

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

— 12th Year of Open Access —

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. XII, Issue-1 (February 2021)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Taslima Nasrin and the Fourth World Literature

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Article History: Submitted-27/08/2020, Revised-24/02/2021, Accepted-26/02/2021, Published-28/02/2021.

Abstract:

Taslima Nasrin, the literary artist is a class by herself. Being a woman, she dares to challenge the established conventions- be it in religion or the structure of the family or socio-economic-political set-up. She is assertive and adept in choice of words to express her feelings. Her literary works in translation like-*Selected Columns*, *Love Poems*, *No Country for Women*, *Lajja* and so on are the best sellers. She knows how to use satire, irony, and create incongruous situations in a witty manner. The Fourth World literature is concerned with marginalization, subordination, underdevelopment, subalternity and the groups that are neglected in the society. Hence the Fourth World literature is created by those who are gifted with iconoclastic attitude and have concern for the statelessness, rootlessness and poverty. Nasrin is a controversial writer primarily because she is with the poor rather than the rich, with the banished ones rather than the natives and the subalterns rather than the influentials.

The aim of this research paper is to analyze the splendid passages of Nasrin, a victim of the influential elite and religious fundamentalists. It is difficult to assert that Nasrin the writer belongs to first or second world which is developed, not even the third world which is developing. Her agonizing experiences in life, exile for no serious fault make her a worthy writer of the Fourth World. This paper also focuses on dexterous literary devices of Nasrin that enables her to picture the Fourth World.

Keywords: Poor, Stateless, Underdevelopment, Satire, Irony.

I

As a literary artist Taslima Nasrin is a class by herself. She is at once a columnist, a fiction writer, a woman poet and above all a lady who courts controversy. She has incurred the

wrath of Muslim fundamentalists. A friend of Nasrin views that 'she is either the bravest or most foolish person I have ever met'. (Weaver: 49) She has vehemently criticized the existing order of things be it in the domain of religion or politics or economics. She has a soft corner for the marginalized- the socially and economically backward people. Hence, she occupies a special place in the literature of the world. It is an admitted fact that our world has been divided, at the moment into three categories. The first world refers to the capitalist countries like the USA, Japan. The second world belongs to the USSR and her allies. The third world is constituted by India and other countries in the South Asian continent. The conception of fourth world is a bit different from that of three worlds. The nations in the first three worlds have definite boundaries. They exist within definite geographical demarcating lines but the fourth world has no definite boundaries. Literary people have talked of it. The fourth world is inhabited by the aboriginals, the natives of the soil, the tribals and all those people who are marginalized economically and socially. In such a literary scenario it is my humble attempt to place Taslima Nasrin in context of fourth world literature. The people in the fourth world do not enjoy the benefits and facilities of technologically and scientifically advanced nations of the first three worlds. A resident in the USA can belong to then fourth world if he or she is not anxious to participate in the developmental process- scientific or technological. Thus, to portray the passions, the inclinations, the life style of these people demand a kind of art which many writers in the civilized world are no gifted. In the 20th century a modern poet like W.H. Auden held 'we are a mountain people dwelling upon mountain'. The purpose of his statement is due to the fact that modern man has not been able to control his primordial desires like hunger for sex, instinct to possess property, aggressive tendency for domination over the other, killer instinct just to kill animals for food and so on. Thus, Auden makes a pertinent point that outward advances in the domain of natural sciences has not transformed human nature. Nasrin speaks it in a different tone and a different manner. Many literary critics brand her as an angry woman who raises voice about the prevailing system of political injustice, socio-economic inequality and above all a rotten system in which the innocent is tortured. Thus, to assess Taslima Nasrin as a literary artist demands critical thinking. To associate her as an exiled woman, a controversial writer, a rebel against fundamentalists is to place her among the writers of the fourth world literature because the fourth literature concentrates upon the marginalized, the uncivilized, the neglected, the primitive, the uneducated and so on.

This paper has been divided into four sections. The opening section is the Introduction in which reasons for associating Taslima Nasrin with fourth world literature are stated. The second section is devoted to the study of fourth world literature in which the views of many scholars and theorists of fourth world literature are discussed. In this section fourth world literature is described as a kind of new literature in which Taslima Nasrin has a place. The third section dwells upon the writings of Nasrin in which the characteristics of fourth world literature are brought out. The fourth section is the conclusion in which contributions of Nasrin to the fourth world literature are evaluated.

II

The Fourth world literature is a term used to describe the literature on the marginalized regions and populations of the world. The fourth world is often linked to indigenous people. Thus, the literature of the fourth world focuses on those who are excluded from the mainstream society. *The Forth World: An Indian Reality* published in 1974 throws light on the stateless, poor and marginal conditions of the people. In 2007 the United Nation's declaration on rights of the indigenous people (UNDRIP) was introduced to improve minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of indigenous people of the world. Such declaration arrested the attention of the literary people who are very much concerned with minimum dignity and welfare of the natives of the neglected regions of the world. Professor Upendra Baxi holds that there must be some narrative coherence behind the grouping nations or people into the different worlds.

In his article *Fourth World Literature: The Voice of the Marginalized* R.Reshmy focuses on the marginalization of the indigenous people who once dominated the world may be in the primitive era. The author disapproves of the materialism and imperialism of the modern people that have resulted in the marginalization of the life style and culture of the ancient people.

Taslima Nasrin is a writer of the fourth world literature in a different sense. She dwells upon the marginalization of women in Islamic countries. These women are as simple as the women of ancient times. These women are dominated by their husbands and in-laws. Thus, the theme of subordination, neglect, indifference which are the characteristics of fourth world literature are very much discovered in the writings of Nasrin. She writes a mind-blowing book entitled *No Country for Women* in which the title itself is suggestive of the fact that women

belong to no countries be it of the world or of second world or of third world. Thus, Nasrin's placement of women naturally goes to the fourth world.

In context of fourth world Raven Hill makes a thought-provoking statement- his phrase 'obscured specificity in its quest for generalizability' provokes the writers of the fourth world literature. The people in the fourth world remain unknown, unseen and unheard of because of what Professor Baxi views 'multiple black holes of social exclusion' throughout the planet. Social exclusion is one of the major themes of fourth world literature. Nasrin had to suffer social exclusion because of the rebellion of the Muslim fundamentalists. Nasrin herself has experienced social ostracization but she survives because of her indomitable will power. Hence Nasrin the Muslim woman and the writer can be the subject of fourth world literature.

Fourth World literature concentrates upon the citizens who have been excluded from the main stream in any manner. The people of the fourth world are deprived of the political power that belong to the moderns or the elites. They are also deprived of the facilities and privileges of the global consumerist world. The fourth world literature is about those people who have been marginalized on the grounds of race, caste, religion and so on. Taslima Nasrin is a creative artist. She is a rebel- a rebel against undue domination of the male over the female, the educated over the uneducated, the conformist over the independent thinkers. She points out the drawbacks in a system like patriarchy, religious fundamentalism or orthodoxy. Her thinking is different from that of the religious fundamentalists specially in a religion like Islam. Her novel *Lajja* which sold like hot cakes incurred the wrath of the fundamentalists in Islam. She was banished from the country. She moved from one part of the globe to the other in search of security and safety. Thus, the life that Taslima Nasrin lived or lives is of a different type. Hence it is appropriate to place her in a new world what can be termed as the fourth world because the fourth world deals with the people whose rights have been abrogated. Nasrin claims for the rights to free expression. In fact, it is right to be honoured least civilization should not grow.

In the article *Fourth world Literature in India: An act of Appropriation* Dr. J. John Sekar states that fourth world literature deals with literature of and about indigenous peoples. The real stake holders of fourth world literature are Adivasis, natives in the neglected regions who are away from the main-stream. The author quotes on the Fourth World from Investopedia:

These are the most under developed regions in the world... unlike the first, second and the third world the fourth world does not have any political ties and is often based on a hunter-gatherer life style. This area includes tribal and nomadic communities. (John Sekar:3)

The life style of the residents of the fourth world is nomadic. Taslima Nasrin born and brought up in Bangladesh could not live like a respectable citizen in her own country. Her writings were inflammatory which could incur the displeasure of the influential people especially powerful politicians. Hence being true to herself like a nomad she was to move from her country and take shelter here and there preferably in the obscure and undisclosed places. Thus, the life of a wanderer which is befitting for the inhabitant of the fourth world was adopted by Nasrin.

John Seakar makes it categorically clear that the fourth world nations consist of people who are excluded from society. These groups of people are marginalized and vulnerable to landlessness. Nasrin in this sense could not enjoy any particular piece of land. Her life was always under threat. In this article the author suggests the creative writers must consciously concentrate on the issues and problems confronting the indigenous people. Nasrin herself is a creative artist. Her creativity did invite social and religious segregation. Hence when a perceptive reader studies Nasrin he or she feels that Nasrin's words consciously or unconsciously echo the plight of the residents of the fourth world. In the succeeding section some of the brilliant passages are analyzed in order to highlight Nasrin's temperamental inclination towards the inhabitants of fourth world.

III

The poems of Taslima Nasrin convince a perceptive reader that Nasrin in fact does not belong to first world or second world or third world because these worlds have been created on the basis of the commitments to certain ideology: capitalists or communists or non alignment with any of them. Nasrin voices the feelings of those who are oppressed, depressed or suppressed by the system created by man. Fourth world literature gives a pathetic picture because this world dwells upon the issues of undue dominance or neglect. In the poem *The Unrung Ring* Nasrin writes:

Dreams ring, keeping time to their beats,
and, making a havoc internally,

loneliness rings.

Only an intimate bell on my door does not ring. (The Unrung Ring)

Nasrin creates two worlds here: one of the civilized people and other of the people who are isolated from the main stream of life. Hence, she holds there is loneliness- an internal havoc. In the concluding line of the stanza, she talks of intimacy which is alien to civilized hypocrites. Hence the poem breathes an air of loneliness and intimacy which the primitive people in the days yore could practice.

Nasrin's prisoner poems are heart-touching. Here she laments how she is tortured by the civilized people. She addresses them as serpents. Here is a thought-provoking passage:

I'm caught unawares by the invasion of a venomous snake,

Hurling wrath and loathing, squirms all over my body

And hiss: Be off transcending boundaries

Hush-hush escape to a far-off quaint land

Towards the impassable mountains.

While creeping around the shadow, the serpent demands:

Get lost forever. (<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-safe-house-2/>)

The very poetic expression 'hush-hush escape to a far-off quaint land' pictures a different world and definitely this world is neither first nor second nor third. The expression 'Towards the impassable mountains' confirms it is another world which can be termed as fourth world.

The Woman Breaking Bricks is a poem that echoes the sentiments of the inhabitants of the fourth world. The opening stanza of the poem reads as follows:

The woman, breaking bricks and sitting on a sidewalk,

wears a red sari as she breaks the bricks, under the burning sun, breaks the bricks,
the bronze coloured woman breaks the bricks.

Twenty-one? But she has seven children back home, looks forty up,
and all day for ten taka, not enough to buy food for one, let alone seven,
she breaks the brick. every day, breaks the bricks.

(<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-woman-breaking-bricks/>)

Here is a brilliant picture of a woman labourer whose job is to break bricks, be it under the burning sun. The woman puts on a red saree and looks bronze coloured. So, her saree and colour match with the work she does. Like a primitive woman she has been blessed with a good

number of children-seven even if she is not in a position buy sufficient food for one. Her wage is only ten 'taka' for a day. The woman is aged twenty-one but she looks as if she were forty. Thus, she wears a depressed look. The description feeds for a person who is away from the main stream of social life of a civilized society. Her appearance, dress and job appear primitive. The modern civilized world has no meaning for her.

The woman poet reflects on her dream and contrasts her dream with those of town planners. The poetess writes:

Her dream is her dream,
but in the morning her tent is soaked with water.
So she shouts out to her neighbors, to the world,
I have a dream, I have a dream. But still no umbrella, still no tin roof.
Look, neighbors spit on her and say, her seven children are hungry,
she needs oil for her hair, powder for her face!
Her skin colour darkens daily,
her fingers harden, harden like the bricks they are breaking.

(<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-woman-breaking-bricks/>)

The two stanzas quoted above reflect an ironical situation. The woman breaking the bricks under the burning sun with out an umbrella over her head reflects on her miserable plight. Such conditions of work pose a contrast to the living conditions of modern people residing in the tall towers. These people do not recognize the sufferings of the workers for whom they could live comfortably. This woman labourer lives in a tent because her house was so weak that it was blown away in the storm. The water drips through her tent. Thus, the woman worker is close to nature and she has the ability to put up with the ravages of nature. Such a picture reminds the reader of a primitive woman who was struggling with natural calamities and surviving. Such kind of description is befitting only in context of fourth world literature.

The penultimate stanza reads like a fine piece of poetry designed for fourth world literature:

Look, neighbors spit on her and say, her seven children are hungry,
she needs oil for her hair, powder for her face!
Her skin colour darkens daily,
her fingers harden, harden like the bricks they are breaking.

(<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-woman-breaking-bricks/>)

Nasrin's observation is penetrating. The description is pathetic. The woman labourer who breaks the bricks can not provide oil for her hair nor powder for her face; her children are hungry. Her skin colour darkens; fingers harden. The passage evokes pathos.

The final stanza brings out the creativity in woman poet in depicting the plight of a woman labourer. The poetess writes:

So, with her hammer she continues, continues breaking the bricks,
becoming herself a brick, a brick that cannot be broken
by the sun's heat, an underfed stomach, a dreaming heart.

(<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-woman-breaking-bricks/>)

The woman labourer works with hammer to break the bricks and finally her heart becoming as hard as the brick. Her stomach is underfed but she is a dreamer. She dreams for better days to come. Thus, here is a picture of a woman labourer who cannot be the inhabitant of the first world or the second world or the third world. She is a residence of the fourth world- a world in which she is close to the primitive people who were very strong and sturdy physically; they did not know the gifts of science which could make the world so various, so beautiful, so diverse and so complicated. Thus, Nasrin the poetess is at the bottom of the heart reserves a place for the dwellers of fourth world.

IV

It will be a thought-provoking statement if we estimate Taslima Nasrin as an artist of and for the fourth world. She was born in East Bengal at a particular period of history, loved Bengali the native language and wrote extensively but the fruits of her labour proved to be bitter for her. The so-called civilized Bengalis, the Islam fundamentalists could not tolerate her expression. By nature, she is independent thinker; she is gifted with creativity to translate her experiences into printed words but those printed words incurred the wrath of the people who debate on the issues that raised in the first world or second world or third world. Nasrin felt intensely lonely in her life. Her literature is the reflection of loneliness. She could identify herself with lonely people. The women brick-breaker as portrayed by evokes pathos which sensitive literary figures can experience. In her life she could not experience intimacy in human relationship. She loved, married and divorced one after another. Her life was lonely but artistic.

Living is an art and she showed to the world that the artist can be as hard as a primitive man and lived like a nomad or wanderer. She didn't like nor could she be allowed to settle down in a particular region or country. She is moving from place to place sometimes openly and sometimes in disguise. She is cosmopolitan in her outlook. She does not care for the systems created by the humans in all these worlds- be it first of the second or the third. She relies on her intelligence her creativity, her imagination and definitely she is the harbinger of a new kind of literature which can be branded as fourth world literature.

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