

Chapter 1

Religious Clash and Ill Treatment to Females

General Background

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* is a controversial novel. It is a story depicting a difficult relationship between religion, the state and the characters in the novel. All the female characters represent their social condition fully controlled by Islamic fundamentalists. The novel portrays the terrifying disintegration of families, living in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the riots that broke out to arrange the demolition of Babri Masjid. A lot of Hindu males were butchered and many families were raped and killed. Nasrin clearly draws the picture of the double victimized females, who got victimized by males in their own community and system. The main argument of the research is that religious fundamentalism causes chaos and social disintegration society as reflected in Nasrin's *Lajja*.

The work depicts the plight of a Hindu family in Dhaka, where all the female characters become victims of male bias and Muslim extremists. For example, Maya, during the time of riot moves to a Muslim friend's house in order to be safe, but later on, she is abducted by Muslim marauders and is then tortured mentally and physically. Through the case of Maya, Nasreen presents the plight of women at the time of wars and riots wherein they are double victimized- victims for belonging to the minority community and also victims of being women, and thus, a prey to crude savagery of communal forces. Not only Maya, all other women in the novel are also subject to male despotism in one way or the other. Kironmoyee, Maya's mother, is a helpless sufferer. She cries helplessly and nobody sympathizes with her plight. Praveena, Suranjan's beloved is married off without taking into consideration of her own will. Later on, she suffers because the marriage breaks off soon. She is a target of

rigid patriarchy and religious bigotry. Females are raped as they are taken as the weak in patriarchal society.

Lajja depicts the plight of a fictional Hindu family in Dhaka, in the wake of communal violence that erupted in the city after the destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists in Ayodhya of India in December 1992. In this riot of religious extremism, females were made scapegoat both by Hindus and Muslims. Suranjan's sister has been kidnapped by Muslim fanatics during the communal riots that spilled over from the Babri mosque, and Suranjan takes his revenge on a Muslim girl, who by her profession is prostitute. Later on, the family decides to leave Bangladesh for India. Indeed, either Muslim or Hindu, females are the victims of male chauvinism.

In patriarchal society a lot of rules and regulations have been formulated to control female activities very limited roles confined to domestic activities are assigned to women. These rules and regulations have come down from the remote part. The female characters in *Lajja*: Kironmoyee, Maya, and Shammima Begum are all compelled to behave as per the patriarchal norms, wherein Nasrin aims at highlighting the situation of women belonging to minority community of Hindus in Bangladesh, who had to go through a tough phase during the demolition of Babri Masjid in India. Women remain as mere object or property to men. Nasrin, on account of her personal experience of childhood sexual abuse and the deteriorating status of women in Bangladesh, contributes considerably to the feminist thought. In most of her writings, she gives evidences of her feminist leanings as she delineates situations pertaining to subjugation and marginalization of women by men who have patriarchal mindset. The double marginalization of women on religious grounds on the one hand and their gender identity on the other is another crucial aspect in the novel.

In Ayodhya of India, the Hindu devotees-cum-fundamentalists demolish the Babri Masjid, thereby evoking the Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh to Smash the Hindu temples: The Shiva Temple, the Dkakeshwori temple, the Jaikali temple, and the like and to loot the houses and shops of the Bangladeshi Hindus. When a mob of Muslim fundamentalists set fire to the temples, looted the houses and shops owned by the Hindus, thereby compelling the latter to leave their country. The state which is believed to be the guardian of its citizens, remains as the mute spectator. Even in the eye of religions, the men and women are not equal, i.e. the latter have to wear *burkhas*, and are deprived of the basic human rights which they have. This type of state's indifferent behaviour to its citizens and God's prejudiced views towards human being creates social disintegration in the society in Bangladesh.

The main objective of this thesis is to show how parochial mind-set and communal riots of religious fundamentalism unsettles the peaceful life, thereby causing identity clashes in Nasrin's novel *Lajja*. Women's double marginalization due to religious extremism, their compulsion to delve with social disintegration due to religious riot and bigotry are the outcomes of religious fundamentalism. Due to the Islamic fundamentalism and governments' indifference towards Hindu people who had been living there since their ancestral period are facing chaotic condition and social disintegration as they are deliberately become rape and killed in the hands of Muslim extremists.

Through her writing, Nasrin desires to awake 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. 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, which is purely a feminine emergence through which she wants to make women aware primarily Bangladesh secondarily whole female civilization.

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 will be a truly strong, independent and free person. On September 12, 1994 she gave an interview to the *New York Times*, in which she said:

Why shouldn't 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. (1)

It shows that she is determined to write about and improve women's miserable condition in Muslim societies without caring at all what misfortune may happen to her. Her comments about religion make people angry.

The main cause of social disintegration is religious fundamentalism. Nasrin says that Islam oppresses women and is against humanity. She criticizes verses in the *Koran* that treat women as property, slaves, and sexual objects. She comments in a magazine *View of Full Version*: "According to the *Koran*, woman's heaven is to be like our Mother Earth which man should irrigate in order to make her fertile" (1). So, she has determined to write against the *Koran* for the rights of women and humanity.

Due to the rising intolerance of the Islamic clergymen she has forced into exile in Sweden. In *View of Full Version* Abdul Malick remarks: “she has insulted our religion: she must die!” (1). Since then she has been suffering a lot from the Muslim fundamentalists. Her banishment from Bangladesh to Sweden is due to social detachment.

Literature Review

Lajja is a famous novel originally written in Bengali. The Indian word *Lajja* means shame in English. First published in Bengali language in 1993, the novel has been translated into several other languages. Nasrin has dedicated the book “to the people of the Indian subcontinent”, and has announced in 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. In “Editorial Review” 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” (I). So, for Ingraham this novel has more historical significance than literary value, because it has postulated the fragmentation of lives due to religious extremism.

Similarly, in Afterword, of *Lajja*, Tutul Gupta labels the novel as the allegation of religious extremism, inhumanity, bloodthirstiness, insanity and many other labels.

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. (3)

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

Memon has termed *Lajja* as the literary work which examines the difficult relationship between religion and politics, and others are of the opinion that it lacks the aesthetic quality. In her article, "Structured Silences of Women" Memon searches the reason behind ban of Nasrin's novel, *Lajja* and demands the free and untrammelled flow of information.

Menon, referring to Bangaladeshi women's rights organizations, states that the violence, crimes and atrocities against women, especially in the Muslim countries, accelerated in the early 90s as religious courts commenced to take the law into their own hands says that we, to understand *Lajja*, should examine the social and political context in which the ban on *Lajja* was imposed. She is of the opinion that the censorship in *Lajja* is biased/prejudiced because of the state involvement. In her own word, "Understanding the context of *Lajja* is particularly important where state censorship is concerned because it rarely occurs in the absence of political compulsions. This is true whether the individual concerned is male or female, but there are added implications for women" (78). These lines show the state's indifference towards its people's sufferings and agony. Due to the religious riot, people are suffering badly.

Another renowned critic Md. Mahmudul Hasan in "Free Speech, Ban and "Fatwa": A Study of Nasrin Affair" also deals with the issue of censorship vis-à-vis Nasrin's novel, *Lajja*. To Hasan, *Lajja* drew the widest international attention, and that was especially because of the involvement of the Indian establishment and media that sought to distract the world's concerns away from religious tension and

communal strife in India in the wake of the Babri Masjid's demolition in 1992. He says, "Taslima Nasrin affair in *Lajja* is sometimes used to reinforce the binary between Islam and free speech, and the writer represented as a wronged woman of Bangladeshi Islamic Patriarchy" (540). In their lines, Nasrin seems to be against Islamic Fundamentalism that is prevailed in Bangladesh during the contemporary era.

Similarly, another critic, Manmay Zafar in "Under the Gaze of the State: Policing Literature and the Case of Nasrin" says that Nasrin's novel, *Lajja*, endeavors to analyze the difficult relationship that persists between among-the religion and politics or state, minority and majority, women and men. He is of the opinion that Nasrin's *Lajja*, written under the gaze of the state defying the fundamentalists' fatwa demolishing her death, invites discussion on state censorship using religious sensibility as a marker of literary judgment. He says, "*Lajja* has brought the issue of literature and its uneasy negotiation with state politics to the forefront of national debate" (472).

Karen Offen questions the literary quality/aesthetic quality of Nasrin's *Lajja*. Offen says that it's, from the aesthetic point of view, not a novel, if at all it is a novel is a novel stripped of, what could be described as a sui genesis space. Offen, says that the success of a novel depends on how successfully the novelist constructs the story, the plot and how adept he or she is at characterization. He elucidates the lack of aesthetic quality in *Lajja* as follows:

In *Lajja*, the story, plot and the characters are secondary to the content that the writer wishes to impact. It's a result in 'Lajja' we find the characters who are contrived in order to convey through them the ideology of the author. Nasrin's characters speak like news presenters and her 'interior monolog' are well arranged catalogues. In softy and insufferable idealism of Suranjan and Sudhamoy is depicted in such a

way that they are not psychologically believable characters. Sudhamoy in particular to my mind, is a contrived figure that Nasrin eyes to pit what is ideally expected the materialization of (the secular principles that Sudhamoy embodies) and the actual political status 940 in Bangladeshi. (508)

The novel is a response of Nasrin to anti-Hindu riots, which erupted in parts of Bangladesh, soon after the demolition of Babri Masjid in India on 6 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.

Nasrin's allergy to fundamentalism and communalism clearly finds its expressions in the Preface to *Lajja*:

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. (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 oriented to these four characters. On 6 December 1992, the demolition of Masjid in India 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. Suranjan, their son cares very little to adjoin 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.

Nasrin writes in preface:

In September that year 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 her job to continue her battle against religious persecution, genocide and communalism. (ix)

Lajja has carried out the behaviour of the Muslim fundamentalists, where they do not have any sense of judgment. Nasrin further writes in the 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. (ix-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 Nasrin, the religious scriptures are out of the 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. The government, instead of taking action against the fundamentalists, turns against her. A case has been filed by the government charging that she hurt people's religious feelings, and a non-bailable arrest warrant has been issued. Deeming prison to be an extremely unsafe place, Nasrin went into hiding. Salman Rushdie, in his open letter to Taslima writes in *New York Times*:

As you know, Taslima, Bengali culture-and I mean the culture of Bangladesh as well as 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 intelligence, the imagination and the word that your opponents are trying to loot. (1)

This is the view of Salman Rushdie who underwent almost similar type of plight like

Nasrin. He strongly reacts against the government's siding with the religious extremists and its disgraceful decision.

The majority who were not fundamentalists remained silent. Regardless, some anti-fundamentalist political groups do protest against the fundamentalist uprising but do not defend Taslima as a writer and a fellow human being who has the freedom to express her views.

Saving Nasrin's face and supporting her views, Salman Rushdie remarks:

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. (4)

Thus, Rushdie considers Nasrin'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 have come to Nasrin's support. News of her plight becomes known throughout the world. Some western democratic governments that endorse human rights and freedom of expression try saving her life. After long miserable days in hiding, she has finally granted bail but also forces to leave her country. Swedish officials welcome Ms. Nasrin, whose plight has drawn comparisons to Salman Rushdie's years in seclusion. Culture Minister Birgit Friggebo says, "The author was forced to leave her country for using her natural rights to write and say whatever she wants" (*NYT* - 3). Thus, he has sympathized Nasrin for her plight.

Wherever Nasrin lives, she fights for human rights and women's rights. In 1998, without the government's permission she risks a return to be with her ailing

mother, a mob of fundamentalists demand her murder. She writes in *Ferra*: “When her mother – a religious Muslim – died, nobody can form any mosque to lead her funeral, her crime being that she was the mother of an infidel (11)”. A cause again has been filed against her on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people. After a few weeks of staying, Nasrin has forced to leave her country once more. She is desperate to see her father when he becomes ill but the government does not let her go to Bangladesh. Her passport has not been renewed; her rights as a citizen have constantly been violated by the government authority.

The numerous prestigious awards she has received in western countries have resulted in increased international attention to her struggle for women’s right 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, in *View of Full Version*, 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” (Milick 1). 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.

The academic significance of this research work will be evident in its focus on patriotism with the patriotic feeling of the devoted people who love their nation more than their family members. The research moves around the character, Sudhmoy who seems to be a true patriotic at the beginning and middle part of the novel but at last he loses his faith upon his motherland and is ready to leave. Such activities raise the questions; could hollow idealism become a true patriotism? Are family members

become more important than their motherland? But here in the novel, Nasrin carries out the fact that the hollow idealism never represents the true patriotism.

This research will mainly be based on textual analysis on *Lajja*. To justify extensive studies on the literature of text and the critical perspective libraries will be consulted for the very purpose. After observing the criticism mentioned, the proposed thesis redraws the religion, from the feminist perspective, in Nasrin's controversial novel, *Lajja*.

In Ayodhya of India, the Hindu fundamentalists demolish the age long Babri Masjid, and in relation, the Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh set fire to the temples compelling the Hindus, who are in minority, to leave their country. In both countries-India and Bangladesh-the crimes are state sponsored. It is because the states are run by the fundamentalist religious doctrines rather than the political principles or ideologies. This project claims that state should be run by the humanitarian political ideologies or principles if we have to live in the peaceful society where there is no discrimination in the name of Muslims and Hindus, minority and majority, man and woman, and the like.

Organization of the Study

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part, providing background for the study. This chapter includes general background, problem statement, objectives, literature review, and the organization of the study. The second chapter deals with the theory applied to analyze the text. It is feminism that has been brought into application for analysis. The chapter also includes the detailed textual analysis of the work *Lajja*. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2

Social Disintegration and Women Suppression in Nasrin's *Lajja*

The present study is an attempt made to analyze marginalization of women along with that of the religious minority as depicted in *Lajja*. Evidently a protest novel, Nasrin situates it in the context of religious fanaticism that reared its ugly head in Bangladesh in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid in India in 1992. Nevertheless, the novel also exhibits immense potential to be studied from a feminist perspective. The representation of the female characters, their treatment at the hands of Muslim male fundamentalists as well as Hindu males at the level of family, society or religion/ nation, and the fate they eventually meet are some points of discussion which make the text worth feminist analyses. The feminist thrust of Nasrin in view of the issues pertaining to women, the problems faced by the marginalized Hindus in Bangladesh, and the notions of nation and religion have been intricately woven together in *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. It has been taken in whole 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 females by the Religious fundamentalists. "The conventional perception of gender roles in a socio-cultural setup cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive beings thereby casting women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive (Beauvoir 59). Therefore, women are expected to fit themselves in this frame, wherein every sense they are inferior to men and lose their personal identity. Thus, women remain as mere object or property to men. Nasrin, on account of her

personal experience of childhood sexual abuse and the deteriorating status of women in Bangladesh, contributes considerably to the feminist thought. In most of her writings, Nasrin gives evidences of her feminist leanings as she delineates situations pertaining to subjugation and marginalization of women by men who have patriarchal mindset.

Feminism is a social theory based on the advocacy of equal rights, freedom for females to the level the males are enjoying. It is an attempt to rupture the traditional patriarchal system and its assumptions. It is evident that females have been dominated unjustly by males for centuries. They were confined to households, restricted to take part in any social activities. They were taken as the objects of property of males. With the advent of new technology and ideology, this domination upon females found the first attempt for its outlet in the early 20th century. Through different waves, the movement has enabled females to be emancipated to a great extent today.

Connecting the narrative of Nasrin's *Lajja* that focuses on how women in Islamic culture are victimized and more pushed to the margin in respect of almost all areas of life, many noble ideals have been used by oppressors for justifying immoral deeds. Asma Barlas in *Believing Women in Islam* quotes a few lines from her reading to the holy Quran and thus states, "Sexual inequality and discrimination are a function merely of misogynistic readings of Islam, or that one can explain the status of Muslim women solely in terms of the Qur'an and/or other Islamic sources all too often taken out of context" (21). She tries to portray the picture of women in Islam by stating that women in Islam are not unequal. Rather the prejudiced reading makes this kind of understanding that women are oppressed and exploited.

Furthermore, she blames the readers and their contexts in which they read the holy scriptures and thus color their interpretations to the holy Quran, "even though

Muslim women directly experience the consequences of oppressive misreadings of religious texts, few question their legitimacy and fewer still have explored the liberatory aspects of the Qur'ān's teachings" (22).

The teachings of the holy Quran are pious and are targeted to enlightening the humankind, but the perceivers misread and consequently convey the wrong comprehension. In the same way Barlas shows the difficulty that she has encountered:

Another difficulty with claiming that the Qur'ān is egalitarian and anti-patriarchal is that some of its teachings, especially those dealing with polygyny and "wife beating," suggest otherwise, as does the fact that the Qur'ān recognizes men as the locus of power and authority in actually existing patriarchies. However, recognizing the existence of a patriarchy, or addressing one, is not the same as advocating it. (25)

Barlas hereby highlights the claims made regarding the holy Quran and its understanding. Thus she says that there is a difference between recognizing something and advocating the same.

Whatever problems Barlas observes in the interpretations of the Quran are problematic themselves. Therefore, the women in Islam as they are mentioned in the Quran and as they are treated in the Islamic society are different. She furthers the discussion on the reading to the Quran and thus says:

Muslims read patriarchy and sexual inequality into the Qur'ān on the basis both of specific verses (Āyāt, s. Āyah) and of the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men with regard to such issues as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. From these, they infer that men and women are not only biologically different but also unequal, and are opposites, a view mirrored in the claim that in Islam the masculine and

the feminine principles also are strictly separated. (26)

This is the unbiased observation that she has got concerning the genuine plight of women in Islam. Indeed women are treated unequal to men in the Islamic life. The gender issue counts much in respect of men and women relationship. In order to understand patriarchal readings of the Quran, we need to study the relationship not only between interpretation and history, but also between the content of knowledge and the methods by which it is generated.

Feminism is a doctrine related on image and ideas advocating women's rights for the equality of the sexes, identity and freedom. Feminism tries to redefine women's activities and goals from a woman centered point of view and refuses to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object, a second sex or a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression inequalities and injustices; women suffer because of their sex and defend equal rights for women in political, economic, social, psychological, personal and aesthetic sense. It aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Although rooted in Islam, the movement's pioneers have also utilized secular, Western, or otherwise non-Muslim feminist discourses, and have recognized the role of Islamic feminism as part of an integrated global feminist movement.

Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the religion, and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur'an, hadith (sayings of Muhammad) and sharia (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society.

At a time of change and upheaval within the Muslim world, women are

increasingly articulating a vision of the future that includes gender equality and social justice alongside their faith. The future of the Islamic state will depend on leaders' ability to incorporate human rights into an Islamic framework. Islamic feminism has an important role to play in this process. Ziba Mir-Hosseini says, "Political Islam, if it is going to have a future, has to democratize. A large part of this process involves taking into account the rise of women and minorities. This process is unfolding differently in each country because of different political structures and social conditions, but it is happening" (9). A prevailing argument among many groups, including feminists, academics and the press, insists that legal systems in the Middle East codify gender inequalities in accordance with the precepts of Islam. Islamic law is threaded throughout many justice systems and constitutions in the Middle East, as these legal codes and constitutional laws often mesh a civil law of the European model with Shari'a principles.

Inarguably, many of these legal systems fall short of internationally recognized safeguards against the discrimination of women, as outlined by the UN and other organizations advancing human rights through international legal frameworks. Ziba Mir Hosseini, one of the foremost Islamic feminist scholars, explains:

Feminist scholarship in Islam as in any other religious tradition has a lot to offer to both the understanding of religion and the search for justice. Women advocating Islamic feminism assert that Shari'a principles like qiwama could have several different interpretations, yet throughout history male elites have used and interpreted the law in a perversion of justice for their own ends. (13)

However, another prominent Islamic feminist scholar, Leila Ahmed, explains that

“feminists of whatever religion or religious background have always fiercely debated the key sources of women's oppression. Is it patriarchy, religion, racism, imperialism, or class oppression, or some very lethal and toxic mix of all of these?” (2). Feminists have also thus differed on the solutions, as well as exactly whom we must fight first to liberate women.

At first, feminism concentrates on the equal rights which began late in the 18th century with Marry Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792). Which well deserves its rank as the first great feminist work. Wollstonecraft emphasizes on the importance of equal education and attacks the sentimental novels of her time for their pernicious influences on women's intellectual development.

Islamic feminism begins with the advocacy for the protection and establishment of women's fundamental rights in the culture dominated by the men in Islam. Feminists especially women feminists in the Islamic culture initiated the movement for the rights of women in Islam since the people of their kind were exploited and oppressed because of their sex. Thus as feminists battle for the rights of a vast portion of the population, it is no wonder their strategies and reasoning are complex and sometimes at odds. Perhaps the rights of women are best dignified by appreciating women's separate beliefs and respecting their prerogative to pursue their interests and fight discrimination in a way that they feel is truly representative of their identity.

Thus, Islam highly respects the dimension of humanity. The presence of Islam as a moral source can be observed in its achievement in transforming pre-Islamic Arabic nomads into civilized communities with values and morality. With the presence of Islam, these communities, being used to living in open deserts and highly susceptible to inter-tribal wars and conflicts, achieved success becoming sensitized to

elevated values and morality. Inter-tribal wars and conflict occurred because of their lack of values and morality, which terminated after Islam spread its teachings. The Koran, Muslims' holy book and reference, has manifested itself in a language laden with aesthetics, which has the power to influence the nomads' emotions and awareness in shaping society's humanitarian vision.

When Nasrin's *Lajja* is read in the similar line, it becomes clear that female characters are typical character who faces the male domination stands a historical figures to reflect the cultural and social differences between men and women in Islamic society in Bangladesh.

Nasrin writes that the intent of *Lajja* is to expose the corruption in Islamic Bengali society, not denigrate Islam. On the one hand, Islam has given women more inalienable rights than any other religion ever has. On the other hand, the practitioners of Islam in many societies have successfully managed to distort the practices of the religion to suit their own needs. In many cases, this means delegating women to their homes.

The current chapter deals with the primary issue by bringing about the critics' readings to the texts under the rubric of the women in Islam society in the communal riot in Bangladesh. The argument has also been supported by evidence from the novel and the critics' views and perspectives. Similarly, the second chapter will be the textual analysis that does incorporate the theoretical support. First the argument will be discussed and then it will be justified with the textual and theoretical supports from the novel and the feminists' readings and views. Finally the concluding chapter will entail an analytical summary of the entire research paper. At last works cited that maintains the acknowledgement of those writers and critics whose readings and views are cited in the course of the research.

Nasrin exemplifies the woman who breaks the patriarchal code, and is thus maltreated. Nasrin writes in “Dissident Women’s Voices Coming out of Islam” as: In 1993, a fundamentalist organization called Soldiers of Islam issued fatwa against her. Rather than supporting her, the government sided with the fundamentalists and confiscated her passport, asked her to cease writing and banned her book *Lajja* (*Shame*) in which she depicted atrocities committed by Muslim fundamentalists against Hindus. (42)

Lajja deals with several feminist issues. In fact, Nasrin demonstrates the ways how patriarchal mindset challenges the female's identity and created a social disintegration. Quigley regarding the issue of *Lajja* states Nasrin as feminist one. Nasrin "has written is for the oppressed women of Bangladesh. . .she has wrung her heart out into her words” (24). One of the most important feminist issues that has been dealt with in the novel is the treatment of women at the hands of various patriarchal institutions like family, society and state, headed by a patriarch who either looks down upon women or marginalizes them.

Lajja is the controversial and the most burning book as it deals with the sense communalism that was happened in Bangladesh. It is a brutal indictment of extremism and man’s inhumanity to man. The novel reveals the height of man’s insensitiveness to man in the name of religion. Nasrin incorporating the facts wrote the novel *Lajja* which came out in February 1993 in Bangladesh and within a short time it sold more than 60,000 copies before it was banned by the Bangladesh government five months later, with the reason that it was disturbing the communal harmony. Extremists were marching on the streets of Dhaka clamouring for the life of Nasrin. But she was not ready to take back her stand. She writes in the preface of the

novel, "But none of these things have shaken my determination to continue the battle against religious persecution, genocide and communalism" (ix). The issue is incorporated in the novel *Lajja* is duely responsible for social disintegration. The writer of the novel herself is compelled to leave her country as Islamic fundamentalists declared her death penalty as she wrote the novel. After the incident, result 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. The government has been standing with the Muslim fundamentalists and bans the ground of Bangladesh.

Nasreen is not in favour of religious fundamentalism, because it creates a social disintegration. She gives the reason for writing *Lajja* by pointing out that she hates religious fundamentalism and communalism:

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 Hindus in my country were hunted by the Muslims after the destruction of 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 all of us, and we all are to blame. *Lajja* is a document of our collective defeat. (ix)

She has been 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 quotes her as urging a revision of the Koran, the Islamic holy book. Extremist groups have been offered \$50,000 reward for her death. She has also been charged by a Bangladeshi court with offending the religious sentiments of the Muslims, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of two years in prison.

In *New York Times* an associated press writer reports, "Abdul Kadar Mollan, spokesmen for Bangladesh's leading Fundamentalist party told that the government will have to pay a very heavy price for letting Ms. Nasrin go out of the country" (5). His statement shows that Islamic fundamentalism is deterred consequently social disintegration has created where women suffering, pain and agony is there.

The Muslim fundamentalists have been get power from the majority of the Muslim people and from the backup of the government spreading favorable discourse in politics, law, court, religion, media and continue their brutal treatment upon the minority of the Hindu community. There has been no sympathy for the innocent marginalize Hindu community. Their contribution to Bangladesh has also not negligible as they have also fought at the cost of their life to liberate Bangladesh from Pakistan. How much rights the Muslim have to live in their country than the minority Hindus family also but religious extremism has created social disintegration which is not good for the betterment of social harmony.

But the contemporary socio historical reality has so much adverse for the Hindus that they do not find any alternative except silently leaving their country. But in the novel quite contrarily Sudhamoy, the head of a small Hindu family does not pursue other Hindu's path. He loves his country very much and he has a strong belief, 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 was demolished, 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 and their deeds of Islamic fundamentalism. The female characters either they Muslim or Hindu in *Lajja*: Kironmoyee, Maya, and Shammima Begum are all compelled to behave as per the patriarchal norms, wherein Nasrin aims at highlighting the situation of women belonging to minority community of Hindus in Bangladesh, who had to go through a tough phase during the demolition of Babri Masjid in India. The double marginalization of women on religious grounds on the one hand and their gender identity on the other is another crucial aspect in the novel.

There are multiple facets in the novel *Lajja* that Nasrin wants to show how women are dominated in Islamic society in Bangladesh. Nasrin, herself being a female writer is suffering from time immemorial in the hand of Islamic fundamentalists. Her banishment from her own country, price of 50 thousands rupees on her death also signifies the social disintegration and irresponsibility of the state on her. One of the most important feminist issues that has been dealt with in the novel is the treatment of women at the hands of various patriarchal institutions like family, society and state, headed by a patriarch who either looks down upon women or marginalizes them which Simon de Beauvoir postulates in her work *The Second Sex*, a seminal work which questions the whole position and roles of women in the society.

She further opines, "Feminism and feminist literary criticism are often defined as a matter of what is absent rather than what is present. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture reflected in or challenged by literary text" (196). Patriarchal ideology pervades those writings, which have been considered great literature. As insisted by Beauvoir, female characters are dominated and given marginal and subordinate roles, represented as a complementary in opposition to masculine desires.

Nasrin's *Lajja*, although it has been written as a fiction, in fact, seems to believe that art is for life's sake. The story incorporated in *Lajja* is not fantasy or romantic story to entertain an idle reader but it emerges human beings to fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. She is with the victim and marginalized and against irrational authority; it does not matter whether this authority is religious, social or patriarchal. Nasrin direct or indirectly deal with the themes related with fundamentalism, communalism, bigotry and racism. "Fake sense of religiosity and fanaticism assume the qualities of negativity and acts as an agent of corruption not only for the individual's soul but also for the whole society" (Wadud, 22). Amina Wadud writes the situation in women in Islamic society. Actually in Islamic society women are treated as commodity, they are taken as marketable object, which can be bought and sell or forcefully snatch in order to fulfill the lust of religious bigotry.

As insisted Wadud, there are so many rendering incidents incorporated in the novel *Lajja*. Nasrin denounces treatment of women as objects of lust, physical and psychological violence. Nasrin does the same with tremendous vehemence as she depicts in *Lajja* how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to varied kinds of torture that may even result in their deaths. The novelist demonstrates how the abduction of Hindu girls has been common in Bangladesh and how the hooligans

do not have any kind of fear. Whenever they wished, they would abduct a woman and rape her brutally. That was the reason that most of the Hindus sent their daughters to India for their education and security. To quote an instance from the novel:

Manju Rani Seal, a student in the ninth standard... was abducted at 8 p.m., on the evening of 4 December 1988 by Abdur Rahim and his goons. A case was registered the next day at the Laksam police station by her distraught family. There is no trace of Manju Rani. Her abductors threatened Premanand Seal and his family but the police took no action when informed. Hindu families in the area are now terrified of sending their daughters to school . . . In Parkumira village of Tala subdistrict in Satkhira, Rabindranath Ghosh's young daughter, Chhanda, a third standard student. . . her School teacher abducted her with the help of some young hooligans. They took the terrified little girl to garden nearby and raped her... a case was filed . . . no one was arrested. (48-49)

Thus, the females as portrayed in the novel are nothing more than objects to be used by the male predators to satiate their lust. In an attempt to retaliate the Babri Masjid demolition in India, women's bodies are defiled and desecrated as they become extensions of the geo-political entity called India for religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh.

Female characters are given marginal and subordinate roles, represented as complementary in opposition to masculine desires. Regarding the subordination of female in Bangladesh as described in the novel by Nasrin, Chris Beasley is worthy to quote here:

The field of feminism attends to or includes: a critique of

misogyny sexual hierarchy; a focus on consideration of women as the subject of the analysis; an expanded account of the altered orientation to what may be discussed within analysis of social and political life-compared with traditional thought; diverse perspective, manifestly represented by certain form of debate. (27)

In these lines, Chris shows the unequal social and political life of women in the society.

Hitherto existing society in Bangladesh is male dominated society where female are taken as second class citizen, where women are compelled to tolerate whatever male members of the society do. As critics insist, Maya is time and again abducted by Islamic fundamentalists from their parents house but they can do nothing.

Lajja, depicts certain men ravishing young Hindu girls for their pleasure and vilifying concerned Hindu families. The abduction of Maya as a child of six illustrates the same. This incident terribly traumatizes the girl and has such a negative effect on the psyche of the girl child that she is not able to behave normally for two months. She would sleep fitfully and would wake up abruptly in the middle of the night.

The family is never safe thereafter as they keep receiving threats through anonymous extortion letters that aimed at kidnapping Maya again. However, when Maya grew up as a young girl of 19, the ominous day of 11th December 1992 came. A group of seven hooligans entered the house of Sudhamoy who had recently suffered paralysis, and began to break the goods of the house. They were all about twenty-one years old. Two of them wore caps, pajamas and Kurtas. Sudhamoy and Kiranmoye tried their best but they could do nothing against seven

hooligans who very quickly took Maya away. Maya was crying for help but nobody came forward to help her because she was a Hindu girl and the abductors were Muslims. She only screamed to her mother for help saying: “‘Ma . . . please help me, Ma . . .’ She fought with her captors as she was dragged away, looking back in pain and terror, hoping against hope that her mother would be able to save her” (*Lajja* 148). This inhuman incident shattered all the hopes and dreams of Sudhamoy’s family.

Being communists, the family did not believe in any religion whether Hindu or Muslim and humanity was the only religion for them. As a result of it, they decide to leave for India with their heavy heart which is extremism of suffering social disintegration in the name of religious fundamentalism.

Brother of Maya, Suranjan takes no rest in search of his sister, but despite his best efforts, he could not find Maya. He felt helpless as he could not find any assistance to locate his sister. The legal system also turned a blind eye on the family as they were Hindus. The wails and shrieks of the young girl Maya went in vain as there was none who could come forward and help the family in finding her and taking action against the predators who abducted her. Maya is innocent neither has she harmed Muslim nor benefitted Indian Hindus, but being a woman she is suffering due to Islamic fundamentalism and patriarchal mindset of abductor. At this juncture, the cause of Maya’s abduction is worth analyzing as it is a Muslim nation retaliating against the Babri Masjid demolition via raping vulnerable woman of Hindu origin, who is being perceived as an extension of India, or those who demolished Babri mosque.

There have been instances of such sexual and physical violence against women in the history of the world. The partition of 1947 being one of them as

women had to bear the brunt of the political blunder as they were abducted, tortured, raped and killed brutally.

In fact, Nasrin too, as a feminist writer condemns violence against women. Out of sheer pain of helplessness, misery and frustration, Suranjan began to drink wine and abuse Muslims. Time and again he was haunted by the pain of losing his innocent sister, Maya. Certain questions like what the abductors must be doing with Maya; whether they may have tied up her legs and then raped her one by one; how she must be tolerating the pain; whether she would be living or dead etc. kept haunting and traumatizing him. He felt a strong desire to avenge the honor of his sister and was filled with anger and hatred for the Muslims. He, like the hooligans, wanted to kill the Muslims and abduct their daughters for taking revenge.

It was the eleventh day of riot in Bangladesh, i.e. 16th December, and people were celebrating the victory. Suranjan kept abusing the system and his own incapability to retaliate. He even thought of committing suicide but thought that it would be so cowardly an act. He eventually came up with a remedy as he thought something else. He took a rickshaw and went to Bar council where he met a whore named Shamima, the daughter of Abdul Jalil.

For Suranjan, however, Shamima was not a whore but a girl belonging to majority community. The rape was what occupied his mind as a revenge against the loss of his sister's honor. He only longed to rape one of the Muslim women out of sheer revenge for what they had done to his sister. As he got the opportunity he too behaves brutally like Maya's rapists. To quote from the text:

He turned off the lights in the room. He threw the girl on the floor and stripped her of all her clothes. Suranjan took quick, deep

breaths, as he dug his nails into the girl's flesh. He bit her breasts, one part of his mind understanding that what he was doing was certainly not love. Relentlessly 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 moaned with pain, screaming occasionally, 'O my God! I am dying of pain....' Suranjan laughed with savage satisfaction." (200-01)

Thus, one may observe how revengefulness virtually annihilates humaneness which affects women most adversely. Suranjan reduces the Muslim girl to mere object of sexual desire with a view to avenge his sister's rape by the Muslims. Double marginalization of women of being women and religious bigotry which is obviously a heart rendering and social disintegration as either Hindu or Islamic males they are guided by their religious extremism and revenge where innocent girls either they are Muslim or Hindu becoming escape goat.

When societal institutions like religion, state, family and society that should provide conducive and safe environment for people in general and women in particular irrespective of their religious backgrounds turn against them, the situation becomes rather abysmal. What Suranjan did is as much condemnable from a feminist perspective as Maya's abduction as in both the cases, it is the woman who is demeaned and abused physically as well as psychologically. Whether it is the persecution of the Hindus by Muslims, abduction of Maya or Suranjan's sexual violence with the Muslim girl, all of them fall in the category of inhumanness and violence.

Viewing woman as good or bad is another instance of patriarchal mindset. Using words such as 'slut' to reduce her being is a common practice if she has

multiple sexual partners but in case of man the term that is used if he has sexual relations with more female partners is 'stud.' Moreover, "good girl" and "bad girl" syndrome subsists even today which reduces women and thus denies them human space. Tyson regarding the patriarchal ideology opines: "According to a patriarchal ideology in full force through the 1950s, versions of which are still with us today, 'bad girls' violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way. The good girl is rewarded for her behavior by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture" (90). Louis means, good and bad are social construct attributed to the females in order to exploit women. In each and every patriarchal society, male members have created certain types of codes and conducts that they forcefully attribute to women in order to make them subservient and docile.

In *Lajja* too, this aspect of good and bad regarding males and females comes to light as there are women framed as good or bad by the patriarchal setup. One who happily accepts patriarchal norms and adapts in accordance with its demands is labeled as 'good' as in case of Kironmoyee. At every step in the novel, she is portrayed as an ideal wife who serves the family and makes all possible sacrifices to keep the family going. As discussed above, another female character namely Shamima Begum is violating/ transgressing the patriarchal code. She is, in fact, viewed as a bad or fallen girl. Islam mandates purity, and virginity as virtues. Likewise in certain folk cultures too obsession with virginity is idealized.

Regarding the tradition in Bangladeshi culture Alma writes:

In folk culture, tales, stories, and fables, mostly in the oral tradition, always romanticize the physical purity of the female body. Numerous tales of heroic women killing themselves rather

than succumbing to sexual assault are very much a part of Bangladeshi folk culture. Thus, when a girl attain puberty, her parents immediately begin to suffer from a social anxiety about how to save their daughter's purity so that she can be regarded as a marriageable 'good girl.' This can be ensured by marrying daughters off as soon as possible. (436)

The vindictive attitude of men, where they tend to ravish women on the basis of the latter's religious background, and then reducing them by terming them as 'good' or 'bad' according to their suitability gets reflected in the novel. The society depicted in *Lajja*, is deeply patriarchal. Here, discrimination on the basis of sex or one's gender identity is a norm. To discriminate, it is necessary to first 'otherwise' women. Simone de Beauvoir primarily focuses on Sartrean notion of existentialism: "existence precedes the essence" (43). Beauvoir raises this issue regarding woman who has been essentialized in the society with certain stereotypes like woman as a flesh, related to nature, vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. Several essentialist thinkers believe that the woman is doomed to eminence but has passivity to bestow peace and harmony. Beauvoir's central attack is on the attitude of the scholars and writers towards women's position.

Nasrin being a female is victim herself on the hand of Islamic patriarchal society. For, Nasrin's own life narrative stands as an evidence to prove how woman is discriminated against and how attempts are made to gag her voice by those who cannot see women articulating their thoughts and resisting injustice done to them by those who are stuck with patriarchal mindset. Nasrin powerfully makes her point in one of her interviews that she herself is victim of Islamic

patriarchal mindset. Meve Quigley in her article “The Fatwa’s in the Fire” writes:

They issue Fatwa to try to stop people speaking against them?
They can kill anyone in the name of God. They want to kill me, they demand my death only for the reason that I am alone, I am afraid, so I must be afraid of them and stop my writing. If I stop my writing, women will lose conscience because the fundamentalists like to oppress women to show their power. So they are not used to seeing that women can protest and are surprised if they do. They want to keep them down. So I think for women, protesting is more dangerous.” (25)

It is not easy to protest in a country like Bangladesh simply because it may provoke the rage of the mullahs representing a closed, patriarchal mindset.

At one point in time, even Nasrin was proud of her beautiful country Bangladesh and felt privileged on account of its rich heritage and culture. However, she eventually became victim of the vindictiveness of the Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh who deprived her of nationality by issuing fatwa against her and banished her from her own country simply because she exposed the “Islamic republic of Bangladesh” which Bangladesh actually has become on account of religion-centricity, rather than its pseudo-official counterpart “People’s Republic of Bangladesh” (*Lajja* 207) recorded in the National annals as a camouflage.

Towards the end of the novel, however, Maya is killed and the Hindu Dutta family eventually decides to move to India—a decision that has the narrative of pain, humiliation, insecurity, fear, and mindless killings embedded in it.

The novel exposes the mindless bloodthirstiness of fundamentalism and brilliantly captures the insanity of violence upon women in Bangladesh. *Lajja* is a savage indictment of religious extremism and man's inhumanity to man. Datta Sudhamoy, Kironmoyee, and their two children, Suranjan and Maya have lived in Bangladesh all their lives. Despite being part of the country's small Hindu community that is terrorized at every opportunity by Muslim fundamentalists they refuse to leave their country, as most of their friends and relatives have done.

As the steam trains pulled out from Mymensingh on their way to Phulbaria, the guard's whistle would invariably be accompanied by the heartbroken wails of people leaving the only country they knew. As their neighbours left, they would call out to Sudhamoy's father: 'Sukumar, come, let us go away. This is the homeland of the Muslims. (6)

Religious extremism is solely responsible for the wails of people that they are leaving their motherland forever. In these lines, it is clearly seen the cries of people as they are going away from their motherland.

Social disintegration due to fatwa has created a unspeakable pain and agonies in the heart of the people, but Sudhamoy, an atheist, believes with a naive mix of optimism and idealism that his motherland will not let him down, but later his prediction comes out as false one, and he including his family face tragic condition. The world condemns the incident, but its fallout is felt most acutely in Bangladesh, where Muslim mobs begin to seek out and attack the Hindus. The nightmare inevitably arrives at the Duttas doorstep and their world begins to fall apart. They abduct female member and forcefully use them as sex object which create psychological as well as physical wound in the mind of women.

Gilbert and Gubar regarding the female suffering and pain they opine:

Women suffer from mental illness because of the patriarchal socialization since they are likely to experience their education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness as in some sense sickening. Those early female writers undertook a terribly difficult path to overcome the 'anxiety of authorship', to repudiate the patriarchal prescriptions and to recover and remember the lost foremothers who could help them find their distinctive female power. (1242)

Women are suffering from patriarchal social norms and values. Patriarchal social system has created a kind of vehemence where the whole female civilization is compelled to root out.

In the war time in Bangladesh, females are double marginalized. Women have no agency; their agency has been taken as male members of the society. Regarding the incident of Sudhamoy, who is a male member of the Hindu family. No matter how he is suffering from the threat given by Islamic mob, he is living in the verge of life and death, but at the same time, his wife Kironmoyee is being twice victimized. In the tension of bloodshed and riot burst in the street, he is sitting in the Varanda on Charpai and taking rest but his wife is compelled to cook and feed him. On the one hand she is suffering from Islamic fundamentalist and on the other hand, she has to play subservient role in her family.

The following lines in the novel *Lajja* further shows the sub-ordination of the female as depicted in the novel:

Kironmoyee was in the kitchen cooking rice and dal. She would also have to make some soup and fruit juice for Sudhamoy but who was to fetch the fruit? She wondered resentfully how her son could lie in bed

all day when it was evident that he was required to help. Maya was upset with her brother for another reason as well. She had begged and pleaded with him on the 7th to find them all a refuge, but Suranjan had not lifted a finger to help. (99)

Above lines shows the double marginalization of the female character in the novel.

During the time of chaotic condition due to religious extremism they are facing mental problem. Male members of the family are taking rest on their bed but they are not ready to assist women because they think that women are due to serve them.

There is unequal relationship between family members which can be seen in the novel as shows by Nasrin.

Women's patience in the novel is praise worthy. Kironmoyee has to play a subservient role in the family, she has to take care after his husband, son and daughter too. She is gentle, polite and understanding. Issues like chaotic environment, physical sufferings, and extreme hunger, are supposed to be warmly accepted and humbly enacted by her in order to keep the family intact. "Kironmoyee did not eat herself, but kept Maya's share of food for her" (*Lajja* 100). A woman's desires carry no significance when it comes to her family; she is expected to make every sacrifice to keep the pot boiling. Likewise, in case of Kironmoyee:

After all that the responsibility of keeping abide by the family afloat through all the crises that visited it had developed upon her. She did not make a fuss. Her latest sacrifice involved selling a pair of her gold bangles to Dr. Haripada's wife. Afterall, gold was not so precious that it could not be sold if the need arose. At the moment, Sudhamoy's treatment and speedy recovery was the prime concern. (*Lajja* 113)

Kironmoyee is ready to detest the problem. Throughout the beginning of her life as

depicted in the novel, she has not rest in her personal life. She has born for others help and servant.

For extreme hunger, she could not meet any food, but she sacrifices her desire and hunger for other family members, which comes under the patriarchal designation. Patriarchy has taught her to be subservient role as Simon de Beauvoir insist in her book *The Second Sex* as:

One of the problems arising from societies based on agnation is the fate of inheritance in the absence of any male descendants. The Greeks had instituted the custom of epiklerate: the female heir had to marry her oldest relative in the paternal family (genos); thus the property her father bequeathed to her would be transmitted to children belonging to the same group, and the estate remained the property of the paternal genos; the epikleros was not a female heir but only a machine to procreate a male heir; this custom placed her entirely at man's mercy as she was automatically handed over to the firstborn of her family's men, who most often turned out to be an old man. (123)

In these lines, Beauvoir insist that women's suppression is due to patriarchal society which has decended from ancient time from Greek civilization.

Women, from human civilization, are taught to be subservient. As insisted by Beauvoir in the novel too, Kiranomoe's desires to move to India to her relatives at the perilous hour remained unattended. All she could do was secretly shed tears and behave submissively, which is referential of the patriarchal setup, where the family is led by a male member, who is supposed to be all powerful and centralized. Such that, the female member, however, is tyrannized and is expected to behave according to an established patriarchal norm.

Furthermore, the assumption that a woman has no identity of her own and is

dependent on the men around her, be it her father, brother, husband or son. This theme has been amply exemplified in the novel; Sudhamoye, for instance, praises his wife Kironmoyee and daughter Maya by telling Maya: “You feed me, your mother massages my body, presses my temples . . . Will I get so much of love and care once I am well?” (146). The patriarchal norms and values do not let women fulfill their aspirations, as for Kironmoyee, she has to repress her deep inner cravings which would eventually turn into virtual deprivation and thus become way of life; it is at the cost of the family that a woman is conditioned to subdue her desires and fit into the socio-cultural framework. Hence, *Lajja* shows the lack of female agency in the novel as well.

Chapter 3

Female Suppression of its Consequences in *Lajja*

Nasrin through *Lajja* exemplifies the issue of gendered self-representation and feminist concerns. She incorporates her experiences to make new, empowering image for women. Instead of limiting the lives of women to one ideal, she pushes the ideal towards the full expression of each woman's potential. She does not give the *satisavitri* image of a woman. Rather, she presents her female characters as disobedient and fearless as she is. She strikes hard against stern patriarchy and male chauvinism. Speaking out about women's rights, Nasreen maintains that she criticizes culture and tradition in order to give strength and courage to those who felt they could not speak up. In fact, Nasreen has broken the structured silence prevailing in the Bangladeshi society as far as women's rights are concerned. Through her novels, Nasreen opines that all men are same. Male, either they are from Islamic or Hindu they exploit women physically, economically and politically.

Nasrin through *Lajja* reveals the destructive impact of religious fundamentalism providing example of 1992 Babri Masjid demolition and the ensuing riots. There was internally creeping antagonism between Hindus and Muslims for centuries. But this incident carried that antagonism out to the surface end it caused a great chaos in the societies where the people of two religious resided. The following riots caused unprecedented erosion to human civilization and human psyche.

The storm of riots also slaughtered the honour and status of females. In *Lajja* Nasrin has clearly pointed how females have been abducted, raped and tortured. Thus, along with social disintegration, she has clearly specifies female suppression in *Lajja*.

As nation is a geo-political entity, so is the body of the woman which is marauded, tortured and abused simply because the narrow nationalistic and fanatic

mindset views it as an extension of the former thereby causing what has been discussed above as double marginalization of the women. Further, the boundaries of feminism are not limited to the cause of women as they can be extended to the cause of underprivileged ones. Thus, the anti-fundamentalism stance of the novel also envelops anti-patriarchal resistance where in gender identity is privileged over religion particularly when Nasrin delineates atrocities against women in the same way as religion (Islam) supersedes nationalism when it comes to the abuse of the religious minority (Hindus). Thus, the gender extremism and religious fundamentalism go hand in hand throughout the text subjecting the female characters like Maya to inhuman torture until she dies. Hers is not only the death of a woman but also of that inner assurance of survival on the part of the Hindus in their own country as Sudhamoy would believe at one point in the text prior to when his daughter breathes her last.

The foregoing discussion prove that the religious fundamentalism and extreme practice of patriarchal are the major factors of social disintegration and female suppression. The harmony between the people from diverse religion has been demolished through the demolition of Babri Masjid. The ensuing riots became the caustic element to rupture the solidarity between Hindus and Muslims.

As noticed in *Lajja* Nasrin points out that the scriptures are biased against females and have focused on stripping females off their fundamental rights. The writer points double suppression upon females. On one hand, they are dominated by the males of their own religion, and on the other, they are extremely violated by the males of another religion. The novel has clearly justified that religion extremism creates social disintegration and torture for women.

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