated concepts as he remarks:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. Contrary to a myth whose history and function would repay further study, truth is not the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, not the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world. It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it includes regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its' general politics, of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes functions as true. (qtd. in Adams 1144).

Each society creates a 'regime of truth' according to its beliefs, values, and so on. Foucault identifies the creation of truth in contemporary western society with five traits: the centering of truth on scientific discourse, accountability of truth to economic and political forces, the "diffusion and consumption" of truth via societal apparatuses the, contril of the distribution of truth by "political and economic apparatuses" and the fact that it is "the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation" (qtd.in"Methods"97). Individuals would do well to recognize that ultimate truth. 'Truth' is the construct of the political and economic forces that command the majority of the power within the societal web. There is

not truly universal truth at all; therefore, the intellectual cannot convey universal truth. The intellectual must specialize, specify, so that he/she can be connected to one of the truth-generating apparatuses of the society as Foucault explains: "Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements [...] "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power, which produces and sustains it [...]" (1145). Because of this, Foucault sees the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of science and ideology, but in terms of truth and power. The question of how to deal with and determine truth is at the base of political and social strife.

Thus, according to Foucault, power is productive, strategic, and is exercised. For Foucault, it is a relation of compromise between two forces. Knowledge is not at all the same thing as power. Power is unstable and flexible since it is about two parties who are involved in the exercise in a guerrilla war. Knowledge, on the other hand, is segmented and stratified. It is knowledge that is dependent on power and power sometimes can stand without knowledge. Foucault says that they are complementary but not the same thing.

New Historicism and Literature

New historical literary criticism embeds our study of literary texts in the study of history. New historical criticism has little in common with traditional historical criticism. The traditional historical criticism, which dominated literary studies in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, confined itself largely to studies of the author's biography in order to discover his or her intentions in writing the work, or to studies of the historical period in which the work was written in order to reveal the spirit of the age, which the text was then

supposed to embody. For traditional literary historians, literature existed in a purely subjective realm, unlike history, which consisted of objectively discernable facts. Therefore, literature could never be interpreted to mean anything that history did not authorize it to mean.

The New Criticism, which dethroned traditional historical criticism and controlled literary studies from the 1930s to the 1950s, rejected traditional historicism's approach to literature. For the New Critics, the only thing literary historians could offer was interesting background material about literary works. The New Critics argued that the understanding of a text's meaning, however, has nothing whatsoever to do with history because great literary works are timeless, autonomous art objects that exist in a realm beyond history. As a result of New Critical dominance, the historical study of literature faded into the background and tried to content itself with the tasks New Criticism deemed its proper work: for example, providing background material on authors' lives and times- which would not, however, be used to interpret these works- and preserving, through the provision of accurate editions of revered works, the canon of great literature.

New historicism, which emerged in the early 1980s, rejects both traditional historicism's marginalization of literature and New Criticism's enshrinement of the literary text in a timeless dimension beyond history. For new historical critics, a literary text does not embody the author's intention or illustrate the spirit of the age that produced it, as traditional literary historians asserted. Nor are literary texts self- sufficient art objects that transcend the time and place in which they were written, as New Critics believed. Rather, literary texts are cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the text was

written. And they can do so because the literary text is, itself, part of the interplay of discourses, a thread in the dynamic web of social meaning. For new historicism, the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text and context are mutually constitutive: they create each other. Like the dynamic interplay between individual identity and society, literary text shapes and is shaped by its historical contexts.

New historicism is concerned not with historical events as events, but with the ways in which events are interpreted, with historical discourses, with ways of seeing the world and modes of meaning. Indeed, historical events are viewed by new historicists not as facts to be documented but as 'texts' to be 'read' in order to help us speculate about how human cultures, at various historical 'moments', have made sense of themselves and their world. We can not really know exactly what happened at any given point in history, but we can know what the people involved believed. In other words, we can know from their accounts the various ways in which they interpreted their experience and we can interpret those interpretations.

For new historical literary critics, the literary text, through its representation of human experience at a given place and time, is an interpretation of history. As such, the literary text maps the discourses circulating at the time it was written and is, itself, one of those discourses. That is, the literary text shaped and was shaped by the discourses circulating in the culture in which it was produced. Likewise, our interpretations of literature shape and are shaped by the culture in which we live. Louis Montrose describes the new historicism as " a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history "(410). In the succeeding chapter the present researcher will analyze Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* from new historicist perspective.

III. LOSS OF FAITH IN NATIONALISM IN TASLIMA NASRIN'S *LAJJA*

The novel, *Lajja*, is based on the historical event, i.e., destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in India on 6 Dec, 1992 by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists and its fallout spread in Bangladesh, that resulted in Muslim persecution of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh. The event has been interpreted as a matter of tremendous threat to their existence by the minority Hindu community and as very aggressive step upon the Muslim community by the Muslim fundamentalists. According to the interpretations of the Hindus, they are very much afraid of the majority Muslim community as they are often tortured at every opportunity by the Muslim community, where as according to the interpretations of the Muslims they are very aggressive, wrathful and revengeful due to the incident.

After the incident, resulted by the destruction of the Mosque at Ayodhya and its interpretations, by the novelist through the novel, the Muslims argue that the novelist must be given death penalty for her writing against the Muslim community. Then the government, siding with the Muslim fundamentalists, banned the novel on the ground that its contents might hurt the existing social system and religious sentiments of the people. Bangladeshi Joyal Abedin filed the charge in June 1994, amid accusation Nasrin had blasphemed against the Koran in her novel "*Lajja*", which the writer repeatedly denied.

She was under death threats from the Muslim Clerics and faced criminal charges from the government for allegedly criticizing the Koran. The Muslim fundamentalists were infuriated by a newspaper article that quoted her as urging a revision of the Koran, the Islamic holy book. Extremist groups offered \$5,000 reward for her death. She was also charged by a Bangladeshi court with offending

the religious sentiments of the Muslims, a crime that carried a maximum penalty of two years in prison. Elisabet Soderstron, an associated press writer, reports," Abdul Kader Mollan, Spokesman for Bangladesh's leading Fundamentalist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, said," the government will have to pay a very heavy price for letting Ms. Nasrin go out of the country" (*New York Times* 5).

The Muslim fundamentalists gained power from the majority of the Muslim people and from the backup of the government spreading favorable discourse in politics, law, court, religion, and media, and continued their brutal treatment upon the minority of the Hindu community. There was no sympathy for the innocent marginalized Hindu community. Their contribution to Bangladesh was also not negligible as they had also fought at the cost of their life to liberate Bangladesh from Pakistan. How much right the Muslim had to live in their country, the Hindus did have also the same.

But the contemporary socio-historical reality was so much adverse for the Hindus that they did not find any alternatives except silently leaving their country. But, in the novel, quite contrarily, Sudhamoy, the head of a small Hindu family, does not pursue other Hindus' path. He is a nationalist. He has the strong belief that the society, where he has been residing with good relationship even with the Muslim people. Although his belief is not agreeable to other family members, they cannot persuade him because it is very hard to dismantle the strong mountain that he has built within himself. But when the environment is intolerably adverse day by day, he has to agree to leave his place. Thus, the incompatibility between extreme fundamentalism and his extreme nationalism has resulted in complete loss of his faith in nationalism.

When the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was demolished on 6 Dec.1992 by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists, the world condemns the incident, but its fallout is

felt most acutely in Bangladesh. The Muslim mobs begin to seek out and attack the Hindus. In the novel, there is a description of a small Hindu family, which is terribly terrorized by the Muslims. The family consists of father-Sudhamoy, mother- Kironmoyee, and their two children Suranjan, and Nilanjana (Maya).

The novel displays that the minority Hindus in Bangladesh were not tortured by the Muslims only in the period after the demolition of the Mosque as there had already occurred many incidents in which the Hindus and their religious structures were tormented and smashed into pieces. The novelist has given long lists of the events and the devastations. So it can be said that this novel is based on historical events of 1992 in India and Bangladesh. This novel is not in a timeless dimension beyond history. It is embedded to the contemporary historical time and context. It is a cultural artifact that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which it was written:

After many years of struggle, Bangladesh had freed itself from the grip of Pakistan in 1971 and a new constitution had been implemented: "We, the people of Bangladesh, having proclaimed our independence on the 26th day of March 1971 and through a historic struggle for national liberation, established the independent, sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh" (182).

After the independence of Bangladesh, the reactionaries who had been against the very spirit of independence had gained power, changed the face of the constitution and revived the evils of communalism and unbending fundamentalism that had been rejected during the war of independence. After independence, amongst four clauses, a clause that enshrined secularism was included in the Constitution of Bangladesh. This was an invincible weapon

against the possible resurrection of communalism. But after 15 August 1975, communalism was reborn. Along with it came the forces of fundamentalism, fanaticism, malice and despotism. Religion was used as a political weapon and a large number of people were forced to follow the dictates of the Islam. Thus, unlawfully and unconstitutionally, Islam became the national religion of Bangladesh. As a result, communalism and religious fanaticism exploded out of control. After the 8th Amendment in 1988, the Constitution of Bangladesh acquired the following insertion: "The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Republic," (181). Thus Bangladesh was declared Islamic state and other religions were marginalized. The government exercised power and dominated other religions through the amendment in the constitution. Those who possessed the authority to define religious discourse excluded those who were not in power.

Bangladesh did not come into being on her own. It was the joint effort of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians that made her birth possible. Therefore, to declare only one religion as the national religion is to discriminate against the members of other religious communities. The country where the religion of one particular community is declared the religion of the nation, then that state ceases to be nationalistic in nature. A country which proclaims a national religion can any day be declared a theocratic state. Love for one's country does not vary in degree from person to person nor is it distinguished by caste or religion. Loving one's country is a universal feeling. But when certain groups of people find that because they do not owe religious allegiance to the declared national religion, their religion is regarded as secondary, or is perhaps even third grade in status, and when they are also branded second class citizens, then their

egos take a tremendous battering. The promoters of the national religion are absolutely responsible for arising the feeling of communalism in the people. But the feeling of communalism of the majority is always much stronger than that of the minority. The discourse of the majority in the society is naturally stronger and more pervasive than that of the minority. Those who are in power, circulate their discourse far and wide through media and the truth is created. But the truth cannot be true forever. When there is change in power structure, it will also be changed. It is always related to power. Power and truth are interwoven and attached.

It became very difficult for the Hindus to survive until and unless the state was declared a secular state. Secularism means the development of an unanimous or similar outlook towards all religions. There is no scope for partiality and secularism, in effect, means the separation of religion from politics. There were calamitous happenings everyday and the government continued to say that there was communal harmony in the country. The government manipulated media according to its interest and people got the impression that nothing was happening; and there was perfect communal harmony in the country. The government had never thought of restraining fundamentalists and fascist groups in the country. Politics was never free from the clutches of religion. The Muslims in India were in a position to fight because India was a secular country but in Bangladesh, power was in the hands of the Muslim fundamentalists. There was no scope to fight in that country. The Hindus were treated as the second class citizens.

There was no Hindu in the administration. Since Pakistani times, no Hindu had been appointed to the post of secretary. There were only a handful of Hindus in the army, and they never got promoted beyond a point. There were also no

Hindus at all in the Air Force and the Navy. When it came to send students abroad for higher studies or for training, the Hindus were selectively avoided. The Hindus also did not have any profitable business in their hands. If the Hindus wished to go into business, it was a must for them to get hold of a Muslim partner. Only then they were granted a license. Moreover, they were not given any industrial loans by the various organizations. Similarly, extracts from the Koran were religiously read out at all state functions, societies and associations, but the extracts from the Geeta were never read. In the whole year, the government had reserved only two days as holidays for the Hindus. Nor could they opt for any special holiday. In every public function, there were proposals to construct new mosques but they never spoke of constructing temples, nor did they talk about maintaining the existing temples, churches and pagodas in the country. It displays the miserable plight of the Hindu minorities. They were discriminated in each and every sector by the government supporting fundamentalism. They were marginalized forgetting their contribution to Bangladesh.

Foucault states that power is not only repression; it is something positive. At times, power needs to prohibit unnecessary and negative things. To control bad manner and attitudes there needs power. If it is positively applied, it would create order, Justice and equality in the country but in Bangladesh power was applied negatively giving rise to disorder, injustice and inequality.

In the novel, Sudhamoy seems to have been enormously influenced by his father's nationalistic impulse. He is the one who contributed remarkably for his country's independence. But his contribution is neglected as he is a Hindu by religion in a religiously aggressive Muslim country. In spite of suppression of the Muslims upon the Hindus at every opportunity, he does not lose his patience. He

refuses to leave his country as most of his friends and relatives have done. His thoughts are quite contrary to other Hindus. He has unshakable nationalistic faith. He seems as if he were ready to be destroyed than to abandon his country. He thinks that those who desert their country are inhumane. He is even averse to send his daughter out of the country for studies. He is strongly against the idea of leaving the country for any reason. Once when his cousin suggested him in buying a house and land at Calcutta, he replies with anger, "You mean, you want to earn the money here and spend it in that country? You know, you should be condemned as a traitor" (18). It shows that he has immense love for his country.

But the socio- historical environment was very much adverse for his belief and determination. He had to face ineffable discrimination as he belonged to the Hindu community. He suffered very unpleasant impact of religious extremism even in his professional life. The Officers, junior to him, got their promotion but as he was a Hindu, he was deprived of it. His two years' continuous strive for his promotion proved futile. He only succeeded in wearing out the soles of his shoes. He was destined to retire as an Assistant professor only. Indeed, it was foolish of him to expect promotion in the Muslim country. On the day of Sudhamoy's retirement, one of his colleagues had put a garland of marigolds around his neck and whispered into his ear: "It is not right to expect too many benefits in a Muslim country. What we are getting is more than enough for us" (21). It shows the miserable plight of the Hindus in Bangladesh where Muslims were all in all.

The incident at Ayodhya brought a tremendous terror to the family. There was no environment to come out of the house. They had to feel terrified of the people of their own neighborhood, with whom they had intimate and neighborly reconciliation up to the day before. The people of the same locality appeared on

the nearby street shouting the slogans very unpleasant and frightening to them against the Hindus:

As the procession passed by their house, they could clearly hear the voices say, 'Let us catch a Hindu or two, eat them in the mornings and evenings too [...]' Suranjan saw his father shiver. His mother stood with her back to the window that she had just shut. Suranjan remembered that they had used the same slogan in 1990. Who were they? Ironically, they were boys from the neighborhood! Jabbar, Ramjan, Aalamgir, Kabir and Abedin! They were all friends who lived in the same area, met frequently, discussed matters of mutual interest without rancour, and even took joint decisions on issues of significance. And it was the same people who wanted to make a snack of Suranjan! (17)

It shows the effect of violent religious consciousness on the psychology and relationships of people. The Muslim people's religious consciousness is generated and made aggressive by the fundamentalist leaders to take action upon their Hindu neighbours. The demonstration in the street is the demonstration for power. The Muslims forget their neighbourly reconciliation with their Hindu neighbours. They are convinced that religion is more important than neighbourly relationship. They are used by the fundamentalists to fulfil their interests. Sudhamoy's innumerable helps become negligible to them. They are blind and cruel to their own well wishers and helpers. The Hindus have to be scared of the Muslim friends with whom they used to move in all social affairs by putting hands in hands. The innocent Hindus of Bangladesh are destined to face the unpleasant punishment of the mistake made by the Indian Hindus – destruction of the age-old

Mosque. They became the victims of Indian Hindus' religious extremism. The Hindus in India were more powerful so they dared to destroy the age old mosque and the Muslims in Bangladesh were more powerful so they started their violent action upon the powerless Hindus. Every historical event is related to power. Both the historical events that took place in India and Bangladesh were related to power. Foucault believes that the chaotic occurrences of history are conflicts of power. He sees every action and every historical event as an exercise in the exchange of power.

Suranjan has also the influence of his father, Sudhamoy. He is a young man involved in every socio-political affair in his neighbourhood. When his sister, Maya, terrified of what might happen to them urges him to take her along with parents to a safer place as done in the past, he showed complete unwillingness. He just remains in the house passively and she manages her security by herself. Then Suranjan decides to move around the city although it is very dangerous for him to do so. Just as he enters a bigger street, a group of boys shouted out, "Catch him, he's a Hindu" (27). The boys are his neighbours. For the last seven years he has been meeting them at least once a day. They are often in his house asking for all sorts of help, and because they are neighbours, Sudhamoy often gives them free medical treatment. And it is these very people who are threatening him to beat up because he is a Hindu. Then Suranjan walks briskly in the opposite direction not out of fear, but out of shame. He is truly ashamed and anguished by the thought of these boys beating him up and during his visit, he sees a lot of devastations made by the Muslims.

Generally it is believed that religion aims at peace and tolerance. But here it has created a lot of disorder and unrest. It is indeed a pity that even at the close

of the twentieth century, there are so many atrocities in the name of religion. Instead of serving society and humanity, it has created complexity. But religion is not blameworthy. It is the mistake of those who are circulating religious discourse. When religion is used by power holders, then it creates destructive consequences. Every religion should be independent of power structure. Only then, it can serve society and humanity.

Being a Hindu, Suranjan was deprived of job opportunity. Although he was qualified for the jobs he tried, he was not selected in the interview. He was one of the sharpest students in the university, but ironically the students whom he had helped with their studies, got more marks than him in the final examination. It shows that the high posts of the employment sector and education were occupied by the Muslims who were very biased towards the Hindus.

Sudhamoy is the man who does not lose his patience so easily. He has immense hope that the situation will soon subdue. He is not ready to acknowledge that there are riots absolutely because of their extreme love of their religion. Rather he takes it as a matter of vandalism, hooliganism and their desire for plundering wealth. He thinks that they are doing so with their aim to loot and plunder. And when they get a lot, they will be satisfied and there will be no more torture to the poor Hindu families like his family. He says to his son:

Actually, do you know what the truth is? Those who are causing these riots are not doing so for the love of any particular religion. Their main aim is to loot and plunder. Do you know why they loot the sweetmeat shops? Simply in order to satisfy their greed for sweets. Likewise, jewellery shops have been broken into because of a love of gold. The riots are quite clearly the result of hooliganism.

Infact, there is no real difference between the members of the two different communities. And the rate at which peace marches are being conducted, something or the other will soon be done to normalize the situation. (61)

But whatever the matter is, it has been done in the name of religion. Religion is the root-cause of all these devastations. They are also destroying temples through which they do not obtain any material benefit. So, we can say that they are more or less religiously aggressive fundamentalists and in every demonstration of any countries, such types of vandalism and hooliganism occur.

It also reminds us of the activities in the demonstrations carried out on issues in Nepal. Similarly, Sudhamoy says so to save his belief. It is just his futile attempt to preserve his faith in nationalism. The discourse he creates is not dominant because he does not possess power to circulate his discourse. His discourse is not even convincing to his own son. He has no backup to create truth through his discourse in absence of power.

Sudhamoy has the belief that the Hindus will get justice. He wants to convince himself that Hindus and Muslims are treated the same and that Hindus are not the second class citizens in his country. He has the hope of a improved situation. But his son, Suranjan, is impatient with his father's view of the situation. He thinks it is foolishness to try and see themselves as equal to the Muslims and who are the first class citizens of the country as being the members of the second class Hindu minority. Indeed, they have never been conventional Hindus. They have accepted the Muslims as their brothers and friends. But it has not done any good to them. Rather they have to live with the fear of being insulted and wounded. They still have to cringe with fear at the prospect of being

charred by the flames of communalism. Their well-wishes are always reciprocated with rudeness.

To make Sudhamoy Muslim, he is treated to the worst of humanity by the Muslim guards in the jail. They jerk up his lungi and mutilate his penis. He has seen the blood and the severed foreskin and hears the harsh laughter before he has lost consciousness. But other Hindus in the camp have all agreed to read the Kalma and convert to Islam in the hope that they would be spared. It shows that he is prepared to be destroyed than to surrender to the fundamentalists.

Kironmoyee, the wife of Sudhamoy, represents ideal Hindu woman. She is very submissive to her husband. She forgets her individual agonies, likes and dislikes for the happiness of her husband and the family. Sudhamoy has brought her from a well-to-do, educated, cultured family into an insolvent, hopeless family. She has never been all that keen on saris and jewellery. She has never said to him, 'I would like that sari, or buy me that earring (158). Over and above that, he has deprived her of the needs of the body for the past twenty-one years. He has slept beside her quite literally just by guarding her chastity and helping her be the faithful wife. It has always been his own interest that has mattered more. He tried to compensate for his physical shortcomings by loving her verbally but as fiercely as he could to convince her that she must not leave such love for the pleasures of the flesh. Is it possible to satisfy a person's feelings with love alone? Anyway, she never reveals her internal agonies. She just hides them inside except sometimes in the form of tears. She represents the plight of the Hindu women in a male-dominated society. Similarly, although she wants her husband to decide to leave the country, she does not force him because she considers not to go against her husband's belief, idealism and optimism as a wife.

In Hinduism as well, by misinterpreting the religious books of Hindus, men have been ruling upon their wives. The discourse that men should keep their wife under control; women should not go against their husband; husband is like god; is more pervasive and powerful. As the discourse has been circulating in the society for centuries, it has been natural and well established. So, women do not dare to raise their voice against it. They consider it as a universal truth but in fact it is not so; it is just the truth created by patriarchal discourse. When the power is shifted to women in the society, then this truth will be replaced with another version of truth. Any oppressed groups are victimized by the dominant power structure and are also capable of resisting or transforming that power structure. But the need is that they should exploit their capacity.

She was also an excellent singer. But she stopped singing because it was considered a shameful act by the Muslim people. They used to abuse her and call her a shameless Hindu woman. They also did not like the Hindu women to sing and dance in public fearing that the Muslim girls might learn from them. She remembers the bitter remark of the Muslims, which took away her interest to sing: It is only because Hindu women are shameless that they learn how to sing; that is why, they sit in public in front of unknown men and sing for everyone (37). It displays that females are deprived of displaying their creative talent in a Muslim country. There is a strong obstacle for them to involve in art, literature and music. They consider that such activity degrades females' character. The Muslims' interpretation that Hindu women are shameless, so they learn how to sing is the strong weapon to dominate their creative potentialities.

Suranjan seems very fed up with the behaviour of the Muslims. He feels the Hindus to have reached to the situation either committing suicide or leaving

the country. He feels defeated by the communalism and loses his hope contrary to his father. He is different from his father in this sense. He says to his Hindu friend:

You know something, Pulok? Those whom we think of as non-communal, or as our own people, and as our friends, are highly communal deep down. We respect their religious practices, and avoid drinking tea or smoking in public during the month of Ramzon. In fact, we do not even go to their restaurants on those days. But how close are they to us actually? For whom do we make these sacrifices? They are the same, Pulok [...] all the same. The only options left to us now are either suicide or migration. (107)

It reveals that he is not similar with his father in ideas. He views that it is almost impossible to minimize the feeling of communalism arisen in Muslims. Indeed his opinion is the result of the solid reality taking place in the society. His ideas are embedded and shaped by the context. He is more practical than his father in this sense. His father's opinions are away from social reality. He does not understand that his thoughts and contextual reality are not in harmony. As a result, his father suffers big psychological agony at the end of the novel.

The terror of the family was materialized when a mob of Muslim Fundamentalists enter into their house, break all the materials and abduct Maya. Then a terrible sadness and silence begins in the family. It also leads to a gradual loss in the nationalistic faith of Sudhamoy.

Suranjan had never claimed to be a Hindu before, being influenced by his father. He used to call himself a human being and believed in humanism but now

he considers that the Muslims do not let him stay as a human; they make him a Hindu and communal. Before he used to say:

Let all those brick built buildings of worship be smashed to smithereens. Let there be no mandirs, masjids, girjas and gurudwaras, and after they are all destroyed, we will build on their ruins beautiful flower gardens and schools for children. For the good of man, the places of worship should be hospitals, orphanages, schools and universities. From now onwards let the prayer homes be Art and Handicrafts Academies, Schools for Fine Arts, halls for Scientific Discussions. Let our places of worship be converted into rich, green, sunbathed paddy fields, vast rolling fields, gurgling blue rivers and wild unquiet oceans. Let the other name for religion be Humanity. (164)

But now he is becoming communal and revengeful towards the Muslims. As they are destroying the Mandirs, and the Hindus' houses, in the same way, he wants to destroy their mosques and houses. He also wants to rape the Muslim girls as they were doing with the Hindu girls. He feels so much communal and revengeful that he brings home a whore. However, he does not look upon her as a whore. To him, she is a girl that belongs to the majority community. He is longing to rape one of them, in revenge for what they have done to his sister.

He wants to compensate for his sister's abduction by raping a Muslim girl and his raping is very aggressive and painful to her. The novelist writes:

He pulled her hair, bit her on the cheek, neck and breasts. He scratched her waist, her stomach, her buttocks and her thighs with

his sharp nails. The girl was only a prostitute, after all! As Suranjan attacked her naked body, the girl moaned with pain, screaming occasionally, 'O my God! I am dying of pain [...]' Suranjan laughed with savage satisfaction. He continued to hurt her till he could do no more and then he raped her. As he moved above her, the girl thought fearfully that this must be the worst, most savage customer she had ever encountered. (200)

It shows that he gives up his earlier thoughts realizing that there is no environment at all to locate his thoughts and they are just idealism. As a result, he wants to be realistic, communal and revengeful like Muslim friends.

It also reveals that one can not be away from the reality of the society where he/she is living. At the end of the novel, when Suranjan says that he is feeling strongly to be communal and Hindu, Sudhamoy feels very agitated. But Suranjan endeavours to convince him of it and to leave the country. He says, "However, much we call ourselves atheists, however much we call ourselves humanists, those people out there will call us Hindus. They will call us bastards. The more we love this country, the more they will isolate us. We can not trust them, Baba" (215). But Sudhamoy is reluctant to be convinced. He is so stubborn, so strong in his convictions that there is no way to shake him. He can be kicked and battered, but he is not ready to uproot himself from the soil of his homeland. The snakes and scorpions of that soil might bite him but he will still fall back on it. He has the opinion that anyone who leaves his or her country is inhumane but his discourse is even disagreeable to his own son and wife although she does not disagree

openly. Sudhamoy endeavours to materialize his discourse into truth, but he is unsuccessful. For the time being it becomes truth as he is the head of the family but his truth is turned into wrong and his son's truth becomes victorious because the social reality is not supportive to Sudhamoy, whereas it is supportive to his son's discourse.

Next day, he comes to his son's room and asks him to go to India. He realizes his meaningless, absurd and too idealistic faith on his country. His strong feeling of nationalism gets dashed to the ground because this feeling is too extreme and idealistic and the extreme fundamentalism outside is very real, and undefeatable for him. Sudhamoy says:

'Come, let us go away'. Suranjan could not conceal his surprise.'

Where will we go, Baba?' he asked. Sudhamoy said, 'India'. 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 was the way it would have to be because the strong mountain that he had built within himself was crumbling day by day. (216)

In this way, at last, he agrees with his son and feels extreme shame. The reason for feeling shame is that he has to lose his long - possessed nationalistic faith due to its own extremity and the undefeatable communalism taking place outside. But, in fact, it is not shame; it is the intolerable pain that he feels because his discourse is unsuccessful to create durable truth and the discourse of his son, which is also pervasive in the society becomes more powerful and bigger truth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* is a big challenge to the conservative Muslim communities in the world. It has urged them to think critically about their religion, beliefs and assumptions. She is the woman of unprecedented courage, determination and dynamism, who dared to go against long - established ideals and concepts. She has amazed the world by putting forward her strong ideas against Islamic traditions. Her attempt at democratization and humanization of the Muslim communities is very commendable. But considering her as a big threat to Islamic societies, she has not been granted permission to return to her country yet. The international communities need to play a significant role to secure her fundamental rights to go and live in her country. Necessary steps should be initiated to urge the Bangladeshi government to permit her return safely and with honor.

In *Lajja*, she has exposed the religious arrogance of the Bangladeshi Muslims and their brutal attack upon the innocent Hindu minorities. Their brutality is so much extremist that it beggars description. Through the minute description of the plight of a Hindu family, she has displayed the terror befallen on every Hindu family. The head of the family, Sudhamoy, is confused to find his long- possessed nationalistic faith being tremendously threatened and eroded. Despite the limitless oppression and too adverse atmosphere he is not in the mood to lose his faith. He loves his country more than anyone or anything else. He desires to save his belief at the cost of his and his family's life. In fact, there is no environment at all to sustain his belief.

But when the Muslims' religious aggressiveness increases day by day, his faith in nationalism starts decreasing and ultimately there is complete loss of faith in his

country. It is due to the incompatibility between his extreme nationalist views and extreme communalism taking place outside. There is a defeat of idealism by realism. He seems emotional, not practical at all. He is found to have worked more by heart than by head. If he were not so nationalistic, idealistic and overtly optimistic, he and his family would not suffer as he could have done something to avoid the terrible consequences as his friends did. Although he does not do anything to resist Muslims' oppression, he is a kind of rebel because he does not take their aggressive activities seriously. He seems unaffected and indifferent. In this sense, he can be called a passive rebel.

The novel has also shown the failure of the existing government to save the rights of the Hindu minorities who are also the citizens of the country. The Bangladeshi government's siding with the Muslim fundamentalists is undemocratic, discriminatory and partial. It did not take any steps to save the Hindus from the inhumane treatment of the Muslims. Instead through media, it circulated the disinformation that there was no communal feeling; there was perfect communal harmony in the country. It shows how the truth is concealed and the minorities are marginalized and the majorities are favored to assume power and sustain the rule. As a result, the Hindus are helpless and compelled to leave their country. Their contribution to free Bangladesh for her betterment becomes negligible, which was really very shocking and a painful experience for Hindu patriots like Sudhamoy in the novel.

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