



LAJJA

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History:

Received Date: 11/10/2025

Revised Date: 18/10/2025

Accepted Date: 30/10/2025

e-First: 08/11/2025

Keywords *Lajja*, Taslima Nasrin, Communalism, Fundamentalism, Religious Persecution, Babri Masjid Demolition

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ABSTRACT

The novel *Lajja* ("Shame"), published in 1993 by Taslima Nasrin, emerges as a powerful literary response to the communal tensions that intensified following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992. Rooted in Bangladesh's socio-political context, the novel documents the persecution of Hindus, a minority community, by the Muslim majority during the riots that erupted after the incident in India. Drawing upon historical communal discord dating back to the pre-independence era and the violent aftermath of partition, Nasrin exposes how religious extremism continues to shape national identity and social relations in the subcontinent. Through her bold critique of fundamentalism and communalism, she asserts the duty of all citizens to resist intolerance and defend democratic values. Written within seven days, *Lajja* not only reflects the author's liberal vision and commitment to human rights but also stands as a testimony to Bangladesh's "collective defeat" in upholding secular ideals. Its subsequent ban, along with the fatwa and threats issued against Nasrin, highlights the political impact of the text and the dangers faced by those who challenge religious orthodoxy.

1. Introduction

The novel *Lajja* meaning "Shame" was published in the year 1993 immediately after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6th December 1992. Right from the time of the struggle for independence communal discord or the suspicion of the other community, both Hindus and Muslims continued and became major reason for the partition of the country on religious lines. The communal riots in Bengal in 1963-64 led to carnage in East Pakistan which now has become Bangladesh. The writer belongs to the liberal tradition of democracy, open-mindedness and tolerate the coarseness and savagery of other human beings as a sign of their backwardness. The writer hates closed and communal mind-set which differentiates people on the basis of religion. As she herself clearly states in her preface to the novel (P-IX-X). As the quotation prefacing the novel says.

"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.

Lajja was published in February 1993 in Bangladesh and sold over 60,000 copies before it was banned by the government five months later—their excuse was that it was disturbing the communal peace. In September that year a fatwa was issued against me by a fundamentalist organization and a reward was offered for my death. There have been marches on the streets of Dhaka by communalists

clamoring for my life. But none of these things have shaken my determination to continue the battle against religious persecution, genocide and communalism. Bangladesh is my motherland. We gained our independence from Pakistan at the cost of three million lives. That sacrifice will be betrayed if we allow ourselves to be ruled by religious extremism. The mullahs who would murder me will kill everything progressive in Bangladesh if they are allowed to prevail. It is my duty to try to protect my beautiful country from them and I call on all those who share my values to help me defend my rights.

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.

While this is a novel and all the characters in the narrative are the product of my own imagination, and any resemblance they bear to actual people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental, I have also included in the text numerous incidents, actual historical events, facts and statistics. I have verified these to the best of my ability; my sources of information include *Ekota*, *Azker Kagoz*, *Bhorer Kagoz*, *Glani* (The disgrace), "Communal Persecution and Repression in Bangladesh", "Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents", and "Parishad Barta".

"Let another name for religion be humans on.

The narrative is sectioned into thirteen days episode where a day by day account is given of the beastliness and savagery inflicted on Hindus living in Bangladesh, by Muslims was nakedly honored with facts and figures. The writer does not shrink from her responsibility of recording the truth which no official version can courageously proclaim. She outlines as to how the formation of Bangladesh from the tyranny of West Pakistan is based on the former conditional principles and later changed into a communal state by declared an Islamic state, unhinging the minority section of Hindu, into being as the tender mercy of the majoritarian Muslims. The writer clearly highlights the loyalty and attachment of Sukumar Dutta the father of Sudhamoy Dutta who argued (P -6-7).

"He would say, 'If there is no security in your own country, where in this world can we go looking for it? I cannot run away from my homeland. You go if you want to. I am not leaving the property of my forefathers. Coconut and betel nut plantations, yards and yards of rich paddy fields, a house that stands on over two bighas of land I cannot leave all this to become a refugee on the platforms of Sealdah station.' At that time Sudhamoy was about nineteen years old. Most of his college friends were migrating to India, and to a man they warned him, 'Your father is going to regret this decision sooner or later.'

Sudhamoy, however, had learnt to say like his father, 'Why should I leave my homeland and go somewhere else? If I live it will be on this soil, and if I die it will be in the very same place.' But the inexorable migration continued to take place and the number of students in the colleges gradually

dwindled. Those who had not left in 1947 were now making preparations to leave. And so it was that Sudhamoy studied with only a handful of Muslim boys and few poor Hindu students at Lytton Medical College from which in course of time he earned a medical degree.”

At the time the argument advocated by M.A. Jinnah is that Hindus and Muslims are like two nations with then contrary cultures and cannot live in harmony. This argument as that time fired the imagination of the Muslim masses and they fought vigorously for Muslim homeland and when partition came Pakistan was given two pieces of land on both sides of India, the West and the East Pakistan, with or consider of 1000 miles at the foot hills of Himalayas, one of the tallest leaders of congress Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad protested that religion alone cannot be a binding cord to hold two places together (P-8) He argued that the thesis that religion can be a binding force in the lives of people bringing together various and often desperate sections of society together is the biggest bogey and lie perpetrated on the minds of the people. It is in the nature of human life that there cannot be a single force that can hold all people together, without reference to place and time, which will fall apart in course of time. History itself is a proof and testimony of this indubitable fact in the course of history.

The writer also points out that even though he won Pakistan by his bogus agreement he was aware that in the priorities of identifies, the language and culture come first and religion second (P-08).

When Jinnah insisted on the single factor of Islam being universal rallying point, Mountbatten, the then viceroy of the time cautioned him that other non-religious factors weigh in more than that of religion, leading to unpredictable and disastrous results. This prophecy proved to be too true in post-independent Pakistan where cultural variations between East and West Pakistan because the cleaving factor in breaking up the country in 1971. This incalculable cultural factor was pointed out by Amitav Ghosh in his award-winning book “The Shadow line”.

Nasreen traces out the history of East Pakistan to how it was flooded by waves of migration from either side of the border till it culminated in 1971 National Movement for freedom from the tyranny of West Pakistan. This clearly proves that religion has the capacity to create mischief but cannot bind people together in a spirit of brotherhood (P-8).

“Starting from 1947 and stretching upto 1971, the Bengalis witnessed wave upon wave of bloodshed and trouble, all of which culminated in the Freedom Movement of 1971. An independence that was earned at the cost of three million Bengali lives, proved that religion could not be the basis of a national identity. Language, culture, and history on the other hand were able to create the foundation on which to build a sense of nationality. Pakistan was initially able to begin forging a common bond between the Muslims in Punjab and the Muslims in Bengal. But both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis soon showed up the fallacy of the two-nation distinction when they began balking at the prospect of making major compromises with the Muslims of Pakistan.”

She comments as to how the partition of the country is not fenced or bordered by any trenches but people are free to cross a cross, Hindus and Muslims alike but the Hindu population gradually shifted to India as they did not feel secure in a country governed by Islam (P-10).

Hindus started shifting to India as they feel insecure in a country governed by the tenets of Islam which is not resilient and accommodative enough to accept other religions but treats them with contempt and provokes hatred against them. The statistics at every census prove that there is a decline in the Hindu population of Bangladesh which is deflated still further to project the image of Bangladesh as a country of Muslims with a slice of other faiths whereas Hindus, even after 1971, still are a reckonable force who have been marginalized by the biased and prejudiced policies of the government. Sudhamoy is aware that Hindus in early 1990s form around twenty percent of the population.

Sudhamoy imagined that when the country achieves independence for which he suffered and sacrificed much, all will be treated with respect and dignity, irrespective of what religion they belong to, as Bengali Culture is a complex and composite one but of late he realizes that the country's liberal tradition is gradually and insidiously being substituted by Islam which does not accept any way of life other than that of Islam and constricts the compass of life to a strait jacket of rigid moral codes and practices. This knowledge and disillusion gradually dawns up on Sudhamoy that non-Muslim population are gradually ghettoized and marginalized into insignificance. In contrast to the rest of the world, which is becoming more and more open minded and accommodative, Islam as a state religion is converging the wide expanse and avenues of life to one myopic mind-set.

“He Had hoped? that in the independent and secular State of Bangladesh, Hindus would enjoy the same political, economic, cultural and religious privileges that the Muslims enjoyed. Unfortunately, the principle of religious impartiality had slowly lost its place in the country's scheme of things. Today, the national religion of Bangladesh was Islam. And, the fundamentalists who had once opposed the Freedom Movement in 1971 and had maintained a low profile during the struggle, now ruled the roost, organizing processions and meetings. It was the same group of people who were behind the ruthless crusade against Hindus in 1990, these were the hooligans who had broken Hindu temples and burnt down Hindu shops and homes. Sudhamoy shut his eyes.”

There is a difference of perception between the generation which has seen the partition of 1947 and the later one who are unafraid because they have never seen a social upheaval and displacement Maya is told and defiant because she was brought up in an atmosphere where fear haunts your life and is enters your brain and bones (P-13).

“Maya glared at her mother, as if to say there was nothing wrong about her proposed course of action. She seemed unmoved by the sadness in Kironmoyee's face. Sudhamoy sighed helplessly and

looked from Maya to Kironmoyee and back again. He could understand Maya's restlessness. Only twenty-one, she had not witnessed the division of the country in 1947, nor had she seen the riots of 1950 or 1964. She had not seen the country attain freedom in 1971. All she had known from the time she was very young was that the national religion was Islam and that she and her family belonged to the Hindu minority which often had to make compromises with the system. And all she had really faced was the trauma of the riots of 1990 and this had been enough for her to take the decision that she did not want to throw away her life Sudhamoy's eyes glazed over as the pain in his chest \increased and pushed all thoughts of Maya from his mind."

The Bengalis attachment to the land of their birth is not a shallow, sentimental one but rooted in their being so much so, that leaving the place is like a tree up-rooting itself. It is crucial and painful, even though there is no choice (P-16).

"On the day they were to leave, when Sudhamoy had said to Kironmoyee, 'Come, come let's get our things together, we have to leave/ his wife had fallen to the ground and cried pitifully. Suranjan had found it hard to believe that they were actually leaving their ancestral home. The place of his birth, the place where he had spent his childhood playing in the fields, the place by which the Brahmaputra flowed, the place where all his friends were He had not wanted to leave all this and go away. Even Maya, who had been the most compelling reason for Sudhamoy to make the decision, was unwilling to go. She had shaken her head vigorously and said, 'I don't want to leave Sufia and go away . . .' Sufia was her school friend and lived in the neighbourhood. The two would play for hours every evening with their dolls, pots and pans. They were extremely close to each another And what of Sudhamoy himself? Although he had not wavered in his decision to leave the house, he felt very sorry for he had a great deal of affection for his place of birth. But he had said, 'This life is short. I want to live peacefully with my children for the rest of my life.' But was it possible to exist peacefully anywhere at all? Probably not, Suranjan had thought."

During the war of 1971, in which East Pakistan was forced from West Pakistan and renamed Bangladesh, many Hindus can away to safety under the slaughter of Pakistan and returned when the war was over and the country safe. Sukhamoy Dutta taunts them as cowards, who do not have love for the land and not willing to take any risk for it but always want to enjoy the benefits of it. It shows that the love of Dutta is deep-rooted and not a matter of convenience (P-19).

"Sudhamoy had often said, 'When there was a war in the country, you ran away like cowards. After we won our independence, you came back to assert your heroism, and now, at the slightest provocation, you plan to go back to India. Honestly, what a bunch of cowards y o u are!' In the face of his anger and scorn, friends like Jatin Debnath, Tushar Kar, and Khagesh Kiran had begun to keep their distance. If they met by chance, they were not at ease in his presence. Slowly, Sudhamoy had become a

stranger in his own hometown. Ironically, his Muslim friends too—people like Sakur, Faisal, Majid and Ghaffar—had begun to melt away, though it was quite apparent that their reasons were different. Often, if he went to a Muslim friend's house, he would be met with statements like, 'Sudhamoy, please sit in the other room while I finish with my namaaz.' Or 'Oh, you've come today!'”

The writer fearlessly provides the data of employment in which there was an hidden bias and preference in favour of musicians to the deflation and marginalization of Hindus Dutta realizes too late that he has been side-lined because of the religion he belonged and his juniors are offered promotion because they are Muslims. This brazen and potent injustice is something that Datta did not expect at the hands of the administration which is supposed to be fair and impartial (P-21-22).

The career prospects of Sudhamoy were doomed because of his Hindu background even though he is the son of the soil like his fore-fathers and fought for the freedom of Bangladesh from the tyranny of West Pakistan. He has a deep-rooted love for the land of his birth and the writer emphatically says that patriotism is not the monopoly of any single religion and the qualities and commitment of an individual cannot be calculated or calibrated on the basis of one factor alone but is a matrix of several variables, the fore-most being the character and integrity of the individual. Sudhamoy understood that even though it is not explicitly written anywhere in the constitution of Bangladesh, it is implicitly understood that Muslims should have preference and priority in all important appointments as religion tints every public activity.

Islam is the state religion and minorities are tolerated but not encouraged to have any higher aspirations inspite of having adequate qualifications and experience to hold a public position with dignity and decorum. The writer points out the significant fact that no Hindu occupied the post of secretary or additional secretary in the administration. She courageously and transparently provides the data that three Joint Secretaries and a handful of deputy secretaries are Hindus by background and do not expect any promotions, knowing the mind-set of the ruling class. Where the police force was concerned, there were only six Hindu PCs in the entire country and in the high Court there was only one Hindu Judge. Here and there a few low level Hindu Police Officers are there but it absolutely impossible to come across a Hindu Superintendent of Police which clearly indicates the preferential treatment allotted to Muslims over Hindus.

The Writer without hesitation points out that this kind of jaundiced approach is not confined to Government jobs alone but extended to trading activity where every Hindu Trader has to take partnership with a Muslim traders in order to flourish and prosper in business. Taslima trenchantly comments that Sudhamoy would have got promotion and reached the highest echelons of his service had his name been Muhammad Ali or Salimullah Chowdary. Even more crucial is the attitude of nationalized banks which do not provide loans to Hindu traders. When the entire socio economic and political order is slanted, and stacked against Hindu Community, there is very little chance of rising in life but remain in a state of permanent marginalization. This tragic and cynical condition is revealed to Sudhamoy due to his own

experience, but due to his blind and obstinate love for the country he refuses to move from Bangladesh.

“It was at this point that Sudhamoy's stubborn nature would assert itself. 'I will not go. You go if you want to. Yes, I've left our ancestral home, but it does not mean that we are also leaving our country.'”

The writer mentions that before the constitution to a Islamic state the friends of Suranjan the son of Sudhamoy Dutta were Muslims and they used to show utmost care and concern whenever there in a problem. Where Sudhamoy had an heart attack it is not the Hindu friends of Suranjan who came to rescue but his musician friends who took his father to hospital and later donated money for hospital expenses on their minds are not contaminated by bigotry for like any modern youth cultivated open and liberal mind. It is only later that the virus of communalism entered their minds and made them myopic (P-24-25).

Like all youth, the friends of Suranjan are Muslims, even though he has a sprinkling of Hindu friends as they do not give much importance to religion, either Hindu or Islam. When Sudhamoy suffers from heart attack it is the Muslim friends of Suranjan that come to his rescue by admitting his father in the hospital and providing financial assistance without being asked to show their love and loyalty to him. Suranjan also was much attached to his Muslim friends as he has never viewed them through the prism of religion. The implication of the writer is that Islam by driving a wedge between human relationships and constricting the outlook of the people to their religion alone, warped the minds of liberal minded people and sowed the poisonous seeds of fragmenting the society which later became a monster of madness, twisting and closing the minds of decent people. She does hold people responsible for this action but rather blames the beliefs into which they were brain-washed by Islam.

Suranjan showed a deeper and abiding relationship more with his Muslim friends than his Hindu friends. It is also to be observed that in large and growing societies, one ethic or belief system cannot hold the entire population to ransom, negating the diversity and multiplicity of life-styles and out-looks. Till the promulgation of Islam as a state religion, religion was never a dividing factor in the lives of Bangladesh as Amitav Ghosh repeatedly deplores in his “The shadow line”. Suranjan does not give importance to his religion identity but to his rather being a human being first and Bengali next. He has a broad and universal out took on life transcending narrow loyalties like religion and region (P-25).

His loyalties and devotion to his country and culture was highlighted by the writer. He does not bother about narrow restrictive loyalties but realizes that, first of all he is a human being and next a Bengali by race. He is proud of Bengali heritage and does not give importance to religion as a clinching identity. In contrast to his universal idealistic projection of life, religion becomes the bed-rock for other people, deciding their out-look towards life and attitude towards other Bengalis. This resulted in permanent bifurcation among Bangladeshis, ironically reflecting the argument of M.A. Jinnah two nation theory based on religious identity and affinity.

The writer severely castigated the purblind, and fanatical minds of neighbours and youth who have known Suranjan for years but who now look at him solely from the Muslim points of view (P-27).

“For the last seven years he” had been meeting them at least once a day. Suranjan knew a couple of them personally. One of them, a boy called Aalam, often came to their house to ask for subscriptions for the club the local boys belonged to. Suranjan had sung in some of the cultural functions organized by their club, and had even thought he would teach some of the boys the songs of D.L.Roy and Hemanga Biswas. They were often in his house asking for all sorts of help; and because they were neighbours Sudhamoy often gave them free medical treatment. And it was these very same people who were threatening to beat him up today because he was a Hindu! Suranjan walked briskly in the opposite direction, not out of fear, but out of shame. He was truly ashamed and anguished by the thought of these boys beating him up. And his sense of shame and sadness was not directed towards himself, but was aimed at those who would be beating him up. Shame most affected those who inflicted torture, not those who were tortured!” When news spread that some of Hindu temples were razed and the shops of Hindus were burnt, Suranjan wants to visit the place to examine the carnage and also the mischief mongers who pretend to be custodians of Islam but in spirit arsonists and trouble makers. Suranjan is furious that these anti social elements are using Islam as a protective shield (P-33).

His idealistic vision of life transcending the barriers of religion and race, was somewhat dampened when he saw the temples being broken, shops belonging to Hindus razed to ground and the ruthlessness and brutality expressed by Muslim mobs whose minds were frenzied by religious bigotry. As a young man he wants to be part of every activity because he firmly believed that he is first class citizen of the country but it slowly dawns upon him that he was relegated to the status of second class citizen and has to live a life of fear, insecurity and non-participation. He feels that he is cut to size about his position in society and the role he is expected to play.

When some Muslim friends comment that India in spite of calling itself a democratic seen by country could allow the demolition of Babri Masjid Sudhamoy points out that the history of riots in Bangladesh is no less outstanding compared to that of India (P-35).

“I can hardly believe that this sort of thing could have happened in a secular State! What a shame! The entire national ethos, all those political announcements, their Supreme Court, the Lok Sabha, their political parties, the democratic tradition, everything they profess is actually nothing but a lot of noise and hot air. Whatever you say, Sudha-babu, compared to India, there has hardly been any rioting in this country.”

The feeling of Nostalgia of Sudhamoy for the bond of their birth beside Bramhaputa is lyrically evoked by the writer in the following words (P-37-38).

“Often, in the middle of the night, when sleep eluded them, they would get up restlessly and seek refuge on the rooftop. There, as they stared silently at the stars in the distant sky, their hearts would long for their house on the banks of the great river, Brahmaputra. On such occasions, now and again, Kironmoyee would hum the tune of a Tagore song, which talked of sweet memories that could never be forgotten. Listening to her, Sudhamoy's stern heart would soften and he would be filled with a sense of longing for the good things of the past. He would yearn for the fields that he had bounded across in his childhood and in his youth; the school courtyard; the brimming river and the path on the river bank that led through deep forests.”

The savagery and brutality of Pakistani soldiers during the struggle for independence of East Pakistan is graphically and frightening by described by the writes (P-38-39).

Even though the Muslims are beaten by Pakistan's Army, their lives are spared because of their religious affiliation but not the Hindus. Torture and painful death is the lot of Hindus and many died under severe suffering and then bodies were thrown into a well along with the bodies of Muslims who died accidentally. In death there is no way of distinguishing a Muslim from a Hindu and it is really ironical that divided in life on the lives of religion, they were united and unified in death showing that these differences are man-made and discriminatory in nature. Sudhamoy for both his participation in the freedom struggle for Bangladesh and also for being Hindu suffered more at the hands of Pakistani soldiers. His leg and three ribs were broken and his penis severely mutilated. The wounds of the body healed in course of time but not that of the mind and memory. He has to live a life of fear and deception in order to escape the torture and he has to give false Muslim names to his wife and children. When freedom came, he was overjoyed that he can call his wife and children with the names given to them. He did not mind the suffering because of his over whelming loyalty to the land of his birth.

Ironically when freedom came, in contrast to his dream of being a respectable and significant member of society, he was shunted to an insignificant status, of being not as respectable as any Muslim member, questioning his struggle and sacrifice to the cause of freedom. The freedom that came to the country negated and denigrated his own freedom as a member of Bangladesh society as the communal identity became paramount and overriding above other identities by which people live in society.

When the friend of Putta Haripada advises him to leave the country as he doesn't have much income as he way in service, he refuses saying that money is not the only measure for staying in the country. There can be other reasons as well (P-41-42).

“No, Haripada. That is not the reason. It has got nothing to do with the amount of money or the opportunities that you have. Even if you were not earning enough it would be unfair to go away. Isn't this your country? Look at me. I am a retired man, and I don't earn very much anymore. My son does not earn either. I manage with the little that I get from my meagre medical practice. I hardly have any patients

coming to me these days, but does that mean I will leave the country and go away? Those who desert their country are inhuman. Whatever be the condition of this country at the moment, Bengalis as a race are not uncivil. Yes, there is some amount of rioting now, but surely all that will subside. When there are two countries side by side, and one of them is on fire, some of the flames are bound to overflow on to the neighbouring one And, mind you, Haripada, in 1964, the riots were not started by Bengali Muslims, but by the Biharis.

The writer narrates as to how after much struggle and sacrifice of thousands of lives Bangladesh achieved freedom, a ground idealistic from work for the need country was visualized in order to inaugurate a new way of life to people but in course of time the ideals are replaced by narrow mind communal out took resembling a theological state (P-42-43).

“The State of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles: nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism. The country had worked long and hard for its independence. Beginning with the Language Movement in 1952, the struggle had been long and arduous but independence had finally been achieved. In the process, the evils of communalism and religious fanaticism were defeated. After independence, the reactionaries who had been against the very spirit of independence had gained power, changed the face of the constitution and revived the evils of communalism and unbending fundamentalism that had been rejected during the war of independence. Religion was used as a political weapon and a large number of people were forced to follow the dictates of Islam. Thus, unlawfully and unconstitutionally, Islam became the national religion of Bangladesh. As a result, communalism and religious fanaticism exploded out of control. Suranjan began to mentally catalogue the heavy toll communalism and religious fundamentalism had taken on his country”

The writer clearly concerns the prevalence of democracy in a country, which means the rule by the people, cannot continue if it does not co-exist with secularism, because secularism and democracy are like two sides of the same coin she wonders as to what happened to people who are very instance and committed to the ideal of democracy, now became narrow-minded and indifferent towards member of other religions (P-55).

Secularism is the driving force behind Bengali Muslim, who is not as bigoted as his Western Counterpart, during the country's struggle for independence. After independence was achieved, issues of national importance were ignored to such an extent, that the seeds of communalism were insidiously sowed and now became an integral part of national. Life. When the damage of closing the public life was being perpetrated, all the advocates of Secularism were silent and now cannot undo what has been done. It is these same people who fought vigorously for freedom now promote communalism without a second thought. She deplores the decline towards monolithic mentality which stifles and suffocates the national life and inflicts serious damage on the future of the nation as a whole.

She raises the rightful question that is Muslims are angry for a mosque are angry for a mosque being razed, the Hindu equally feel angry and agitated if their temples are broken. She says that Hindus have as much right to express their anger as Muslims do and that there is nothing unnatural in doing so (P-55-56).

“They are angry when a mosque is destroyed, don't they realize that Hindus will be just as angry when temples are destroyed? Just because one mosque has been demolished must they destroy hundreds and hundreds of temples? Doesn't Islam profess peace?”

“The Muslims know very well that the Hindus of this country will achieve nothing by showing their anger. That is why they go about their plundering without giving it a second thought. Has any Hindu been able to touch a single mosque? The temple at Naya Bazaar has been lying in ruins for the last two years. Children jump and play on top of it. They piss on it. Does one Hindu have the courage to fist a couple of blows on the shining walls of a mosque?”

The writer using Suranjan as a mouth piece ridicules the idea that Bangladesh is a country that believes in communal harmony. This is a worst joke of its kind as everything is contaminated by the idea of religion and not even animals were spared (P-58-59).

“And they said Bangladesh was a country that believed in communal harmony! Suranjan laughed out aloud. He was alone in the room. There was only a cat sitting by the door, and it jumped up in alarm at the sound of Suranjan's laughter. Suranjan's attention was drawn to the animal. Hadn't the cat been to the Dhakeshwari temple today? Which community did the cat belong to? Was it Hindu? Presumably it was Hindu, since it lived in a Hindu home. It was a black and white cat, and there was a softness about its eyes. It seemed to pity him. If it had the ability to pity, the cat must be Muslim! Must be a liberal Muslim! They normally looked at Hindus with a touch of pity. The cat got up and left. Perhaps it was going to the Muslim kitchen next door, since there wasn't much food being cooked in this house. In that case the cat had no communal identity. In fact only human beings had racial and communal differences and only they had temples and mosques.”

The changed and changing situation was perceived more clearly by Suranjan compared to his father whose views are tinted by idealism. He refuses to accept that there is a difference of situation between a Muslim and a Hindu due to the changing communal atmosphere of the country itself (P-63). In comparison with the generation of Sudhamoy, Suranjan has a clearer understanding, that being a Hindu is to be a second class citizen with the deprivation of all rights and privileges. They were never narrow minded conventional Hindus but professed and practiced broad-based humanism treating every one with respect. Now the question is raised by the writer as to what good this liberal, open-minded outlook has done to the family of Suranjan, in a country that is fanatically devoted to Islam and will not tolerate the existence of other faiths? Their lives are threatened and crippled by fear of physical assault.

Eventhough Dutta respects Islam very much he was not willing to convert under duress as he feels that it is against his dignity to surrender to pressure and physical force and even though severely beaten and his legs broken, he refuses to obey his mentors (P-65-66).

“They had then suspended him from a wooden beam and thrashed him. With each blow they had told him to become a Muslim; to read the kalma and announce he had converted to Islam. But Sudhamoy had held firm. Just like Kunta Kinte, the black boy in Alex Haley's *Roots*, who was mercilessly whipped for refusing to accept he was Toby, so too did Sudhamoy refuse to call himself a Muslim. His enraged tormentors finally said that whether he accepted or not, they'd make a Muslim out of him. One day, after Sudhamoy had again thwarted their efforts, they jerked up his lungi, and mutilated his penis. Sudhamoy had seen the blood and the severed foreskin and heard the harsh laughter before he had lost consciousness. After this incident, he had entertained no hope of returning to his family alive. The other Hindus in the camp had all agreed to read the kalma and convert to Islam in the hope that they'd be spared, but they were murdered regardless. Surprisingly enough, Sudhamoy's life was spared, perhaps because he had been 'converted' so radically. The torture did not stop, however, and it was a crushed and broken human being who was finally thrown out of the camp.”

When the friends of Suranjan in a discussion argue that Muslims in India are fighting for their place in India, Hindus in Bangladesh are running without fighting a person points out that there huge difference between both parties as India is a secular country where as Bangladesh has a communally, fundamentalist country in which Hindus are fundamentally relegated to the status of second class citizens (P-81).

“The other day someone was saying there have been no less than four thousand riots in India. Even then the Muslims in India have not left their country. But the Hindus here have one foot in Bangladesh and the other in India. To put it differently, the Muslims in India are fighting for their cause, while the Hindus in Bangladesh are running away.

“Goon spoke gravely. 'The Muslims in India are in a position to fight, because India is a secular State. Here, power is in the hands of the fundamentalists. There is no scope to fight in this country. The Hindus here are second class citizens. Since when do second class citizens have the power to fight?'”.

The recurrence of two nation theory adduced by Mr. Jinnah as a reason for the partition of the country in Bangladesh after a period of twenty five years was amazing in itself not to speak of the beneficiaries of this theory giving scope of Muslims to oppress Hindus (P-87).

“Stubbing out his cigarette in an ashtray, Suranjan said/My final question is: During the last phase of the British regime, India was divided into two separate nations. That was complicated enough. Today, why has Bangladesh again been drawn into the whirlpool of the two-nation controversy? Who will derive any benefit from the situation?

Haider did not answer this time. Instead, he lit a cigarette, blew out some smoke, and said, 'Actually, even Jinnah ignored the question of two nations or two races as part of the national framework. He declared, "From this day onwards, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists will not be identified by their respective religions, but by their identity as Pakistanis.

The Indian sub-continent was caught up in the unfortunate tangle of communalism which frequently erupted in violence over flimsy issues as if providing an excuse to harm other communities. Taslima clearly shames the ugly communal and uncivilized behavior of her countrymen who converted Bangladesh into an Islamic state to be narrowed down to one monolithic mindset and eliminate everyone who does belong to the community. The die-hard loyalties of Hindu Bengalis are also to be blamed when one is stubborn in ones loyalties to the land. Hindus living in Bangladesh should have realized that the complexion of the land has changed and it is no longer the land of Tagore's "Sonar Bangla" but a land glutted with communal narrowness. The narrative lays bear with embarrassing bluntness, the evils and horrors heaped on Hindu community, even though they have lived there for generations and vigorously participated in the freedom struggle for Bangladesh from Pakistani's Going by the irrefutable and inexorable logic of partition then each community should choose its place of residence, and if one has to uproot oneself and leave the place.

Bengali Hindus staying back in Bangladesh much against the wisdom of experience is only inviting trouble on their heads knowing fully well the rigid, bigoted, communal mentality of average Muslims when they cannot respect or tolerate people of other religious as being an aprons to them. The bitter and traumatic experience of Sukhamoy Dutta towards the end of the novel with the loss of his daughter made him see the truth that religion has become more important them liberal Bengali culture and people like him does not have cultural space any more. It is this shrinking of social and cultural space that it is a matter of shame as it is not only shameful to harass another human being for the sole and simple reason that he belongs to another community but also an antithesis to the world that is becoming more accommodative day by day and any kind of rigidities or intolerances is viewed as anti-diluvium and otiose in a world with dissolving borders.

END NOTES

Taslima Nasreen	-	Lajja, New Delhi, Penguin Books, India, 1994 (Page IX-X)
IBID	-	(Page 6-7)
IBID	-	(Page 8)
IBID	-	(Page 8)
IBID	-	(Page 8)
IBID	-	(Page 10)
IBID	-	(Page 13)
IBID	-	(Page 16)
IBID	-	(Page 19)
IBID	-	(Page 21-22)
IBID	-	(Page 27)
IBID	-	(Page 33)
IBID	-	(Page 35)
IBID	-	(Page 37-38)
IBID	-	(Page 38-39)

IBID	-	(Page 41-42)
IBID	-	(Page 42-43)
IBID	-	(Page 55)
IBID	-	(Page 55-56)
IBID	-	(Page 58-59)
IBID	-	(Page 63)
IBID	-	(Page 65-66)
IBID	-	(Page 81)
IBID	-	(Page 87)

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