ABSTRACT

Taslima Nasreen, born on August 25, 1962, is a renowned contemporary Bangladeshi novelist. She is recognized for her powerful and thought provoking novels. Her ability lies not only in the realistic depiction of life but also in the vision of life which she conveys through it. She is known for her writing against fundamentalism and patriarchy. She expresses her views on female sexuality freely and candidly. In her fictional works, she always favours the complete freedom of women from the social norms set by the male-dominated society. She is a novelist who writes for life's sake. The main motive behind the writing of Taslima Nasreen is to reform the society and bring equality to all irrespective of religion, caste or sex. She is a writer, a radical feminist, human rights activist and a secular humanist. She has been struggling hard for women's rights and freedom of expression. That is why she has become a symbol of free-speech. Her dreams of secularization of society and secular instead of religious education are becoming increasingly more accepted and honoured by those who value freedom.

The work is divided into six chapters. For the study, some of her novels have been chosen. These novels include Shodh (Revenge), Lajja (Shame), Homecoming, French Lover (Forashi Premik), Aparpokkho (Opposition).
The first chapter of the thesis deals with the influences on Taslima Nasreen’s writing. For a proper understanding of the genius of a literary artist it is useful, as well as interesting, to explore the formative influences of both the heredity and the particular environment in which he/ she grows up and develops his/her creative vision. Like any other individual, the mind and personality of an artist is affected by his/her social and cultural environment, but being more sensitive to the forces around him/her, he/she draws more upon them for perception and creation. He/she absorbs the varied impressions of his/her surroundings and later gives back his/her reflections in his/her creative works. In this chapter it has been shown how her female protagonists carry her personal ideas and philosophy. The authors and the books which shaped her Personality have also been discussed.

The second chapter exhibits Nasreen’s realism. In her fiction as well as in other type of writing Nasreen has openly and frankly discussed the female desire, sexuality and orgasm. She describes about the repressed knowledge of a woman. She is one of the few Bengali women novelists who has touched upon these issues. She has employed expressionistic technique to give a picturesque description of sexual acts. She has mentioned aberrations or deviations in sex. Sex aberrations or deviations, as they are sometimes termed, have always formed part of the sexual behaviour of mankind. There is no universal social
code for sexual behaviour, and relationships that are accepted in one society may be condemned or abhorred by another society.

Among the noted female writers of the century Taslima Nasreen occupies a central place by seeking to liberate female sex from the attitudes of the conventions ridden patriarchal society. She expresses her resentment against sexual colonialism that refers to a relationship between the sexes which is a relationship of dominance and subservience.

Men are the colonizers, the women are colonized. The husband-wife relationship is such type of man and woman relationship which is not based on the equal response but it is based on the concept of domination and subordination. Iqbal Kaur called it “sexual colonialism” in its most overpowering form.’ It does not let women feel that they are being victimized.” There is colonization not only in terms of social existence but also in terms of sexual domination. Man seems to pass every right to satisfy himself while a woman is supposed to make mute and positive response only. The dignity of self-respect, freedom and independent judgment comes to an end in such type of mechanical relationships. The examples of such type of relationships are the relations between Nila and Kishanlal, Hira and Altaf, Jhumur and Haroon. In these relationships, there is an involvement of husband who just needs a female body to gratify himself. Nasreen finds it difficult to reconcile with man-woman
relationship as a relationship in which man is the ‘subject’ the ‘Absolute’ and woman is the ‘object’, ‘the other’. That is why she demands sexual freedom, she avers: “In a society where woman is not free in body, how can she be free in her mind?”

Through the relationship between Nila and Benoir Dupont, Hira and Kaiser, Jhumur and Afzal, Nasreen has exhibited that love outside marriage is more gratifying than the love within marriage. All the lovers provide ecstatic sexual pleasure to those women who are considered sexual objects by their respective husbands. She does a great deal to establish that sex is natural and its free and uninhibited treatment in literature is neither pornography nor obscenity. What can possibly be described as obscene is to gratuitously associate sex and sexuality with a product which is for sale. A female body and sexuality should be (at least) her own business. Thus, Nasreen not only defies hypocrisy prevailing in the society, also she defines democracy and freedom too.

Chapter three deals with the theme of fundamentalism. Nasreen has addressed the menace of fundamentalism in her masterpiece Lajja. Lajja is the story of Dutta family—Sudhamoy, Kiranmoyee, and their two children—Suranjan and Maya living in Bangladesh. Sudhamoy is a staunch nationalist and an atheist who loves his motherland like a true son of Bangladesh. A great idealist, he believes with a native mix of optimism that his motherland will not
let him down at any cost. The background of the novel is related to a shameful fanatic incident in India when Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was demolished by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. The incident enraged the religious feelings of Muslims all over the world. The most horrible consequences of this incident were felt in Bangladesh where Muslim fundamentalists treated Hindu community in a very appalling way. The book deals with the persecution of Bangladesh’s Hindus, a religious minority, by the Muslims who are in majority.

Nasreen has termed religion as a divisive force. It does not often teach people to love one another. On the contrary, it often preaches them to hate people of a different faith. Religion also leads people to depend on fate and thus lose self-confidence. It unnecessarily glorifies poverty and sacrifice and in this way serves the vested interests of the wealthy few. She asserts:

The fundamentalist prescription for all ills of society is severely questionable. Obviously, they cannot go far. Even if they assume power here and there they cannot run a state on just religious rules, and I am sure they will also be challenged by the people after some time.

Nasreen does not find any difference between religion and fundamentalism. She considers religion the root, and from the root
fundamentalism grows as a poisonous stem. If we remove fundamentalism and keep religion then one day or another fundamentalism will grow again. To get rid of religion as well as fundamentalism, people should be educated; especially they should receive a secular education. And the secular humanists should unite and fight fundamentalists without any compromise.

Chapter four concerns about the reasons for women’s sufferings. Female has been considered subordinate and subservient to the male. In her case, the dictum anatomy is destiny was applied and perpetuated, while the male conquered and ruled the world. Woman was only an object, a commodity or else `a second sex', or `the sex'. A woman had no independent existence. She existed not in her own right but as an accessory to man. She had no definition, apart from the one that man gave to her.

There are basically two theories which relate the reasons for women's sufferings. The first one is feminist theory which bases its idea on the biological differences between male and female. Another theory which explains women's oppression is Marxist theory which focuses on the socio-economic reasons for it. In this chapter, attempt has been made to synthesize the Marxist and Feminist perspectives on the origin of women's oppression and then it would be shown how Nasreen has employed these two theories in her novels.
Nasreen clarifies that the most unwanted thing for a married couple is a female baby. If a female baby is born, it is not uncommon that either the wife gets a divorce for her crime of having given birth to a female or the wife must spend her life in disgrace. As has been told in the first chapter, she believes that a woman's destiny is to be ruled by the father in childhood, by the husband when she is young, and by her son when she is old.

In her novels, Nasreen makes it clear that all the norms set by male-dominated society, are used for crushing woman's position in the society. Nilanjana Mandal in *French Lover*, Jhumur in *Shodh*, are the best examples of it.

In chapter five, it has been shown how Nasreen has consistently attacked the male elite class of Bangladeshi society by initiating a break with the tradition of Bangladeshi literature. The literature of Bangladesh is replete with instances where self-sacrificing motherhood is celebrated. For example, in one of the classical texts, Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961), Daria, the central character, kills herself to expiate her sin when she gives birth to an illegitimate child as a result of her rape. Daria confronts the patriarchal imperative of self-sacrifice in the face of "moral duty." The sign of motherhood in Osman is invested with symbolic meanings, and is idealized through the self-immolation of Daria's body. But in Taslima no such self-immolation can be endorsed. In
Nasreen’s novels, we do not see a celebration of the metaphoric motherhood of Janani; instead we see a delinking of motherhood from the ideal of self-sacrifice. She invests the sign with a politics of subversion and protest. Unsanctioned pregnancies are endorsed in Nasreen’s novels with an agenda of empowering women, and an illegitimate child, the cause of Daria’s tragic suicide is transformed, as a deliberate measure, to gain material ends in Taslima's stories. Reading Taslima in light of Osman's hegemonic text brings to focus the strategies of her oppositional discourse. Such a comparison also underscores how Taslima initiates an epistemic violence and foregrounds emancipatory possibilities for Bangladeshi women.

In the context of women's subalternization, how do Taslima's representations foreground a new episteme? In Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge dynamics, an episteme consists of the "unitary body of theory" which tends to privilege some knowledges while it subjugates certain others ranking them low in its hierarchical paradigm. These disqualified knowledges pose challenges to the power and organization of the dominant episteme by claiming attention to their oppositional emergence. Taslima's writings bring to the forefront such subjugated knowledges. As Hayden White in his interpretation of Foucault's tropology has explained, the dominant trope (metaphor, simile, symbol characteristic of the discourse of a period) of a given community of discourse determines both "what can be seen" in the world, as
well as "what can be known about it." Taslima's writings intrude upon this tropological field with challenge. One crucial example is her assertion of female sexuality which is a taboo for the women of Bangladesh.

In Nasrees's representations, the female body, far from being mangled (as in "Breast Giver") is not only intact, but always a site of abundant energy and desire enabling us to ask whether it must be locked in a space of non-enunciation. At the end of "Breast Giver," Jashoda lay dying and "the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes." Unlike Jashoda, the heroines of Taslima's novels experience ecstasy and pleasure simultaneously as they engage in subverting the agenda of their husbands. For example, in Shodh, Jhumur is transfigured by her sexual experience with Afzal, a man other than her husband. At the same time she makes herself pregnant by him in order to subvert patriineality.

It is important to underscore that in her novels, Taslima's attack is consistently directed against the middle class, the professional, and the power elite. She points out that we can no longer relegate the problem of polygamy and desertion of women to the village, its peers (religious figures) or the peasant men who inhabit a rather subordinate rank in the chain of patriarchy. Taslima attacks where the attack is overdue. The middle class man, neither unenlightened, nor prejudicial, is brought to the spotlight as the practitioner of
patriarchal oppression. In *Aparpokkho* and *Shodh*, the heroines' adversaries are such men. They are not religious figures but rather secular elites.

Chapter seven deals with conclusion. Nasreen possesses a deeper knowledge of biological mechanisms in human beings and presents the phenomena of sexual instinct and its varied manifestations, as it is really apart from marriage and family.

Nasreen’s fiction contains a multi-dimensional picture of sexual reality. She emphasizes that it is an elemental gravitation, a compelling thrust, that goads the opposite sex towards biological fulfillment of one another. It is highly captivating and spontaneous and least concerned with human scruples. Under its powerful spell, all other human faculties go benumbed. Nasreen considers sex as an asset for a woman. In *French Lover* her heroine, Nila thinks that if she could not have great figure with which Benoir plays she could have passed her life alone like Molina or could have ended her life like Mithu. She is hungry for love and sexuality is important to get the love. For a man, a woman is a sexual object. If she does not serve that particular purpose, nobody would pay any attention to her.

In her works, Nasreen seems to point out that sexual urge is an animal magnetism. It starts like a mysterious ignition and arouses in human beings a sudden consciousness of elemental affinity between opposite sexes. Through the
relationship of Nila and Benoir, Nasreen seems to convey that it is exceedingly
difficult to break the bond of elemental affinity once it is established between
the opposite sexes. This psycho-elemental relatedness between a man and a
woman is of paramount value, its reality is progressively delimited, and before
its pressing claims all personal considerations are set aside.

It is significant that Nasreen comments on powerlessness and revenge as
motives for writing satire. As a feminist writer, she understands and is affected
by the oppression of women in a society dominated by men. She is merciless
with self-professed intellectuals who exempt themselves from the responsibility
to facts.

The kind of heroine that Nasreen projects again and again, created after
her own image, is individualized for her diverse roles. Sometimes, their
biographies contain parallels to Nasreen. Kalyani of Homecoming Jhumur of
Shodh, all have some personal history in common with Nasreen.

A serious artist Taslima Nasreen selects her own vision and her novels
are offered as true examples of the experiences of her time. Her art comes from
her loyalty to the life we actually live. She has a great power of observation, her
ear is true, and her fiction is rich with the sounds of authentic voices. She judges
as well as chronicles a complex social and economic reality, exposing the
pretentions of men and the illusions of women in patriarchal society. As a social
critic, she has consistently and scrupulously sought truth. Unlike other women
writers, she is neither hopeful nor sentimental. Her range is wide, her eyes and ear are keen and her literary commitment is to the durable and universal facts of human life, candidly and often consciously recorded.

Nasreen holds religion, state and society—the trio, responsible for women’s degraded position in the world. All these factors are used to tame women’s freedom. She is of the view that until and unless, a woman stands up against these man-made systems, she can’t survive in this hostile world. She should not be like ‘a parasitic plant but like a tree with strong roots. She alone, can become many. She, alone, can become immense and limitless.’

Taslima Nasreen is a freethinker who forms views independent of authority or dogma, be it from a divine or human source. There is a definite socialistic slant in the writings of Nasreen. Prose being an ideal medium of communication, Nasreen attempts to make her literary works a vehicle of her social ideology.