Moving from feminism to the themes related to home and homelessness one realises that this theme is of paramount significance for Taslima Nasreen. All her life, she has craved for a home; all her life she has been rendered homeless by the forces beyond her control. She has suffered homelessness not merely as a woman but also as a creative artist and as an individual.

However, before moving further, it is, perhaps, desirable to define these key terms—home and homelessness. Home means security not only physical but social and emotional also. Home is a place where one feels comfortable and secure. On the contrary, homelessness means not having a space where a man feels secure and comfortable in physical, material, social and emotional sense. He is not at ease with himself and his surroundings. He does not seem to belong; he is uprooted and alienated.

Early man’s first step towards civilization to live together in a herd was a result of a sense of insecurity in the face of undefined fears from the physical and natural forces which he could not properly understand. Later on, the problem of inheriting property etc. gave birth to the concept of family and home. With the growing need to dwell in a community life, his craving for home became more intense and gradually home came to acquire a symbol that stands for more than a house, that is, four walls and a roof. Home, in the human world, stands for many things. It may mean one’s property and succession to it and a family order. Being homeless, on the other hand, may mean want of all these things besides the sense of ease, comfort and security.

For generations man has come to confront the state of homelessness not only in the traditional sense of having a premises which he can call his own but a state where he feels uncomfortable for he does not have a sense of belonging; he does not feel rooted. It may be a mental or spiritual state where he does not find himself connected with his immediate environment. In the Old Testament we find God exiling Adam and Eve from their heavenly abode, Garden of Eden, for they defied Him in tasting the forbidden fruit. As a mark of punishment, God pushed them on to this earth making them eternal exiles ever in search of a home as comfortable as their first one. In many religious poets this yearning to go back to the original divine home is fully manifest. Take for example, William Wordsworth’s famous poem "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" where he says:

Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home: (63-66)

If Adam’s eviction meant loss of divine bliss which he enjoyed to the core in his heavenly abode, at the human level it implies that a state of homelessness is always a cause of pain, misery and agony—a state which may disturb and damage harmony in the physical, material, social and emotional sense. It may destroy the spiritual fibre of man making him stoop low in all the sense of the term.

The problem of homelessness arises as a consequence of contradictions and contrariness in religious, racial or national identities and can result in displacement of individuals or communities in the literal sense. The second book of Old Testament records the massive exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The Jews remained homeless for ages till their long cherished dream of a homeland was realised in 1948 when a part of Palestine was carved out as Independent state of Israel.

Since the early stages of civilization the White and the Arab traders have wrenched men and women from their homes and sold them in slave markets. Nearer home, Dalai Lama, the religious head of Tibet has been living in exile in our country since 1959. It may be pointed out here that sometimes the movement of people from one place to another on their own is voluntary as people go in search of livelihood and greener pastures. However, many times it is the physical calamities, economic crisis or political turmoil which leads to mass migration as happened at the time of the Partition of India in 1947. The Partition of India witnessed the largest exchange of population that has ever taken place in the history of the sub-continent. The Partition brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history, “... 12 million people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly half a million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped, mutilated” (Malgonkar 1).

However, this Partition was not a single incident which left millions of people homeless in its wake. Soon after the historical Partition of India in 1947, the eastern wing of Pakistan started realising that it was being treated merely as a colony by West Pakistan. In 1971, Bengalis fought Muktiyuddh during which a large number of Hindus as well as the intellectual non-Hindus who supported self-rule were considered as enemies of the State and killed in large numbers. Not to speak of the aftermath, more than 10 million people had to flee their homeland and became homeless.
Homelessness created tragic situations and the story of sufferings of the homeless people on both sides of the border was almost the same. Such examples of attachment to and detachment from home can easily be multiplied. It all boils down to the fact that home occupies a very significant place in the scheme of human life. Its importance cannot be over-emphasised. But it may be asserted that a safe and secure haven is enjoyed only by a few blessed ones. Countless people are rendered homeless; some psychologically, many others geographically. Lack of sense of belonging is painful but geographical displacement is pathetic. The theme of home and homelessness is discussed in the literatures of all the countries and also has been a part of their folklore though the ordeal of those who literally do not have a roof over their heads is hardly within the full reach of any artist. Their wounds cannot be stopped from lacerating, still literary icons like Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar and Amitav Ghosh, to name only a few, have tried to put a balm on the suffering hearts and souls of those innocent people who were driven out like dumb driven cattle from one country and got the tag of refugees in another. In *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Khushwant Singh’s hero Jugga, at the cost of his life, helps his beloved Noorie cross the Indian border to reach her destined home, that is, Pakistan since her old home in India has discarded her. The novel was a great success at describing the ugly practice of deportation of humans through trains which provided no security and became ghost trains consequently. The scenes have their parallels in Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) too which graphically depicts the pain of those who leave their homes and homeland in search of a safer home but are mutilated brutally.

If nature creates disasters, the victims can be consoled and comforted, but this sheer shameless suffering inflicted upon man by man has no valid explanation or justification. If people are displaced by natural calamities, the homeless can be rehabilitated, but what reassurance is there for those who are tossed from one place to another as undesirable objects? It is at such testing times that the intellectual community, a bastion of secularism, sets out to redress the balance and produces fire-brands like Taslima Nasreen, who in the midst of issues like women empowerment and religious extremism feels the nerve of the wounded psyche of such homeless sufferers. About one and a half decade ago she was badly shaken by the aftermath of Babri mosque demolition. Feeling helpless in restoring communal harmony and putting herself in place of the riot victims, she tried to delve deep into the minds of the minority people and understand how fierce the sense of insecurity is and how it forces them to abandon their
homes and become refugees. In a true work of art there may be much more than what appears on the surface. Among various themes such as feminism, humanism, secularism, pessimism, sense of alienation, communalism, intolerance, violation of human rights and fundamentalism with its corollary of communal killings etc., the disruption of home is an important theme of Taslima Nasreen’s acknowledged masterpiece Lajja. Unrelenting sufferings inflicted upon people make them wonder whether they should stay or leave their homeland. In this way, the theme of home and homelessness becomes a prominent theme in the novel. The “home” motif runs through the whole novel from the beginning to the end. The word home occurs umpteen times in the novel and so cannot fail to draw a careful reader’s attention to its thematic claim. The very opening lines of the novel introduce the theme of home.

Suranjan lay on his bed. Every now and again his sister, Nilanjana whom they called Maya would come into the room and say ‘Dada, aren’t you going to wake up and do something before it is too late?’ Suranjan knew that Maya wanted him to look for a place where they could go into temporary hiding from the danger that threatened them. But Suranjan was in a rebellious mood. Why should he flee home simply because his name was Suranjan Dutta? (1)

The novel starts with the troublesome thought of fleeing home and ends with the decision to flee home. In between come the events that lead to the end, which, as Aristotle has said, should be so crafted as to seem inevitable or at any rate probable. The end is the fulfilment of what is potential in the beginning.

In fact, Taslima Nasreen has long been obsessed with the idea of home and talks about it in detail in her autobiographical book Mujhe Ghar Le Chalo (Take Me Home) (2007). Though it was quite late, in 1994, that she herself was turned out of her homeland, Bangladesh, she has suffered from a sense of lack of security and fulfilment since her early childhood when she was a witness to her mother’s sufferings at the hands of her snobbish father who refused to provide her any emotional or financial support and had once turned her mother out of his house. In Selected Columns she writes, “I had always craved for my own house. In my childhood I would construct a room, a verandah out of bricks that my sister and I carried up to the terrace” (92). Taslima’s mother lived out a life of misery and privation, and all this awakened in Taslima Nasreen an urge to negate this tyranny and dominance, and she left the home, which, in the words of Meredith Tax, “emphasised the distortions: religious repression, female illiteracy, cruelty towards servants
and the sexual abuse that descends without warning upon children, so that home is no refuge but a place of fear, and the ground is constantly shifting under their feet” (“Taslima’s Pilgrimage”) Thus she tried to establish a home of her long cherished dreams that ensured freedom, intellectual gossips and literary creativity; a private place to call her own home where she could live according to her own norms and on her own terms, and which were not dictated by her dictatorial father. Expressing her search for a house and dream of a home she writes in Selected Columns:

I’m looking for a room in this city – to sleep in at night. After working nine to five in a city hospital, my weary steps want to rest, my tired body craves [for] shelter—I search desperately for a room. A room where I can do just as I please, without thinking of the past and the future; where I may bathe naked, or sing out loud or with a cup of tea (made with my own hands), I can write a marvelous poem. Even now I am looking for a room to sit in, to call friends over. My salary is inadequate for a spacious flat, I am looking just for a room. Though from childhood I had dreamt of a house—a dream house that I have decorated endlessly in my mind. (81)

Her three marriages were unsuccessful and left on her youthful psyche an everlasting scar that gave her the anguish of being homeless in the social sense of man and wife living together in a brick and cement building. The following lines of Selected Columns express the pain of a broken home: “I had long wanted a home of my own. When I grew up and my dream spread its roots, I did not realize that the man with whom I lived was an imposter. He did not understand an iota of my dreams. He only craved the flesh of a woman” (93).

During her career as a medical practitioner she tried to take a house on rent and make her own home and would take all kinds of liberties with her ex-husband Rudra and other male friends. Soon she became an eye sore of conservatives and was scandalized by a magazine Sugandha. All this became unbearable for her father and brother who forcibly carried her to their home, devastating everything that constituted her dreams. Hassan Al Abdullah, a poet and teacher at New York City High School, writes in his review of Ka, Taslima’s autobiographical book, how they did not even give her any time to comprehend what was going on in their minds and started inflicting brutality upon her:
Her father immediately pushed her down the floor and kicked her in the stomach. She was stunned on the situation. While she managed to stand up, she got another push and a kick in the back. She fell on the refrigerator and cut her lips. Her brother, who was standing by, threw the tabloid on her face. “Look, what they wrote about you! This is what you do here!” yelled her father. (“Taslima Nasreen’s Ka”)

This agony of turning homeless in spite of having a sustaining career and a decent income was an anguish that was revealed in her writings. The novel *Phera* is conceived and constructed entirely on the issue of home and homelessness. After her despairing experience in search of home in Bangladesh, Kalyani, the heroine, is at her wits’ end as to where her home is—in India or in Bangladesh. In *Shodh* and *Phera*, Taslima Nasreen’s preoccupation with feminism has its corollary in the form of the theme of home and homelessness as it is mostly the female characters that have to seek the security of a home but are in due course rendered homeless. For Jhumur of *Shodh*, her in-laws’ home is not a place where she can find harmony, understanding and self-respect. It is, in a way, an arena for the perpetual tug-of-war for self-assertion with its heroine, Jhumur on one side and her husband Haroon together with other members of the family on the other side. Four walls do not make a home, so, in order to get respite from the claustrophobic atmosphere she is forced to live in, she gets a job so as to be away from this home for at least some part of the day. Maya of *Lajja* is constantly in search of a safe and secure home and leaves home earlier than the other members of the family. Later on, she is dragged away from her house most brutally by the rioters. The very opening scene of *French Lover* depicts the heroine leaving home, her parental one, her ominous exposure to the outer world and a bleak indelible mark that it leaves on her sub-consciousness. The second chapter, “The Visiting Bride” opens with the sentence “Nila felt like a guest in Kishanlal’s home” (13). The third chapter is entitled: “Life at Home”. The fourth chapter has the opening dialogue: “Why don’t you leave that house?” (79). The fifth chapter also mentions house in the first sentence. In fact, most of the chapters of *French Lover* make a mention of home or house on the very first few pages.

Nila lives out a life of a lonely prisoner in her husband Kishanlal’s flat. It is no home for her. Nila does not regard her parental home in India, too, as her home. Her mother, Molina, was a victim of grave atrocities and tyranny unleashed by her father, so she holds him responsible for
her misery and hates him, hence, it would not be wrong to call Nila the reverse reflection of the subdued and tormented Molina. Then, there is no bond of love and attachment between her and her brother. In a way, India offers no love to her. So she does not look upon India as her home. But in Paris also she is not able to establish a home for herself. It is very difficult to find an accommodation. At Danielle’s residence she is coerced into submission to her lesbian advances and apparently is not at home. Then she receives a stunning assault at her dignity when she is raped by Sunil, her brother’s friend, whom she has until now looked upon as a brother, in the house where she feels at home the most and seeks refuge when she is literally homeless.

Nila finds herself on cloud nine after she manages to purchase a house in Paris, “Now I have a home of my own and you know how good that feels, to have your own home” (217). She furnishes it lovingly as her mother would have done. But a real home is one where one lives with one’s relations and shares their joys and sorrows. Robert Frost has said in “The Death of the Hired Man”:

Home is the place where,
When you have to go there,
They have to take you in. (28-30)

Nila’s French lover, with whom she dreams of making home is bound more to his wife and daughter than to Nila, and is a casual visitor to Nila’s house. Not quite unexpectedly, the home crumbles under Benoir’s dilemma of a choice between his family and his beloved, and Nila’s realisation of the truth. With all her enthusiastic vigour, when she seeks to settle with her French lover, and spends all she has inherited to furnish her home, she is crestfallen when Benoir’s French chauvinism comes to surface. Nila abandons her husband as well as her lover on discovering that both are self-centred and hedonistic. Benoir had even refused to stand surety for Nila to take an accommodation on rent. Once again she is left alone and homeless. The causes of her homelessness are: her being a low caste and thus a mismatch for her first lover, Sushanta, her being a misfit with her Punjabi husband, over whom she adopts a superior academic stance, and her allegiance to an alien culture, which causes her French lover trample her elitism underfoot. She is a nowhere woman who does not have a place to belong to. Till the last page of the novel she is a tireless quester of a viable home.

All of Taslima Nasreen’s heroines feel homeless and crave for their own space called home, in fact, three of her protagonists namely, Suranjan, Kalyani and Nila are exiles, two
literally, one symbolically, as they believe that it is love that makes four walls a home. Jhumur of
_Shodh_ feels suffocated in her far too well-furnished house of her in-laws and desires that she,
too, like Sebati and Anwar had her own private place, “Listening to Sebati I wished Haroon and I
too had a place of our own, so we could run a house together, sharing the expenses of the
housework” (83). She considers her husband’s place mere hell and yearns for freedom. For her,
love is the basic requirement for making home. Where there is love, there is home. She says, “It
was better to live with love amidst wilderness than to remain lonely in Paradise” (90). Ranu,
Jhumur’s sister-in-law, too craves for her own home and asks Jhumur, “Don’t you want to have a
place of your own? I do” (188). Jhumur, frustrated by Haroon’s behaviour, is speechless, “I
laughed playing with her finger and muttered to myself: _I too had such dreams, Ranu dear, a
dream of a life under an open sky. Imprisoned in this hell hole I have forgotten all that, forgotten
even what the sky looks like_” (189).

Later, too, she confides in Ranu, “It’s always nice to have a place of one’s own. It has
been comfortable to have stayed in the joint family. I haven’t had to worry about where to live,
what to eat… But I’ll breathe more easily in my own home, no matter the hardship.” (212)
Shifting the topic, Jhumur asks Ranu, “Ei Ranu, does Hasan love you?” Ranu, having much
deeper wisdom and practicality, replies, “Love? What does one need that for? I want a home, a
husband, a family of my own. I dream of a place I can do up, cook, wait for my husband to come
home…” (212). Like Ranu, Jhumur too wants to run away from the problems and pressures of
the joint family and have a home in a quiet spot.

Kakima in _Shodh_ is literally homeless after Nitun Kaka sells his house to leave for India
forever, but is unable to sustain the pangs of separation from his motherland and dies of heart
attack. Now she has to take refuge in the house of Jhumur’s father for two months and then take
a place near theirs on rent.

In her novels, Taslima Nasreen peeps into human psyche and tries to explore very
adroitly the dim domains of the conscious and even unconscious of her major characters. The
characters who suffer from a sense of homelessness and alienation do not remain normal social
human beings in the strict sense of the word. Their homelessness as well as the awareness of
this loss makes them behave in an eccentric manner. Suranjan is serious and slow of tongue and
leads a sequestered and morbid life during and after the outbreak of communal riots. The sense
of alienation plays havoc with his mental state. Being a Hindu, his home in the Muslim-
dominated country Bangladesh is in jeopardy. He is horrified at the prospect of being homeless. Long before Suranjana leaves his home in literal sense, he suffers from a sense of alienation in his own home. He is furious at his parents’ and his sister’s sense of escapism and stops communicating with them, retreating into his own traumatized self which ultimately brings him on the brink of nervous breakdown. The agony of isolation makes Suranjana alienated from his home, his family, his parents and even from himself.

Then, Taslima Nasreen’s female characters like Jhumur, Kalyani and Nila feel alienated in their husbands’ homes because the other members of the family do not let them share a sense of belonging to the house. Jhumur of \textit{Shodh} married Haroon because she loved him but is detached from everybody else because of their conservative ideas. Soon after conceiving her first baby, she sees Haroon’s sordid self and in spite of keeping her physical relationship intact, she is most distanced from him emotionally and psychologically. She is much more alienated emotionally from her husband as she is geographically distanced from her parents and her sister Nupur, from whom she could get emotional support to integrate her crumbling self and the lack of which pushed her in a kind of distorted negativity and vengeance.

Kalyani of \textit{Phera} also married Anirban for love but she also undergoes constant suffering because of her sense of alienation. She is an alien in India being away from her homeland, Bangladesh; she is an alien in her husband’s home because of her upbringing in an alien culture; and most significantly she is an alien because at sub-conscious level, she is always transported to her parental home in Bangladesh whenever there is a reference to home. More than her husband, she is able to connect herself to a Bangladeshi refugee who works as an accountant in her school, and whom she supports blindly in spite of his being involved in a scam. She also has an emotional attachment with her former lover Badal, for whom she promises to Swapan to send financial help from time to time even though she is not sure whether he is the same Badal whom Swapan is referring to:

\begin{quote}
Kalyani didn’t know what to say. She felt that although her household was in disorder, she hadn’t encountered any great misfortune, yet her life was really in shambles, her dreams shattered. Would she try to get hold of Badal’s address? Perhaps, if she tried really hard, she could see how Badal was spending his days in humiliation and neglect, with feelings of being a failure. But how could she come and stand in front of him as she was. She who had everything one could
\end{quote}
hope for; husband, children and money, happiness too if one could call it that.
And it was just possible that the Badal, Swapan talked about, was not the Badal
she knew; the name was common enough. (107)

In Nila of *French Lover*, Taslima Nasreen does not let her love for Bangladesh and India
come to the fore and provide her any sense of attachment to her motherland. Nila is forever a
forlorn character. She is an alien in India, an alien in France. She was an alien in her father’s
home, before and after her marriage with Kishanlal. She has no emotional integration with her
husband who does not match her in sense of culture, in her taste for art and literature and her
attitudes and aptitudes. For a short span, she tries to cope with him and cooks, washes up and
cleans the house for him but her dream of a perfect home soon gives way under the shattering
impact of Kishanlal’s idea of a perfect Indian housewife. In spite of all the comforts that
Kishanlal provides for her in a foreign land, Nila does not feel at home in Kishanlal’s home; it is
just a gilded cage for her where she feels trapped and suffocated, and craves for freedom.

Though not being at home is a great loss at the psychological level, the loss of material
home doubles the distress, as it happens in case of the Duttas of *Lajja*. Earlier, in 1971 when
tension was mounting and the family had moved to Brahmpalli, Suranjana was ill at ease. In 1990,
too, when there were communal disturbances, Suranjana’s family had to take refuge in Kamal’s
house, fearing that something untoward might happen to them. Once again, as the communal
harmony is jeopardised, a similar unease grips him now. The idea of leaving home rankles
Suranjana, “Why did he have to run away from his own home. Kamal had never had reason to do
so. Was not this country as much his as it was Kamal’s” (1). As a result, he stands against the
general current and fights an unequal losing battle. He considers himself the son of the soil. He
expresses his firm resolve saying, “I won’t leave my home whatever the circumstances” (2).

Leaving one’s home is a sort of snapping all ties with its norms and conditions. At the
same time the inmates of the home too lose their hold over the person outgoing. When Maya
determines to leave home to seek shelter in Parul’s house, Suranjana is bitter at the prospect of her
marrying Jahangir, a Muslim boy, whom she is in love with. But he hesitates to stop her as he
has no control over her moves once she leaves. He cannot restrain her, “And now that she had
left the house, who was there to stop her?” (14). Nila’s father, too, who is not happy with her
sexual escapades with her French lover, cannot do anything except show his resentment in a
letter to her. In *Shodh*, Jhumur’s leaving her home for the flat downstairs is symbolic of crossing
the *Luxman Rekha* of morals and ethics of home and its rules. One can do anything out of home but one has to abide by certain restraints of life if he wants to return. Mojammel of *French Lover* is not returning home as he is not ready to go back with nothing. Nila asks Mojammel:

‘Why don’t you go back?’

‘Home? I’ve spent so many years in the hope of earning some good money. What will I do if I went back home now? At this age I won’t get any jobs and what will I eat? How would I show my face there? I can’t go back with nothing. Even with such menial jobs here, I’m able to send back some money home. At least I pay for my younger brother’s studies.’ (34)

Moving away from home willingly or unwillingly also poses a threat to one’s sense of protection. Though Sarlabala sends her daughter, Kalyani to Kolkata for safety reasons, she (the daughter) is constantly vulnerable to sexual attacks from her cousin Saumitra. That is why in Maya’s view, a home over which the clouds of danger, death and destruction are hovering is no home. She wants to leave such a home and go to Parul’s home for considerations of safety. The Duttas had a large ancestral home in Mymensingh, but Sudhamoy had to sell the property and move to Dhaka when Maya, then six years old, was abducted. She came home after two days and remained shocked and silent. So this house was not considered safe. Ironically enough, Maya who had been the most compelling reason for Sudhamoy to make the decision, was unwilling to leave. For her, home does not mean living with family members only; she has a good attachment with her friends too with whom she played with her dolls in her girlhood. So home is a place with which one associates one’s memories of childhood where one played insignificant but binding games.

Thus, home is made of its inmates, its rules and regulations, its associations and its surroundings. That is to say, persons, places, locations, environment and incidents become part and parcel of home. *Kironmoyee of Lajja* finds it very hard to adjust to her new surroundings.

“She would remember how the guavas in her garden were always the best in town, and she hoped that the green coconut trees were still being taken care of...” (20). Kalyani too associates her memories of home with the trees they had in its vicinity:

The pond had disappeared, so too the wild rose tree that grew at its edge, throwing up white starry blossoms. The clump of bamboo trees was not there, the mango trees, the six of them, offering mangoes of different variety, gopla-bhog or
fajli, were non-existent. The guava tree, custard apple and kamranga tree had also vanished. The date tree with an earthen pot hung around its trunk, she would see taken down, standing shivering in the cold during misty mornings, steam issuing from her mouth, was also not there. Her friends had woven garlands of shuili flowers lying on the ground in the winter months. Sarlabala had dried the stems of shuili, ground them into yellow paste and added it to the pilaf to make it appear saffron coloured. The flowering Kamini tree was nowhere to be found. Once its heavy smell would invade the room and make Sarlabala knock at the door and exclaim, ‘Shut the window, the snakes will come out when the air is heavy with scent.’ There was nothing! (62-63)

One likes to stick to home as long as one can. In Phera, Kalyani cries her heart out at the time of her departure for India, “She kept holding onto the door of her room, to the veranda pillar, clutched Sarlabala’s hands and flung her arms around the tulsi tree, growing in the courtyard” (5). Kalyani’s father had explained to her that he could not come to Kolkata on account of his illness but later on, while on her visit to Bangladesh, Kalyani wonders:

Was illness the sole reason for his not leaving? Kalyani, was convinced he couldn’t sever the bonds that tied him to his dear country, more important to him than his children. The pull he felt for his land was like the umbilical cord connecting him secretly to the land. (60)

In Lajja, Kironmoyee had fallen on the ground and cried pitifully on the day they left their ancestral home for Dhaka. In Shodh, Nitun Kaka dies of heart stroke that he suffers due to the pangs of separation from his homeland.

Affinity for home has a strong psychological base. When a man is away, he remembers home and craves to return to it, and if he is not able to do so, he suffers. He becomes nostalgic and is full of reminiscences of the time when he formed relationships with his near and dear ones which remain imprinted on his memory and emerge again and again. Recalling home, he relives his past, which was never dead or lost, and finds connection. Suranjan wonders if people really felt that this country was no longer a safe place to live in, “why did they weep so much at the prospect of leaving? Five years back Suranjan’s uncle from Calcutta had visited them at their home in Brahmanbaria, and had broken down and wept like a child” (30).
Suranjan’s father Sudhamoy remains committed to his homeland Bangladesh till the very last. In actual fact, their problems multiply when Sudhamoy refuses to leave his country. Niloo Kalaam also explains, “Over the years Sudhamoy and his family has suffered severely as a result of their refusal to leave their country.” *(Peace Magazine)*

When some of his relatives begin to quit Bangladesh he says: “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”(7). In Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* too, Debi Dayal’s father, Tek Chand, cannot untie the chords that tie him to his homeland. He vanishes from the convoy: “They are going to my land’ he mumbled, ‘I am running away from it. Leaving my wife alone—just lying in that room’”(380-381). Really, if the desire to live in the rootedness of home is strong, the desire to die in one’s native place is even stronger. Kalyani urges upon her husband to cremate her in her own country, Bangladesh. She requests him:

‘Put me there when I die.’

‘There? Where?’

‘Where I was born. One should die where one was born.’ (33)

As a matter of fact, in earlier times, it was considered ominous if a person did not get space in his homeland for last rites. Sudhamoy’s words tally with those of Jethamoshai in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, who is confronted with the same situation:

Once you start moving you never stop. That’s what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will ever have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and will die here. (215)

In the prevailing circumstances, the above quoted lines appear to be a kind of prophecy. Yesterday it was Bengal; today it is Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam and what-not. In the communal clashes in Assam in 2008, around 70,000 people were rendered homeless. For many months, Kandhmal’s Christians were brutalized, their homes pillaged and burnt. People of a family could not stand together to save another member from being burnt alive. They were chased into forests and left to take refuge in camps. They became refugees in their own country and sought refugee status from the UN. In fact, different religious identities have long been causes of displacement of innocent people. We
have similar repercussions in *Lajja* when Sudhamoy recalls the days before independence: “For seven years he had lived in a small bamboo hut under the assumed name of Abdus Salaam in the village of Arjunkhila in Phulpur. Suranjan was called Saber and people called Kironmonyee Fatema” (39).

Home is a place of comfort and safety. Tearing away from home results in physical death of Jethamoshai of *The Shadow Lines*. He was living peacefully with a Muslim, Khalil, and when grandmother stubbornly wants to take him away he is killed in riots. Forcibly taken from home, Sudhamoy is kept in an internment camp by some Muslim fanatics who want to convert him. When he refuses they torture him to no end. When he returns home after a few days, he is a broken man both physically and mentally. Sudhamoy’s plight reminds us of the concentration camps of Germany where Jews were killed in gas chambers. Anita Desai, in her *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1987), too, gives a very heart-rending picture of Hugo Baumgartner’s father who returns home from such a camp:

His mother ran to greet him with her arms thrown up in an abandon of relief, but his father turned away, he did not want her embrace, or Hugo’s. He turned his back to them, shoulders hunched in his thin green jacket, and did not want to speak. He would say nothing about Dachau. When they came near him, he began to shiver – the shiver started in the back of his neck, making his head jerk like a hen’s, and then ran down into his shoulders so that they shook. He had to go to bed and they pulled on quilt after quilt, trying to make him stop shivering. Even his face twitched on the pillow, pulled in every direction. Eventually he turned to his side and stared at the wall. Now and then a remnant of that shiver made the quilts suddenly heave, subside. (41)

Anita Desai, the daughter of a German mother and Gujarati father, has been an expert in landing in the hearts of the victims of cultural dichotomy. Hugo Baumgartner, her protagonist of the same novel, lives all his life as a homeless waif; turns towards sub-humans for love and dies forlorn; he is a classic case of homelessness.

The brutal attack on the Duttas’ home and the abduction of Maya are the most tragic events in the novel, *Lajja*. Seven young Muslim hooligans barge into the house and start breaking everything. Suranjan is away at the time. Terror-stricken Sudhamoy, Kironmonyee and Maya watch their house being reduced to a shambles. Then the scoundrels catch hold of Maya
and carry her away. Kironmoyee runs about in the street crying: “They have taken my daughter...please save her....” (148). No help from any quarter is forthcoming. Suranjan comes home and finds that Maya has been taken away. It is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back. His agony bursts through his sobs that shake his body. The shock gives way to anger and fear in Suranjan. In spite of all-out efforts to search for Maya, she is not found. Outside home what happens to her is anybody’s guess. Suranjan arrives at the sad conclusion that there is no security in their home. It is no home at all; it is better to give it up. When the situation takes a threatening turn, Sudhamoy one day calls his son and asks him to sit beside him and speaks to him in a broken voice, “I feel worried for you...you return home so late. Haripada had come over yesterday. The situation in Bhola has gone worse. Thousands of people have lost their homes...” (206).

In Lajja, Taslima Nasreen also acquaints her readers with another cause of homelessness of the minority communities. In 1965, an Enemy Property Act was introduced in the Constitution of Pakistan to take over the immovable property of the minorities, “…the property of those Hindus who had left the country for India during the mass exodus of 1947 and after the riots of 1950 and 1954 was listed as enemy property...” (129). In Phera, too, there is reference to Enemy Property Act. Kalyani’s uncle in Bangladesh informs them that they should sell their house lest it is illegally occupied. Kalyani’s brother Jyotiprakash finds it hard to detach himself from his home and writes to Kalyani intimating her of his sentiments, “I can’t bring myself to sell the place; haven’t as yet, become so hard-hearted or desperate about money that I’ll exchange my memories for a handful of coins. Let the house remain. I’ll take comfort in thinking something belonging to us is still there” (21).

Parimal, Kalyani’s brother informs her about the Act introduced by the government. Kalyani is perplexed how she, who loved her country so much, could be an enemy to her country and her property enemy property, “Come on, Parimal—how can our house be deemed as enemy property? Are we enemies of our own country? We?” (21).

Lajja is essentially a story of a Hindu home which has to be abandoned under the impact of impending danger to the lives of its inmates. The members of the Dutta family do everything possible within their power to preserve this home, but all in vain. Home in a looser sense is the house where the members of a family live with near harmony. But in a wider sense, home is one’s homeland, that is, the country. Just as the wall in Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” is
symbolic of divisions between caste, colour, creed and country, home acquires metaphorical dimensions of country. Thus there are two homes, the smaller home and the bigger home. But they are not separate. They are inextricably aligned. The smaller home is the part and parcel of the bigger home. In this particular case of the Duttas, Bangladesh is their home. The love for this home is called patriotism, and the Duttas are never found wanting in it. In Suranjana, Taslima Nasreen gives voice to the anguish of those who love their country greatly but are accused of being traitors at the outbreak of communal violence. This novel, *Lajja* came into being at such a time and has an amazing canvas of many sensitive issues related to human lives. Although the fear of losing home has gripped Sudhamay’s mind yet he is not going to give up his ideals. Suranjana, on the other hand, has changed his attitude. He no longer considers himself a part of the country after what he and his family have undergone. He tries to persuade his father to leave home and go to India, “Baba, I’ve been thinking of only one thing all last night. I know you will not accept my suggestion, but I’m begging you to. Please, Baba… please. Come, let’s go away” (213). In the beginning Suranjana neglects the affairs of his smaller home for the sake of his bigger home but ultimately, they have to leave this home and therein lies the tragedy of their lives.

In a foreign land people develop a sense of attachment with the people belonging to their motherland, irrespective of their religious identities. Nila feels close to Chaitali and Sunil because they are Bengalis like her. Then, she feels a sisterly affection for Mojammel, who is a native of Bangladesh, but still a Bengali, and thus she develops an affinity for him. Kalyani, quite irrationally, involves herself with a fraud; only because he came from her hometown, Mymensingh, and feels that he must be a good man. Suranjana’s countrymen are like the members of his family, be they Muslims or Hindus. But when his so-called secular friends desert him one after the other he receives a rude shock. The disappearance of sense, sensibility and humanity from his homeland Bangladesh inflicts a severe wound on his psyche and he loses his reason and sense of proportion. He becomes as inhuman while assaulting a Muslim prostitute as the attackers on his home and the abductors of his sister Maya. His predicament, overpowering sense of defeatism, dark despair and unbearable anguish can be better imagined than described. And all this because it is nothing short of torture to tear oneself from home.

The existence of home is dependent upon a number of factors. Home is not an isolated identity or an ivory tower. It is affected by social, political, religious and psychological forces
operating alone or altogether. The question why the Duttas leave their home is linked with a complex set of issues. Fear is not the only reason though ostentatiously it is. Their old idealism is gone. They are the helpless victims of the reversal of all that they stood for. The betrayal of their former friends creates a void in their existence which is hard to fill in. The question why the Duttas leave home is important. The severance of ties is painful. But the causes of this severance are also important and need pondering over. The last scene of the novel when the Duttas decide to go away from their home, the smaller as well as the bigger, is pathetic and painful. It is the climax of the story without a denouement. The author seems to share her shock and anguish with the readers. At the same time she seems to be giving a stern warning that if such circumstances as compel the Duttas to leave home are allowed to prevail, it augurs ill everywhere for the human beings and their country. The most crucial question at this point is: Do the members of a minority community have no right to call a place their home, a country their homeland? Do they belong nowhere? A large population of a minority community flees, lawfully or unlawfully, to the country where their community is in majority. But is there still a future for them there too? They are always polarised and have to suffer whenever there is the slightest fomentation of riots. They are harassed in the land of their refuge even at the slightest pretext. They are never part of the mainstream and branded as refugees. Those who leave their all at their native place just to save their lives, quite paradoxically become ill-fated refugees in their adopted land. They are interrogated whenever there are any illegal activities and are suspected of being secret agents. They were second-rate citizens in their native land; they are second-rate citizens in their adopted land. Their ordeal is not exaggerated or viewed out of proportions when we cast a glance over news items like the following, with some political party starting a campaign:

...to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshi immigrants living in slum colonies of the state capital....the police believe Bangladeshi immigrants might be behind the growth in crime rate in the region and in the past ten months. They claim to have arrested more than a dozen of Bangladeshi nationals involved in instances of armed robbery and loot. (Tribune 30 Sep. 2007)

In the name of internal security and combating terrorism, the so-called outsiders have to face bashing stereotyping. Certainly, some may have strayed but why malign every single person from the class? So there is urgent need to ponder over the problem and address it adequately.
Because of natural suspicion, cultural differences and other socio-economic reasons the immigrants are unwelcome in the land of refuge. The psychological insecurities of the refugees come in direct conflict with those of the natives of the land in which they have sought refuge. In the post-Partition period, Hindus and Sikhs migrating to India from what is now called Pakistan were treated shabbily, and were for long abused as ‘refugees’. This happened even in the face of the fact that they belonged to the majority community. It is to be kept in mind that the ‘locals’ perceived in them threat to their own community as well as to their business and politics. The incoming flood of refugees was a threat to their social norms, natural and financial resources and political power and this sense of insecurity made them behave in an abnormal way. Moreover, they did not accept them in marriages too. Indians, just like Germans, believe in the purity of race, and accused their girls for being lax in moral standards, willingly or unwillingly, as many of them were forced into prostitution due to unavoidable circumstances. Kalyani of Phera is always considered a refugee and her in-laws refuse to accept her as their daughter-in-law saying, “We don’t want a refugee girl” (17).

In the wake of the Independence and Partition, Lala Kanshi Ram of Chaman Nahal’s Azadi (1975) is forced to leave his own home and he finds it hard to bear the harsh reality that he will have to abandon his home as it is vulnerable to Muslim attack, and take refuge in a refugee camp: “‘Refugee, refugee, indeed!’ he shouted, when he had understood the word. ‘I was born around here, this is my home—how can I be a refugee in my own home?’” (130). For many months, Lala Kanshi Ram stays at the refugee camp in his own town, loses his daughter and son-in-law, and reaches India after being witness to harrowing experiences wrenched of all humanity; but the hardest blow comes to him when he remains a refugee even in India. He desperately searches for a home, which rehabilitation office should have provided him, but leave alone a compensatory house in exchange for his own loss in the country left behind; he is unable to acquire a house on rent: “In each of these areas, they also enquired for a flat in a private home. The native people in Delhi seemed so afraid of Punjabis. The moment they gave out their identity, the door was shut on them. ‘Punjabis? Never! You are too quarrelsome.’” (351). He spends the rest of his life in the refugee camp, unable to connect himself not only to a proper home but to the members of his own family also.
It was a two way traffic, for, Muslims from India were called Muhajirs in Pakistan and looked down upon by the locals. Many Hindus and Sikhs embraced Islam as a sole hope of their survival, but still they were treated as low castes and never considered to be equals.

The novel *Lajja* ends on a note of pessimism on the part of the Duttas. But it is fraught with a moral lesson which should not be lost sight of. Home carries the sense of belonging. It binds people to a place which they love and for which they can make any sacrifice. Suranjan and his family have completely identified themselves with Bangladesh and her people. It is, in a sense, not the Duttas who leave home of their sweet will but it is the home that turns them out. Through the pessimism of the Duttas the author delivers the message that all liberal-minded people, wherever they are, must sit up, think and arise and fight the forces which drive one from one’s home. They must act before it is too late and matters go out of hand. Having a great insight into the depth of human behaviour as well as irony of circumstances, writers like Taslima Nasreen know that there is no end to the suffering of such people. Suranjan Dutta and his family leave Bangladesh because they are left with no other option but die at the hands of frenzied fanatics or commit suicide.

However, at this point a question arises: Are the people across the border standing with their arms open to embrace the guests? The question has only negative answer. Being unwelcome and unwanted in one’s long-lost homeland as well as the new home land is clearly reflected in Taslima Nasreen’s novel, *Phera* too. The heroine Kalyani is alienated from her family, her parents, and even from her own self in India. For her, her native land, Bangladesh remains her home and in an alien land, her identity is a crumbling self.

As has been pointed out earlier, home is where a person connects himself. Women feel connected to their parents’ home and call it their home even after they spend many decades in their husband’s house. All her life, Kalyani has called Bangladesh, where she lived with her parents, her home. In spite of a well settled life with Anirban, her husband and her two children in Kolkata, she connects herself only to Mymensingh, Bangladesh. In fact, her Bangladeshi home has been imprinted upon the memory graph of Kalyani permanently.

She knew that although she had found a proper home, had a permanent job, in spite of being a refugee, something was missing. Someone was calling out to her from afar. She looked about herself wildly, as if to discover who it was who was beckoning her, creating a minor havoc in her straightened out existence. Passing a
span of time she began to appreciate that life was like a tree which when uprooted throws up leaves but does not flourish. (*Phera* 24)

She wants to return to, or at least visit her homeland for once. While living in Kolkata away from her home in East Pakistan (as Bangladesh was called when she left it), Kalyani “longed for a drink of water of her native land. She missed her country” (8). In spite of Anirban’s reluctance, she arranges to fly to Bangladesh singlehandedly with her small child, Dipan. Back home at the place of her birth after living in Kolkata for thirty years, Kalyani “began to inhale the air hungrily, taking deep breaths as if all this while she had been suffocated” (9). She tells her son, Dipan, “Push your chest out and inhale. You won’t find the air in Kolkata so fresh” (9). She is enchanted by its beauty and is agonized as to why she does not deserve the love of her country:

What did she do wrong that she had to flee the place of her birth? It was as if she was being punished for committing some grievous sin. Sarifa had stayed on; she hadn’t been compelled to go away….But didn’t that room, that train, the pond, the tree, the river Brahmputra also belong to her? Didn’t she have the same right over them? Then? (37)

Kalyani is beside herself with joy and when she reaches Bangladesh, she expects a warm welcome from her old friends and acquaintances. She remembers how Sharifa, her girlhood friend, had fallen on the ground and Kalyani had promised that she would come back. Now she is so happy that she has fulfilled her promise and in her exhilaration does not even realize that Sarifa would have been married by now and that she would have had her own responsibilities too, besides plunging in childhood memories. But Kalyani is living in a fool’s paradise:

She had not told anyone that she was coming. If she had, they would have surely received her at the airport. It was nice that no one knew about her arrival, she should give them such a pleasant surprise! The neighbours will be in a tizzy seeing her after such a long time. (34)

For Kalyani, the lure of home is irresistible but little does she know that she is pursuing a mirage. On her return to her dear homeland, she realizes that the psychological difference between her and the people she visited in Bangladesh is as great as the geographical difference between the two Bengals. Human links seem to go. Her own countrymen, whom she had imagined to be very large-hearted, prove to be aliens and consider her a foreigner. In her own
native land, the thought of being unwanted hurts her and nothing can remove this bitter feeling of disappointment:

In her mind Kalyani had held a picture-postcard image of her own town drowning all other images. A small quiet place where men were never on the run and had a kind word to say to each other when they met in the fields, on the streets or in the market place. She had come back to give her folks a surprise. Trembling with excitement, she stretched her hand out wanting to hold her dreams and her memories in a firm grip. She had not yet been able to locate her dear home. Sighs of moaning seemed to rise from the bowels of the earth where it, perhaps, lay buried. Her house had faded into oblivion like the river. (53).

The river Brahmaputra is always a part of the land which evokes the feelings of love for the motherland. So it is but natural that Kalyani cannot maintain her peace when she is forced to go away from her country leaving behind her dear town Mymensingh and river Brahmaputra. She is ecstatic to smell the soil and breathe the air of that place where her parental home of the girlhood days had stood. But now Kalyani is not able to locate her house to which she had connected all the cherished memories of her childhood. She finds it all in ruins, just a heap of debris. She stands there shocked and stupefied. Here she reminds us of Abdul Ghani of "Malbe Ka Malik" (1988) by Mohan Rakesh who also successfully captures the anguish of those uprooted from their homes and homelands. Ghani returns from Pakistan to Amritsar after around seven years of the Partition. He had lost his children in the riots. Now he wishes to catch a last glimpse of his house but what he finds there is only a heap of stones, bricks and mortar and a damaged door-frame. Stunned to see this rubble, he remembers his son and cries out, "Oye Chiragdina!" and then lets out a sigh, "Is this all that is left of my house?" (38). Instead of home, Kalyani, too, finds only a solitary berry tree standing on the ground. Clinging to it, she wails helplessly drawing the attention of many insensitive and a few understanding people of the neighbourhood. Like Mohan Rakesh, Taslima Nasreen, too, successfully illustrates Kalyani’s grief:

All of a sudden memories of childhood and adolescence, stirred fiercely within her making her fall to the ground to caress the land lying next to the black berry tree which carried the imprint of her feet and the fragrance of bygone days. She went down on her heels, smelling and clutching the earth with her two hands.
...Kalyani began to weep, clasping the black berry tree, her grandfather had planted in this, her land. She wailed even more loudly as the number of people gathered around her multiplied. She had little sense of her grief. All she knew was she belonged to this country. She was born on this land and didn’t come out of Sarlabala’s womb. (92)

The following lines from Thomas Hood’s *The Bridges of Sighs* describe Kalyani’s plight quite aptly:

O, it was pitiful!
Near a whole city full,
Home she had none. (46-48)

Kalyani’s plight is beyond the comprehension of those who have never been separated from their homes or homelands. It is a feeling that comes only to those who have suffered the pangs of separation. In her childhood, Kalyani herself did not know why people felt sad when they left for Kolkata which was full of wondrous things. Jyotiprakash, her elder brother had told her, “You’ll know why when you leave home – those who haven’t had to go away can never understand what it is to forsake one’s own country” (5). Anirban is aghast to learn that Kalyani has applied for a fortnight’s leave from work. He simply asks, ‘Are you mad?’ (31). Sharifa and her husband have no idea that it is the love for the homeland that has drawn her to Bangladesh. Kalyani hears them talking:

‘They have no relatives in this place, no place to stay, why have they come?’
‘It’s something, I, too, don’t understand.’ (76)

Kalyani weeps bitterly clasping the black berry tree that her grandfather had planted. She is not even aware that people have gathered around her enjoying the spectacle. Some of them were curious but it was hard for them to understand the cause of her grief. They ask among themselves:

‘Why does the woman weep?’
‘She’s a Hindu. We had another such, some days ago.’
‘Why has a Hindu woman come here to weep?’ said another.
Someone now mumbled, ‘She has come from India, she had her house in this place.’
'You mean her house? How can that be, perhaps it was during the time of the British.'

'Who knows!'

'She is probably deranged, not in her right mind.'

'It's difficult to tell.'

'Was there a house belonging to the Hindus?'

'That's what she says.'

'Perhaps there was, so many people have had properties here but it's no reason to cry. Didn't Muslims come away from India leaving behind all they possessed? Do they go back to lay their claims on them now?...' (93).

Kalyani is utterly flabbergasted when Athar addresses her as an Indian. He accuses her for the killing of Muslims during riots that break out after Babri Mosque demolition in India, “But tell us about Babri Masjid—you are butchering us in your country, aren't you?” (114). While they were having their dinner, Athar makes it clear that Bangladesh is not her country. Kalyani is so much shocked at Athar's attitude towards her that she stops eating, gulps some water and tells Sharifa that she is going to sleep. The next day she leaves Sharifa's house without even taking breakfast. For Kalyani, Bangladesh is her homeland and India, where she had gone at the time of partition, merely an adopted land. Here, she is just a contrast to Grandmother 'Th'amma' in The Shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh, who, as she came to India long before partition, considers it home and Bangladesh an alien land. She even refuses to accept the refugee status. She wants to and tries her utmost to bring her Jethamoshai to India, to home from Bangladesh where he is all alone, abandoned. "There is only one worthwhile thing left for me to do in my life now, she said. And that is to bring the old man home...And her eyes grew misty at the thought of rescuing her uncle from his enemies and bringing him back where he belonged, to her invented country” (136-37). It is a bolt from the blue when Robi, her nephew makes her realize, "But you are a foreigner now, you’re as foreign here as May…” (195). Grandmother’s astonishment is just like that of Kalyani.

Grandmother of The Shadow Lines and Kalyani of Phera, both return to Bangladesh, their motherland, after a long time, but they are in sharp contrast to each other. Grandma accepts India as her homeland but Kalyani does not. Grandmother goes to Bangladesh but not out of her love for the country. Grandmother is communal in her outlook while Kalyani is nostalgic of her
childhood spent in Bangladesh. Grandmother, on the other hand, hates nostalgia. Kalyani goes home and it is her ‘Phera’, as is the Hindu custom, to go to her parents’ house soon after marriage. But it is not grandmother’s ‘Phera’. Consider the narrator’s details:

He remembered how his mother had laughed at her as she got into the car and said something about her being as anxious as a bride going home for the first time. He remembered too how she smiled back and retorted; you’ve got it wrong – I’m going home as a widow for the first time. (205)

Yet, the experiences of both of them culminate in the same disillusionment and reversal of situation or peripety. Kalyani has to face communal abuse while Grandmother loses her uncle and her nephew in communal violence. Bearing a scar on her heart, Grandmother donates for the war-refugees her gold chain, the only ornament that she refused to part with even after her widowhood. Similarly, robbed of her emotions as well as her money in Bangladesh, Kalyani too takes off her gold chain in the last scene, as is obvious, to pay the bus fare. Kalyani also shares her lot with Hugo Baumgartner of Anita Desai’s Baumgartner’s Bombay, who lives in a state of self imposed exile from Germany, from where he runs away due to his Jewish origin and hence, to escape from being persecuted by Hitler’s Nazi Party. But till the last day of his life, he loves his country, Germany and her people, and feeds and shelters a German youth who kills him in cold blood. Kalyani, too, dies an ideological death at the hands of people of the country she considers her own.

For making a home there must be respect for individuality, allowance for freedom, sharing of interests and real attachment among the members of the family living under the same roof. Kishanlal is a philistine yoked to a woman of finer feelings and artistic taste. Nila is fed up with her pent-up life in Kishanlal’s house and craves for freedom. She leaves home, leaving this note for Kishanlal: “…I have to live according to your wishes because you are the master, you are the boss; without you my life is pointless and I am a mere servant who will clean your house, cook, serve and provide sexual gratification at night” (74).

Later on, she celebrates her freedom with Danielle, her co-worker:

Outside, Nila wanted to dance. She had never felt so happy, so free in Paris. She raised her hands in the air and said, “So you wanted to keep an Indian servant. Now where is she, Kishanbabu? Why didn’t I do it sooner?” she hugged Danielle and shouted, ‘You have set me free!’ (81)
Taslima Nasreen fathoms the theme of home and homelessness from the gender perspective too. The fear of homelessness for most Muslim women is linked with the fear of divorce. As the word ‘talaq’ is declared, the woman is rendered homeless. She goes to her parents’ house where most of the times she is unwelcome. The writer deals with this theme subtly in her novels like Phera and Shodh. Kalyani learns from Swapan that his sister Rukhsana was divorced and remarried. Still her married life is not peaceful as her second husband beats her. Yet, she is not supposed to return to her brothers’ house. In Shodh, Jhumur and Sebati discuss how female patients fear divorce the most. In Lajja, too, the problem is dealt with taking the case of Parveen, Suranjan’s ex-beloved, who, within two years of her marriage to a Muslim boy, returns to her parents’ home after her divorce. In French Lover too, Anirban, Nila’s father asks Nila when she was going back to Paris. She replies:

‘I am not going to Paris. I’ll stay here.’
‘Here where?’
‘Here in Calcutta.’
‘Where in Calcutta?’
‘In this house.’
‘After marriage your husband’s house is your home. There lie all your rights. Girls come to their father’s house for a short while, not to stay.’ (154)

Nila, a single woman, though not forsaken, rather one who has forsaken her husband as well as her lover, is homeless. Danielle asks about her future plans:

‘So what are your plans? Are you going back?’
Nila asked, ‘Where?’
‘Where else? To your own land?’
‘Do I have a land of my own? If your land spells shelter, security, peace and joy, India is not my own land.’
Danielle said, ‘Then stay here. Didn’t you once say everyone has two motherlands, one his own and the other France?’
‘Danielle, do women ever have a land of their own or a motherland? I really don’t think so.’(291-92)

When Taslima Nasreen rounded off the story of her novel Lajja, little did she know that she too would share the fate of her fictional characters in the near future. After the book was
published there was such stormy protest against the author coupled with the demand for her
execution that she was made to flee her country by the same section of community as ousted the
Duttas from their home and for the same reason—threat to life. Since then she has been moving
from one country to another and has not found home. It is a strange irony that the fearless
woman who gave voice to the voiceless and fought for the cause of the homeless was herself
rendered homeless by religious bigots. Just like her fictional character Kalyani, that she created
much earlier, she could not attend the last rites of her parents. Since 1994, she has been changing
houses and moving from one country to another in search of home. In her own words: “I have
no country of my own. It is like a bus stop here. All the countries are like the bus stops. I am
waiting to go back to my home land but may not get a bus that would take me there” (Swarup,
“Taslima Makes”). Since she is not allowed to return to her homeland and was forced to get out
of Bangladesh when she went there to meet her ailing parents, she has adopted India as her
second home. She herself states:

   I would certainly like to return to Bangladesh but if I am forced to adopt another
country, my first choice would be India since it is a secular country. Moreover
West Bengal reminds me of my own country as both the Bengalis are historically
and culturally one and identical. (Chanda, “Taslima Nasreen to seek”)

Her stay in India is a compensation for her loss of home in Bangladesh; nonetheless, she
considers the whole of Bengal her home. Like the grandmother of The Shadow Lines, she does
not believe in artificial boundaries drawn upon the political maps.

   India is not a piece of paper
   That you had to tear down?
   I want to erase the number forty-seven
   I don’t want to swallow a bone called forty-seven
   Want to take it out
   Want to get back my ancestors’ land. (Nasreen, “The Past”)

So it follows that the theme of home and homelessness not only forms texture of Taslima
Nasreen’s fiction but also is a fact of her life. The theme closely touches her life. The condition
of Taslima Nasreen’s being a persona non grata among her own people is mirrored in A.H.
Jaffor Ullah’s words:
In 1998, she briefly returned to Bangladesh to stay near her dying mother. Even then, her sworn enemies, i.e., Islamists were making enough noise in the streets of Dhaka. She quickly returned to Sweden—her adopted home—after her mother had passed away. The strain of living in exile in a country, whose culture is all but alien to her, took toll on her. She became restive and forlorn. Her peripatetic life brought her back to Bengal for a short time to assuage her mental agony and anguish. However, her destination was Kolkata this time. She wanted to smell, touch, and feel the ambience of Bengal, which was amiss in her exiled life.

("Taslima Nasreen brushes")

It seems the more Taslima craves for home, the more she is distanced from it. Although writers like Taslima Nasreen, who have had first-hand experience of homelessness, depict the theme with greater intensity of feeling, yet we will hardly ever find a novelist or a poet who does not refer to the theme of home and homelessness in his/her creations. The sad state of a person living away from home has been deftly depicted by Keats in his famous poem, “Ode to a Nightingale”:

Perhaps the self same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid alien corn. (65-67)

Incessantly shuttled from one country to another, Taslima Nasreen is just like Ruth of The Old Testament, a young widow, who had to migrate to Bethlehem where ‘she gleaned in the field after the reapers.’ She was ‘sick for home’ and stood in tears’. That the nightingale’s song gave her some solace is poetic embellishment provided by Keats. Taslima Nasreen finds no such solace in a foreign land and suffers greatly.

Most of the problems of diaspora are rooted in their attachment to their native land. Living thousands of miles away from their first home they cannot emotionally delink themselves from the family members, and home and region where they had spent the early periods of their lives. A.K. Ramanujam, the Chicago based Indian poet, too, was obsessed with his Indian past and haunted by the memories of home and family, the memories of his father bathing in the holy Ganges, his mother’s morning prayers and his father’s peculiar manner of applying soap to his body. He remembers even the last of the Mughal princes who ruled India and then paled into insignificance. Still they try to connect themselves to their adopted homes and find some
comfort. Taslima Nasreen, too, seems to say like Nissim Ezekiel who ultimately made India his home and whose sense of homelessness eventually subsided:

Confiscate my passport, Lord
I don’t want to go abroad.
Let me find my song
Where I belong. (41-44)

To sum, Taslima Nasreen has explored the themes of home and homelessness with a rare sensibility. No doubt, this theme has universal contours and has been taken up by numerous writers. However, Taslima Nasreen’s personal experience as a woman and a refugee not only in her own land but also in other countries adds to her treatment of this theme. It is really interesting to observe Taslima Nasreen making an incisive analysis of the situations which lead to the state of homelessness in its geographical, social and emotional sense. Her protagonists—members of minority communities in general and women in particular—are seen in perpetual search of a home. And this search makes their dilemmas really human and their endeavour truly super-human. Indeed, Taslima Nasreen has in her novels explored the theme in its multiple dimensions.
Works Cited


1982. 48-49.


jaaffor_article.htm>.


---. Selected Columns. Trans. Debjani Sengupta. New Delhi: Srishti Publishers and istributors,
2004.


Tribune. 30 Sep. 2008: 12.