

PATRIARCHY GROWS WITH ACCEPTANCE

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With its root -arch, meaning "ruler, leader", a patriarch is a man who dominates something, even if it's just a family or the Society.

Abstract: My Paper presentation will speak about how **Patriarchy grows with acceptance** in society with the best example of Taslima Nasrin's Novels 'Lajja' and 'French Lover'. Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi contemporary woman novelist, who projects this image of a 'new woman' in her works. Nasrin, through her works reveals the sufferings of a woman caught in the web of religion and traditions. She views marriage as the most oppressive social institution that exploits a woman as an object for pleasure and procreation. French Lover is her novel that projects the destructive effects of male-hegemony on the life of her female protagonist, Nilanjana Mandal or Nila that leads to her subjugation. Nasrin, through the character of Nila has explored, that how a woman after bearing the atrocities in her marriage is eventually awakened to her exploitation that motivates her to assert her individuality. This self-actualization urges Nila to defy the patriarchal norms of marriage and lead her life independently at her own terms.

Introduction: 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. Therefore, women are expected to fit themselves in this frame, where in every sense they are inferior to men and lose their personal identity. Thus, women remain as mere object or property to men. Taslima 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.

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. 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.

Taslima Nasrin exemplifies the woman who breaches the patriarchal code, and is thus maltreated. *Lajja and French Lover* deals with several feminist issues. In both the novels, Nasrin demonstrates the ways how patriarchal mindset challenges individuality and self-respect of women which demands needful motivation giving way to fight Patriarchy like the female protagonist, Nilanjana Mandal or Nila of 'French Lover' refused Patriarchy unlike the female characters in *Lajja*: Kironmoyee, Maya, and Shammima Begum who accepted it.

Patriarchy: Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power, predominate in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of the property. They also hold power in the domain of the family, as fatherly figures.

State of Women in the Patriarchal Society: A woman in Indian society has been a victim of humiliation, torture and exploitation. There are many episodes of rape, murder, dowry, burning, wife beating and discrimination in society. Men predominate the Indian society, hence women are a victim of male domination in the respective sphere of life; especially in economic life, over decision making on

resources, on the utilization of her earnings and her body. Hence, a woman's life lies between pleasures at one end and danger at another end.

Taslima Nasrin the Novelist The birth of a 'new woman' in Indian literature connotes an attitudinal shift in the writings of contemporary women novelists, who challenge and deconstruct the traditional image of a woman from a silent and submissive one to an awakened and an assertive individual. A comparison of the early women novelists and the contemporary novelists depict the definite continuity in the trends and approach but with bolder themes. The 'new woman' is educated, awakened, assertive, economically empowered and articulates her needs to attain a complete control over her life and body in the Indian patriarchal society.

Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi contemporary woman novelist, who projects this image of a 'new woman' in her works. Nasrin, through her works reveals the sufferings of a woman caught in the web of religion and traditions. She views marriage as the most oppressive social institution that exploits a woman as an object for pleasure and procreation. She exemplifies the woman who breaches the patriarchal code, and is thus maltreated. One of the most important feminist issues that has been dealt with in her 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.

Here I will proceed with my topic 'Patriarchy grows with acceptance' with an aim of propagating social awareness as well as consciousness by taking example of Nasrin's novels 'French Lover' and 'Lajja'

Patriarchy as Cited in Taslima Nasrin's Lajja: 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. 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.

Lajja deals with several feminist issues. In fact, Nasrin demonstrates the ways how patriarchal mindset challenges individuality and self-respect of women. 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.

Kironmoyee as a mother is expected to be gentle, polite and understanding. Issues like her husband's infertility, physical ordeals, 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 too "[h]er latest sacrifice involved selling a pair of her gold bangles to Dr. Haripada's wife. After all, gold was not so precious that it could not be sold if the need arose" (*Lajja* 113). Her desire to move to India to her relatives at the perilous hour (on account of the aftermath of Babri Masjid demolition) remained unattended. All she could do was secretly shed tears and behave submissively, which is reffrential 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, has been amply exemplified in the novel.

In *Lajja* too, this aspect 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 termed as a 'slut' and looked down upon as she sleeps with

several men thereby violating/ transgressing the patriarchal code. She is, in fact, viewed as a bad or fallen girl. Islam mandates purity and virginity as virtues.

The patriarchal norms do not let women fulfill their aspirations, as for Kironmoyee she had to repress her deep inner cravings which would eventually turn into virtual “deprivation” and thus become way of life. To quote from the text: “When Sudhamoy’s friends came to visit, and they sat around talking, their shadows would sometimes fall on Kironmoyee’s lap, and almost involuntarily she would wish that those shadows were real. . . . Kironmoyee’s physical cravings did not last very long. Her body soon became used to the deprivation” (*Lajja* 114). By and large, it is at the cost of the family that a woman is conditioned to subdue her desires and fit into the socio-cultural framework. Kironmoyee, therefore, spends her life as a “patriarchal woman,” “who has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, which can be defined, in short, as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles”. Thus, Nasrin portrays Kironmoyee as a polite, selfless and self-sacrificing wife/mother who is submissive to the demands of her husband and son, for her main concern is only the well being of her family and her personal choices are a non-issue in the environment she is born and brought up in. She takes her celibacy on account of her husband’s genital mutilation as an existential given and never mentions this handicap as an issue. She also submits to the demands made upon her by the communal atmosphere in Bangladesh as she quietly accepts a new identity with an assumed Muslim name San. At this juncture, it is important to note that both, family and society connive to marginalize women. Kironmoyee invests all her resources, monetary and mental, in keeping her family together. She gives a tough fight to her daughter’s abductors. Despite her reluctance, she cooks beef to make her husband happy and is even willing to accept her son’s Muslim girlfriend Parveen as her daughter-in-law. Her second act of assertion manifests in her refusal to accept the financial help offered by her son after her husband has a paralytic attack, which apparently depicts her as a victim of patriarchy.

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. *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 threatening 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 Kiranmoyee 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.

Despite his best efforts, Suranjan 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 male predators who abducted her. 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/ 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 vengeance 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.

Patriarchy as Cited in Taslima Nasrin's 'French Lover': Nasrin's novel French Lover narrates the story of the patriarchal control which influenced the protagonist Nilanjana by her father, her husband Kishanlal and the domination of friends and lover. This article on French Lover focuses on the predominant thematic concerns of Nasrin as a feminist. French Lover is her medium to convey her views on various sociological, political issues which encompass not only the fate of any nation but also that of women everywhere. The analysis focuses on the failure of marriage in the case of various individuals, especially all the chief characters. Nasrin may be construed as justifying the frustration of Nila at her shabby treatment by Kishanlal and subsequently abandoning her husband. When Nila speaks on behalf of Nasrin, she justifies her liberated escapades as the result of the lack of real love or affection in her husband's attitude towards her and his former French wife. Taslima Nasrin combines both fancy and reality to weave the novel which is more or less precise painting of the world at large with pictures of human beings who live to suffer under the sun. It may also be noted that in this novel the author pursues the theme of male-female encounter, which assumes a rare depth and validity. It may be concisely summed up as man-woman relationship in the context of marital and extra marital relationships. In the marriage of Nilanjana and Kishanlal we find the disharmony between two individuals of different tastes and feelings as in the family of Sunilda and his wife. Chaitali, Benoir and his wife tells about a woman who is willing to give her husband to another woman for the sake of love. Monique Mathew, the French citizen turned Indian, after marrying an Indian, travels from France to India in the hope of living with her loving husband forever. But destiny decides differently. Though she is a lovely and vigorous person and has married a Bengali much younger than her she gets a divorce. In the relationship between Nilanjana's mother Molina and Anirban, Destiny snatches Molina away from Anirban. Nilanjana's mother has been neglected for long and there is no treatment for her disease though her father Anirban is a doctor. In Nilanjana's opinion whatever treatment Anirban might have given to his wife was a pretence to she was getting treated by doctors. Danielle, a French citizen, has a very bitter childhood to recall. Her father had raped her; she has suffered bitterly many times because of the sexual vulgarity of the people around and, ultimately, she turns into a homosexual. Nila's relationship with Sushanta, the high caste Brahmin of Calcutta, exposes the infidelity of a love that fails before marriage and also the pre-marital illegitimate sexual life of an Indian girl on Indian soil. The girl marries Kishanlal with thousands of hopes and dreams: "Nila had her share of dreams about hard life sustained only on love. Perhaps every Bengali was born with that desire" (Nasrin, French Lover 19). On her first trip to Paris, Nila meets the Dutch lady Gabriella; she is forty three and has been buying fabric from India and taking it back to sell in her country. She makes a good profit in her trade of selling plate, jewellery, incense etc. In the Western culture the woman takes her relation ship with a man perhaps in a very light way and there is nobody to talk about her. But, in Calcutta, if a woman flirts with a man her life is considered to be doomed and there will be no man to marry her and that is why a man like Kishanlal has had to travel from France to marry the girl Nila when Sushanta jilted her. On her second trip to Paris, on board the flight, Nila meets Benoir Dupont, who is two years younger than her. Benoir

can sense that Nila is like a reckless refugee. He is very cautious about his every move towards this newfound comfort. In Nila's Indian tradition, sex is admissible only in the context of love and affection. But, in Benoir's culture, one can have sex with someone without loving her, depending on the circumstances. Benoir has just happened in Nila's life. After studying all these relationships one can simply say that these are not relationships. According to the Indian tradition, a relationship is deemed to last for ever and to keep the concerned people happy, while encounters, where a man and a woman meet each other and find themselves indulging in certain actions (sexual) end only in unhappiness, regret and reproach, with no possibility of a compromise and happy solution. Because Nasrin's women characters are all dominated by emotions, they are not ready to tune themselves to the domestic sphere ruled by man. Nasrin wants to show that tolerance towards each other get dissolved in an atmosphere of bleak disheartedness. Though there is much talk about woman's liberation it is a truth that society expects a woman to make compromises to keep the family intact and happy. Meena Shirwadkar, in *Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel*, says: "Marriage is an obligation for womanhood but it makes a demand on woman. She is expected to go through a long process of learning what she has to learn in order to adapt herself to her new environment". The institution of marriage, with all its expectations, falls heavily on a woman. However, when it becomes a battlefield between two egoistic individuals who are not ready for compromise, it proves that the fittest can survive; the strategy of survival varies from woman to woman; when she succumbs to the internal pressure of her own self and the external pressure from the society she either commits suicide or loses her identity. The brave one does not want to make a compromise and comes out of the shackles of the union. Nasrin's protagonist Nila proves a brave character and she wants to retain her individuality against the destructive forces that threaten her identity as an individual and as a woman since marriage subjugates her. Through the character of Nila, Nasrin portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express her feminine urge for self-expression. Even a causal reading of the novel makes one conscious that Nasrin is not only writing about her female protagonist Nila, who is a victim of the institution of marriage and identity crisis, but through Nila, also about other women who are subjugated and enslaved. Kishan never understands the identity of Nila. Women have faced identity crisis, but the crisis seems to occur mostly because of the control men exercise over women. A crisis in one's identity leads to a heightened sense of alienation. Nila leaves Kishan's home. Nasrin generalizes Nila's experiences as a subjugated woman and the subsequent trauma she undergoes and her successful exit as an individual to raise consciousness among women in general. Danielle and her lesbianism represent western freedom, which means she is emancipated, free from all restrictions, social or otherwise, but runs the risk of moral corruption and hence is negatively emancipated. The society at large is still ignorant of such vulgar and gruesome assaults on women though it is a land of "equality", but she revolts against these atrocities by transforming herself into a lesbian to get a female identity. To sum up, in *French Lover* the story revolves not only round the Indian bride how becomes a liberated woman afterwards, but also on the less fortunate women who are considered objects of sex and gratification as many women in the developing countries. The indiscriminate sexual subjugation under different men and the frustration and the self pity at the inability of her own self to avert such pathetic situations and at the selfish nature of the men in her sexual encounters, the betrayal of her beloved husband, friend and lover enlighten Nila, the innocent and ignorant dreamy bride into a hardcore feminist. Nasrin's strength as an analytical writer is revealed as she speaks sometimes through the characters within the frame and many times like an objective chorus. She wails from the periphery of the entire string of incidents. The author makes her characters live and suffer at various places of the world, kindling the imagination of the sensible readers to recognize that the plight of women is the same throughout the world. Her characters fly from East to West and West to East, with the hope of enjoying bliss through marriage, which is not to be. Almost all the women characters suffer sexual atrocity. It may be not necessarily from unknown men but the men of their own family and men who happened to be their friends. Pathetically enough, sex does not distinguish a daughter or a friend, Nasrin generalizes the plight of women by introducing various women characters in parallel situations where in the experience of one woman happens to be that of other women. Ultimately the culmination becomes the liberation or emancipation of women from men. This may be like Nilanjana leaving her husband to live with her friend or like Danielle leaving her father to live alone in the company of friends of her own. The heroine removes herself from her family and her husband because she feels she has an identity of her own that cannot be related to anybody else.

In both the novels, Nasrin demonstrates the ways how patriarchal mindset challenges individuality and self-respect of women which demands needful motivation giving way to fight Patriarchy like the female protagonist, Nilanjana Mandal or Nila of 'French Lover' refused Patriarchy unlike the female characters in Lajja: Kironmoyee, Maya, and Shammima Begum who accepted it.

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