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Sectarian Violence and Fictional Reality: A Dual Theoretical Reading of Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

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Abstract:

This research article focuses on the narrative integration of New Criticism's close reading methodology and New Historicism's contextual approach that resulted in a complex narrative paradigm. The merged approach is seen in the author's view where she captures historical events and created that through fictional characters. Taslima Nasrin's novel, *Lajja*, exemplifies this approach in which she masterfully humanise and personalize the suffering of the people through the fictional Dutta family. By weaving together the historical facts into the fiction, Nasrin crafts a powerful narrative that illuminates the far-reaching consequences of sectarian violence, rendering *Lajja* a poignant and provoking literary work. The author creates fictional characters to portray human suffering during the period of Babri masjid attack. Yet, the characters usually over shadow the historical elements and it unconsciously suppresses the reader in understanding the reality. This research article, illuminates how the author mends the New Criticism and New Historicism approaches by reflecting the unsung trauma of the Hindu families in a Muslim country during the Babri Masjid demolition.

Keywords: Hegemony, Fictional Reality, Trauma Studies, Narrative Integration.

Introduction:

Close reading always deals with the content which never considered the author's information, author's intention, and social background of the text rather it emphasise the message being shown and it has been one of the greatest influence for the greater novels. New Historicism deals with the cultural context and social context in which the text is produced, rather than only information of the text. This approach gives idea to the readers about the purpose of the text and so they can easily connect with the characters if they understand the historical context. *Lajja*, being the greatest influencing novel during the 1990s, speaks about the sufferings not in the direct historical record of Muslim peoples savagery attack on Hindus, rather it speaks about the issue through characters.

The title of the novel means 'Shame', that accounts the shameful actions of native Muslims, but if the novel went wrong, the entire work would result in threat for Nasrin. Considering the consequence, the accuracy of incidents recorded were magnificent in reality. They speak about the exact identifiable incidents of breaking shops, temples, buildings of Hindus and their unaccounted deaths.

Nasrin takes a bold narrative risk to capture the anguish of those affected by sectarian violence in Bangladesh. By crafting relatable characters, Nasrin encourages readers to transcend a detached historical perspective and empathise with individual sufferings. This narrative enables the readers to grasp the human cost of the conflict, rather than merely viewing it as a historical event. Unlike traditional novels, which typically focus on the character development or plot progression, *Lajja* uniquely portrays the integration of the historical context with that of the Dutta family's struggles. Nasrin masterfully parallels the broader historical elements with the experiences of the Dutta family, poignantly capturing the tribulations faced by Hindus in Muslim-majority Bangladesh. And so, Nasrin creates a nuanced

narrative that illuminates the complexities of sectarian conflict and its devastating impact on individuals and communities.

The exploration of suffering characters in this novel is obvious, in which all the minor characters had introduced only about their suffering. Here, the livelihood of people in Bangladesh was juxtaposed in two ways. The happy, wealthy, and dominant Muslims flourishing on one side, and the Hindu's suffering, outcast and loss of livelihood on the other side. But the portrayal had enough evidence to charge against the rule of Bangladesh government.

It became myth that the writer should write for the pleasure of the readers, sometimes the moral rendering to readers. Yet, there are very few novelists who speaks the reality prevailing in a society without any adulteration as well as speaking of real incidents. *Lajja* reached its success by gaining more attention by readers across the country. Yet, the novelist quest for propagate the meaningless revolt and catastrophe was clearly noted.

Capturing historical reality in a novel is a significant risk for writers, who must balance authenticity with creative expression. Besides capturing Babri Masjid incident into the genre of historical writing, the author used fictional characters to breathe life into historical events, providing a balanced and relatable exploration of the past through fiction. This approach humanizes history, making it more accessible and impactful to readers. Nasrin quotes in this book of the incident about the local riot in Bangladesh immediately after the destruction of Babri Masjid "The puja office on North Brook Road, the idol of Kali in the zamindar's house as well as the temple were all destroyed completely [. . .] In Kushtia, six temples were attacked at midnight by the Jamaat Shibeer people"(Nasrin 40- 41).

Through these words Nasrin demonstrates her commitment to historical accuracy, as she elegantly recreates the original incident and the impact of the Babri Masjid destruction without resorting to bias or misinformation. With unflinching precision, Nasrin captures the

far-reaching consequences of this pivotal event in Bangladesh, cleverly employing a narrative lens that enables readers to connect with the real incident on a deeper level. Through the expertly crafted roles of her characters, as well as the strategic incorporation of news accounts (blends both new criticism and new historicism), Nasrin recreates the traumatic situation of that time, thereby facilitating a profound understanding of the event's impact on individuals and communities.

The portrayal of characters in *Lajja* expertly produce empathy from readers, drawing them into the heart-wrenching sufferings of the people of Bangladesh. Notably, the novel's frequent use of the word "raped" over 300 instances came across as mere a social behaviour by Muslim men over Hindu women. This underscores the pervasive brutality and violence that pervaded in the country. The tragic rape and murder of Maya, who is the prominent character, serves as a catalyst, galvanizing the readers' sympathy and compassion for the Dutta family's plight. This poignant narrative thread, powerfully captures the real-life struggles of countless Hindu families in Bangladesh during the riots.

The brutal rape and murder of Maya by group of seven young Muslim men serves as a reminder of the savagery committed against Hindu women during the riots in Bangladesh, in which Maya became the tribute to all the suffered Hindu family of that time. Her lifeless body, callously discarded into a river, symbolizes the senseless and animus violence that pervaded the country. This tragic event is juxtaposed as a celebration for Muslim men who enjoyed their nationality full of Muslim, but Hindu families were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge with acquaintances and many went to their native country, while their properties were ravaged and plundered. Nasrin's unique perspective as a Muslim writer and atheist lens added a depth and value to the novel. Her thoughtful exploration of Hindu-centric emotions and experiences imbues *Lajja* with a rare authenticity, setting it apart from other novels in its genre. The rape of other Hindu women, though documented as historical fact, fails to evoke the same emotional

resonance as Maya's tragic fate. By doing so, the author underscores the importance of acknowledging and learning from the past and creates characters in the novel, which makes the present readers think about the reality of past history in the spectacles of fiction.

Nasrin juxtaposes the aim of Bangladesh government by commanding the slogan in the novel were people saying, "The State of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles: nationalism, secularism, democracy, and socialism" (Nasrin 42). But contradiction to this, the government never had national unity, social unity and no democracy and secularity. They only had religious discrimination. Nasrin speaks the historical context through these characters in which her aim is to raise the question against the government though she belongs to Muslim community.

The writer beautifully blends the real history through characters making the waiting to reach wider readers. She neither wanted to convey the history, nor she had supported Hindu people but rather she wanted to point the insanity and cruelty which is against the human nature and laws. She would not attained popularity if she had recorded the incidents as it really is without characters, but she gave life to the novel by the characters, illuminating the readers to understand both history as well as the individual suffering of Hindu people and simultaneously made the readers mind filled with extreme sadness through traumatic experiences of each and every characters.

The character Kironmoyee, who was the wife of Sudhamoy, was begging the Muslim lads who abducted her daughter Maya from their own home in front of her eyes. Kironmoyee yelled and ran behind the kidnappers in which she realised she's helpless, though there are family's and peoples are around whereas her husband and the head of the family Sudhamoy became paralysed and couldn't help her daughter who was kidnapped by seven young Muslim men, he shared his trauma in groan, but his voice is not heard. The only active member in a family Suranjon wanted to take revenge of a Muslim prostitute for the incident of Maya, tried

to hurt her in dark room and exploited her half but left her alive because he realised it was not meaningful to harm a prostitute. This shows the individual centric nature of Hindu man who wanted justice but never reached out his voice. The complete agitation causes nothing but at the end they had to leave Bangladesh to India because of brutality they faced.

The author's narrative technique through character, moves parallel to the history. The writer would be condemned to death or their work would be banned or burnt if their work is against the government's ideology. But the author Taslima Nasrin ventured against the consequences, strived to write against her own Bangladesh country. She got 'Fatwa' for this novel, consequently Bangladesh government condemned the way she recorded incidents in this novel. This literary piece of work was remarkably completed within a span of just seven days. Denying the conventional wisdom that novel-writing is a time-consuming process requiring months or even years to capture the nuances of human emotions, Nasrin proved that intense creativity and focus that can yield a masterpiece in a remarkably short period. Nasrin envisioned *Lajja* as a catalyst for change, seeking to alter people's perceptions and prompt a more realistic understanding of the devastating impact of sectarian violence. Through this novel, she aimed to challenge societal norms and inspire a more empathetic and inclusive worldview.

Speaking of the historical context, the characters in the novel became invincible force to grab the attention of the readers, which moves around Dutta family, and their daily routine. Kironmoyee, a humble housewife who abandoned her wish of becoming independent women, suppressed her desires because of the social context. Sudhamoy, the father of Suronjon and Maya, was a doctor who helped every humans irrespective of their religion and race. Meanwhile, the zeal hero Suronjon raised the voice against the Muslim people's tyranny in the country, and wanted liberation for Hindus in Muslim country.

Here, the entire novel revolves around the family, symbolically representing the mosquito (Hindu minority) in the web of Spider (Muslim majority) in which they encounter the rageful deeds of Muslim in the country, yet they strived and managed to live there until the end. Nasrin managed to cope the narrative technique without any side of personal and subjective opinions. The characters and the historical context clearly defined the purpose of this work, that is condemnation of cruel Barbaric behaviour.

Critics about this novel, states that Nasrin personally hate the governance in Bangladesh, and she used novel as a weapon to represent her hatred of her country. But this approach speaks about the splendid characterization and narrative technique used by Nasrin, who without any bias, captured the historical elements with fictional characters to show the impact she wanted to create in the novel .

Though Nasrin faced the problem of collecting facts, she made accurate significant incidents, clearly stated the information precisely, not concisely but in bombastic record. She, tried to imitate the historical incidents, and represent it with characters to show the detachment faced by Hindus in Bangladesh during the riot. All the characters in the novel, succeeded in remarking the impact of the insane riot. It is noted that the novel has more and more incident of Hindu people's catastrophic plagues caused by Muslim community people. She condemned the government's silence and their negotiation to ransack entire Hindu community people and forced them to go back to India.

The novelist oppressed herself by not falling any side, either for Muslims or for Hindus. She shades colours to the unknown news through creating characters and represented them in hard circumstances to show the readers to understand the way the voiceless people suffered against the roaring beast. She analysed the history, compared it with reality, and produced lens for the unaware impacts of the people in Bangladesh faced.

Speaking of the narrative technique, the emotions were conveyed clearly and the readers can empathise, sympathise and understand the characters suffered. The narration became the greatest influencing factor for the readers who stood by the side of peace. This narration, created harmony among the readers, made them think about the savage impact of the meaningless conflict and its uselessness.

Looking the characterization, the characters of the novel had their own psychological trauma at their earlier stages, longed for peace among their kins and neighbours. They were tormented only because of their religion at school, at college, at workspace, at outside the home and everywhere. This captures the vulnerability of Hindu in the Muslim country. At the end, they were mercilessly forced to go out of the country, leaving all the asset to unknown Muslim people. Their vulnerability and tired of fighting for liberty in the country revealed through the last word in the novel "Let's leave the country"

The fiction was not conditioned to be true, and all the fictions would not speak about reality. But this novel, representing reality through history, representing fiction by characters, speaks about the communal impact and trauma of the Hindu people in Bangladesh on the time of destruction of Babri Masjid. Every fiction need not say about reality, but it should speak the reason for life. Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* became the greatest novel at the end of 20th century which blends history with fiction to say the agony of Hindu people.

Thus, the New Criticism approach of viewing and analysing the text alone would illuminate the readers by providing them ability to sympathise the Hindu people in Bangladesh. Parallel to it, the New historical approach explains the social context of the novel, which speaks the reality through the art of characterization and their internal and external conflict reflecting social phenomena.

Conclusion:

Lajja is a masterful portrayal of the 1990s riots in Bangladesh, which elegantly captures reader's emotions through its unique characters and their traumatic experiences. By weaving together fact and fiction, Nasrin condemns the brutal attacks on Hindu families living in Bangladesh, providing a clear picture of the violence and intolerance that pervaded the country. Employing a New Historical approach, Nasrin harnesses the power of fictional characters to recreate real historical incidents, thereby illuminating the harsh realities of the past. Through this narrative strategy, Nasrin enables readers to empathise with the victims and grasp the far reaching consequences of sectarian violence, rendering *Lajja* a poignant and provoking literary work.

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