A critical scrutiny of the major novels of Taslima Nasreen, *Shodh* (1992), *Lajja* (1993), *Phera* (1993) and *French Lover* (2002), clearly reveals that she does not believe in the theory that art is for art’s sake. She, in fact, seems to believe that art is for life’s sake. She does not write fantasies or romantic stories to entertain an idle reader. She writes with a purpose and the purpose is to oppose and fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. She is with the victim and the marginalized and against irrational authority; it does not matter whether this authority is religious, social or patriarchal.

As one goes through Taslima Nasreen’s fictional work, one realizes that there are certain themes which she seems always to be preoccupied with. Almost all her fictional works directly or indirectly deal with the themes related with fundamentalism, communalism, bigotry and racism. Nasreen indicts a fake sense of religiosity because when religion takes the contours of bigotry or fanaticism it assumes the qualities of negativity and acts as an agent of corruption not only for the individual’s soul but also for the whole society.

Next, another important theme which preoccupies the mind of the writer is the gender bias. Herself a victim of the patriarchal structures she has seen from close quarters how women are given the role of a mere second sex where they cannot, in any way, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. In fact, this issue so much obsesses the mind of Taslima Nasreen that in almost each of her novels she takes up this theme.

Similarly, another theme that captures Taslima Nasreen’s mind is the theme of home and homelessness. In each of her novels she dwells on this theme, sometimes with regard to communalism, forcing a large number of population to migrate to alien lands where they are constrained to live the lives of refugees, unaccepted and unacceptable to the native people. Sometimes, the questions related to home and homelessness are raised in the context of women who remain homeless in their homes as the male-masters in their own family and in the family of their husbands stymie their very existence. Thus, they are rendered homeless not merely in the geographical sense but also in the emotional and the social sense.

Further, Taslima Nasreen, in her fictional work, explores the human relations beyond the man-woman relationship. She looks at other human relationships beyond the purview of family like father-daughter relationship, mother-son relationship, brother-sister relationship and many
other relationships so that the social milieu that she is trying to create in her novels is presented in all its fullness and depth.

As she handles all these relationships, Taslima Nasreen is able to create the impression of a society which is three-dimensional in its contours. In three novels out of the four taken up for the critical study Taslima Nasreen treats the theme of fundamentalism and the consequences thereof in a detailed and argumentative manner. She makes an in-depth study of the causes of fundamentalism and communalism born of irrational faith in the Koran and other subsidiary Islamic writings. She believes that the Koran has been turned not only into a handy manual to oppress and victimize the people belonging to other faiths, particularly Hindus, but also an important tool in the hands of the clerics to subjugate the Muslim women in all the spheres and stages of their lives. In her novels, Taslima Nasreen has successfully explored the political, religious, social and geographical factors responsible for germinating the seeds of fundamentalism in the soil of Bengal. Her literature peels off layer by layer how fundamentalist potentates proclaim their outmoded and outdated ideas inciting members of majority community to grab the property of the minority communities. She has also discussed social, moral, intellectual and emotional gashes in the social fabric of Bangladesh caused by fundamentalism. She has been accused of treating the subject in a biased manner as some critics point out that she has taken up in her novels the religious extremism of Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh only and has not bothered to write about the carnage of the Muslims going on in other parts of the world including the neighbouring India. However, it is the artist’s prerogative to decide about his raw material; it is he who chooses, sifts and finally incorporates in the body of fiction what he has to include in terms of art. As far as Lajja is concerned, the controversy connected with it is symbolic of the manipulation of religious and political powers that be against the secular ones. The fate of Lajja’s protagonist and later on, of Taslima Nasreen herself, is more than sufficient to reveal the lukewarm attitude of the local government towards the menace of escalating religious extremism that openly negates all human values. Therefore, in her novels one comes across severe criticism and condemnation of the religious institutions and forces that operate actively to debase, even annihilate all human dignity.

It is interesting to note that that Taslima Nasreen’s so called heretical texts like Lajja and Phera do not have any direct reference to the Koran. However, the way the novels are designed, her intention to debunk anything that is based on narrow-minded sectarian, religious constructs
become crystal clear. While in *Lajja* and *Phera* she pointedly talks of religious bigotry in all its dimensions—social, economic and political, in *French Lover*, she does not spare the Hindu prudery and Christian fundamentalism too. If we talk of *Lajja*, the only annoying reference may be quoted as Suranjan abusing his motherland Bangladesh: “Bloody bastards...bloody swine...that’s Bangladesh for me” (179). This comment on the part of Suranjan created a furore in the whole of Bangladesh making the Muslim clerics condemn this novel in absolute terms. *Lajja* particularly takes as its point of reference the demolition of Babri Mosque in India and the resultant turmoil among the Muslims all over the world and particularly in Bangladesh. The Babri Mosque demolition and what happened in India after it reverberated through the length and breadth of Bangladesh, where incited by the newly resurgent Muslim fundamentalists, the common Muslims perpetrated unheard-of brutality and barbarism on the helpless members of Hindu community. Though the major portion of the novel comes in the form of reportage, Taslima Nasreen has been able to focus on the inhuman treatment meted out to the minorities in the name of religion. She was traumatized by what she saw: neighbour killing or raping neighbour. All the joys and sorrows shared together by the communities for centuries by one generation after the other stood shattered by something which was not even remotely connected with their lives. Taslima Nasreen felt so nauseated by these senseless happenings in her motherland. In *Lajja* Taslima Nasreen sees how human beings go mad on account of twisted sense of love for religion and descend to sub-human level. The protagonist, Suranjan, who has, so far, espoused liberal views and, who, in spite of being a Hindu, has always taken pride in Bangladesh as his motherland, is degenerated and turned into a fanatic himself. This situation, feels Taslima Nasreen, could have been averted but for the loud and raucous tone and instigations of the fundamentalists in Bangladesh. The novelist makes a conscious effort to point out that a common Muslim was not at all related, geographically and emotionally, to the Babri Mosque. Similarly, using the same logic, an ordinary Hindu in Bangladesh was, in no way, associated with the Babri Mosque demolition, nor was he, in any way, responsible for the atrocities that the Hindu fundamentalists perpetrated upon the Muslims in India. Thus, the focus of the novelist is on the irrationality of the bigoted faith leading to unavoidable horrendous brutalities that man inflicts upon man in the name of religion.

In the same way, in *Phera* also Taslima Nasreen underlines the issues related to religious fundamentalism and shows how inter-personal relations are affected because of communalism.
Kalyani, the central character of the novel is uprooted from the place of her birth and is forced to shift to Kolkata as there is threat to her person and honour in Bangladesh because of the upswing in communal tension. She yearns to go back to the place of her birth all her life and after a gap of thirty long years she gets an opportunity to revisit her birthplace where she believes her heart and soul have always lived in spite of her living physically in India. Ironically, her bosom friend Sharifa’s family eyes her with suspicion and cannot gauge the intensity of Kalyani’s passion for her birthplace, her childhood friends and all the childhood memories that she has cherished in her heart so long. Through this tale of Kalyani’s yearning for her roots, Taslima Nasreen once again puts under scanner the irrational and unfounded biases a person has against another. Reacting to the narrow considerations of religion thus, once again in this novel, Taslima Nasreen seems to take up her favourite theme of indicting the communal forces which poison the heart and soul of innocent people and destroy all human fibre.

In French Lover, though the theme of fundamentalism and communalism are not dealt with in a direct manner, Taslima Nasreen cannot desist from touching upon this theme by making censorious remarks against Hindu prudery and Christian fundamentalism. Here, instead of communal fundamentalism, her gaze moves towards racial discrimination triggered by human complexion and ethnicity and thus, once again Taslima Nasreen tries to concentrate on the themes allied with communalism.

In the context of the theme of fundamentalism and communalism, all Taslima Nasreen’s novels are lessons in liberal humanism. In each of these novels the reader finds her probing the issues related to sectarian values and by implication advocating liberal human values. Simultaneously, we find her taking the case of freedom of will and choice in an individual. In all her novels she talks about tolerance, love and harmony where no community is superior to another and each human being has a right to live with dignity and honour.

Thus, Taslima Nasreen not only takes into account fundamentalism as a social evil that initially came into being as a religious as well as political power play but also looks into how it has evolved into a divisive factor touching upon the lives of people of the whole world in general and Indian sub-continent in particular. Her novels censure the various vested interests—religious, social, economic and political—that fuel the fire of communalism and mock the secular humanist practices that should govern human society.
Injustice against women and their oppression happens to be an equally important theme in Taslima Nasreen’s novels. As a woman, she understands how the whole society dominated by males creates paradigms the purpose of which is to subjugate woman and turn her into a subservient individual sans any freedom, sans any free will or choice. She confronts the nasty truth that women are mere passive objects in the matters of sex and other matters too. They are only to be possessed and mastered. With her own experience and the experience of her sisters in Bangladesh and not only Bangladesh but the world over, she realizes the fact that all the inalienable rights prescribed for human beings are denied to women because of a vicious conspiracy between religion and society in order to subjugate a woman’s free will. The texts and sub-texts of all the discourses in Islam regard woman as a very potent agent of corruption. Ironically, there is a parallel stream which presents woman as an erotic object to be possessed and enjoyed but who has no right for equal participation even in this intimate act of union. Thus, she is a double victim—on the one hand, she is taken to be possessed and used as an agent of pleasure, and on the other hand, she is recognized as an agent of corruption and hence is required to be kept under control of man. Taslima Nasreen in her novels emerges as a crusader for women’s rights; she acts as a champion for women’s right of living with honour and independence in the framework of human dignity and equality. She also vociferously advocates a woman’s right to have a free choice in matters of love, marriage, sex and in choosing friends for herself. Above all, she talks of a woman’s natural right to live in peace and harmony in a place which she can call her own.

In *Shodh*, Jhumur, in spite of being an educated, courageous and open-minded woman has to share her lot with ignorant, timid women of the family. Her voice in the house-hold matters is hushed. Her dreams of happiness in marriage and child-bearing are shattered. Her movement outside home and at home is restricted and controlled. When she conceives early, she is accused of carrying some other man’s seed in her womb and is forced into abortion. Thus, through the character of Jhumur, Taslima Nasreen exposes the ugly face of sophisticated elites of society who under the cover of material well-being rob their women of all joy and fulfilment in marriage.

In *Lajja*, we find all the female characters to be victims of male bias. Maya’s suggestion of shifting the members of the family to some safe place during the riots falls on deaf ears. Nonetheless, for the sake of her own safety she moves to a Muslim friend’s house but returns
soon on account of Sudhamoy’s ill health. Later on, she is abducted by Muslim marauders and
physical torture and mental agony perpetrated on her is anybody’s guess. Through the case of
Maya, Taslima Nasreen presents the plight of women at the time of wars and riots wherein they
are double victims—victims for belonging to the minority community and also victims for being
women, and, thus, a prey to crude savagery of communal forces. All other women in the novel
are also subject to male despotism in one way or the other. Kironmoyee, Maya’s mother, is a
helpless sufferer. She cries helplessly and nobody sympathises with her. Parveen, Suranjan’s
beloved, who belongs to a Muslim family, is married off without taking into consideration her
own will in this matter. Later on, she suffers because the marriage breaks off soon. Thus, she is a
target of rigid patriarchy and religious bigotry. The Muslim whore, who belongs to the majority
community, is raped by Suranjan. Her rape is symbolic of the weak victimizing the weaker.

Kalyani of *Phera* is uprooted from the place of her birth because her parents are afraid
that her honour may not be safe in Bangladesh, a country with a Muslim majority. She,
however, remains vulnerable to rape attempt in India too, where her own cousin entertains
lascivious designs on her. Thus, for a woman the risk is not only from the majority community to
the minority community, but it is a risk wherein a woman is always vulnerable for she is
physically weak. Also to be remembered is the fact that in a patriarchal structure a woman is a
mere object; she is an object of lust irrespective of her religion, caste or ethnicity. She also
undergoes domestic violence at the hand of her aunt and cousins. She is harassed by her husband
and her in-laws too, for not becoming the mother of a son early.

In her novel *French Lover*, Taslima Nasreen reveals that male supremacy is an
acknowledged fact everywhere—in the East as well as the West. Nila, the protagonist leads a
discontented life with her husband Kishanlal who is an utter mismatch to her and emerges in the
novel to be a male chauvinistic prig. He keeps his wife confined in his home for his own pleasure
and denies her any kind of freedom. Eventually, Nila rushes into the arms of a French Benoir
Dupont, but soon realizes that the Western males are also chauvinistic in their own refined
manner. Mithu, a minor character in the novel, and Nila’s mother Molina serve as examples of
suffering as they have to succumb to the tantrums and mechanisms of their patriarchal heads.
Mithu commits suicide; Molina dies of cancer in want of proper medical treatment while Nila
lives a wholly bleak existence at the end.
Thus, the case of women in Taslima Nasreen’s fiction is archetypal case of exploitation and suffering. Yet, Taslima Nasreen’s heroines rarely submit to their antagonists. They revolt against patriarchy and assert their identity in the best possible way. Jhumur becomes economically independent and attains her freedom. Kalyani after a considerable passage of time is able to realize her long cherished dream of visiting her homeland. Maya, though ultimately a victim of circumstances beyond control, tries to live her life on her own terms. Nila of French Lover asserts herself in the matters of sexuality and economic freedom. Taslima Nasreen’s all writings reflect over-riding feminist concerns. Her women protagonists who have been traditionally and perpetually victims of a nexus between religion and patriarchy exhibit a rare courage to come out and voice their protest against injustice and assert their identity in terms of their physical, emotional and intellectual journeys. Thus, on the one hand Taslima Nasreen reflects through her women characters the various mechanizations through which society victimizes them, on the other hand, she also sympathizes with them and delineates them in a manner where they, using the weapons of education and economic freedom, emerge victorious.

Besides the prominent themes of fundamentalism and feminism Taslima Nasreen analyses the theme of home and homelessness as she realizes that for the victims of religious bigotry and gender discrimination, the questions of home and homelessness become significant. The minorities are traumatised, their properties burnt and very often they are forced into fleeing their homes. They are turned into refugees in distant lands and cultures where they are always looked down upon and are never accepted as equals. The local people detest them for cutting into their businesses and accuse them of corrupting their culture. A sense of psychological insecurity prevails among the people of both the sides and the refugees are never easily allowed to merge in the mainstream. In her novels, Taslima Nasreen correlates both the issues of fundamentalism and feminism with the feeling of homelessness and very skilfully travels the labyrinths of human psyche from the point of view of the deprived ones who are literally as well as symbolically, physically as well as spiritually homeless. Taslima Nasreen has deftly brought out the anguish of the two most underprivileged sections of the society—minority communities and the classic example of deprivation—woman. At the same time, Taslima Nasreen takes a closer and subtler look at such unfortunate situations as she endeavours to understand—the concept of home and homelessness, the concept of belonging and not belonging, being rooted and uprooted. She is
troubled by all such questions and she seems to be grappling hard to find a viable solution to all these problems in her novels.

In *Shodh*, Taslima Nasreen underlines a woman’s perpetual struggle against all odds to create a niche for herself. Jhumur cannot cultivate a sense of belonging to the home of her husband, Haroon because there is lack of love, harmony, mental peace and mutual understanding there. Jhumur and Ranu, the wife of Haoon’s younger brother, crave for their own space called home built on the foundation of love. Dolon, Haroon’s sister, loses her home after her nuptial ties break off. In this novel, Taslima Nasreen cannot help bringing in the issue of communalism which badly affects Kakima and makes her homeless. Her husband, Nitun Kaka sells his home in order to migrate to India but dies in the mean time of a heart-stroke. Kakima is then unable to purchase the house back and lives in a rented house. Dr. Sebati, despite her economic independence and pretence of a happy married life, is unsuccessful in securing a home for herself as she leads a highly discontented life with her impotent husband.

Thus, in this novel Taslima Nasreen explores the theme of home and homelessness with keen insight and projects it with incisive analysis. She also tries to understand the implications of home from a wider perspective. While projecting this theme Taslima Nasreen connects her personal homelessness with the general problems of homelessness in her novels.

In *Lajja*, Taslima Nasreen endeavours to probe the question of home and homelessness in its various dimensions—physical, emotional and psychological. In its larger proportions home also means one’s homeland. Through the story of the Duttas, Taslima Nasreen takes up the case of a Hindu family constantly under threat from Muslim fundamentalists. They find it difficult to safeguard their home during the time of communal riots. The attachment of the Duttas to their home further escalates the tenor of theiranguished cries at the prospects of leaving their home and homeland. Here it goes to Taslima Nasreen’s credit that she very perceptively touches upon the sensitivities of the minority community to understand how painful the sense of being uprooted is. In the novel, Taslima Nasreen also examines the problem of belonging to one’s home from feminist angle too. Maya has to lose her home earlier than others for being a woman who at the time of wars and riots is treated like a commodity and stolen like precious objects. Parveen becomes homeless when she is forced to return from her husband’s home.

The novel *Phera* is constructed entirely on the issue of home and homelessness. Kalyani becomes homeless at an early age. She is not at home in her uncle’s home in Kolkata where her
parents send her from Bangladesh which is affected by communal disturbances. For thirty years, Kalyani yearns to visit her home in her homeland Bangladesh but when she reaches there, she is pained to see her home turned into rubble with only a single berry tree standing there. As far as her attachment to her homeland is concerned, the people of Bangladesh consider her an outsider, one belonging to India, not Bangladesh. Thus, Taslima Nasreen very deftly captures the trauma of a refugee who is at her wit’s end as to where her home is—in India or in Bangladesh?

In *French Lover*, Nila is forever a forlorn character. She is “homeless” in her own home. She is homeless in India, homeless in France. She is an alien, unwanted creature in her father’s home, before and after her marriage with Kishanlal. She has no emotional bonding with her husband who does not match her in sense of culture, in her taste for art and literature and her attitudes and aptitudes and for whom Nila is just an object of lust. For a short span, she tries to cope with him but her dream of a perfect home shatters soon and 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. She desires to create with her lover Benoí Dupont her own home with her own money where love and harmony may reside, but here, too, she fails miserably. She does not fit in the Western system with a different set of values and stands homeless in the end. Thus, in the novel, Taslima Nasreen handles the concept of home in a wider sense—from four walls to one’s homeland and from homeland to the whole world. Nila’s personal pain of being homeless becomes universal when she feels for the misery of those uprooted from their roots in search of a true home. In this manner, Taslima Nasreen takes the issue of homelessness from feminist point of view to the problems of diaspora.

Taslima Nasreen realises that the state of homelessness is the consequence of power games played by politicians and religious bigots as also they are the end results of callousness on the part of individuals and the society. It may also be pointed out that for her being homeless is the by-product of human apathy and selfishness which could be and should be averted through sympathy and love in case of individuals and through principles of secular humanism in case of communities.

Next to the theme of home and homelessness we come across in Taslima Nasreen’s novels some other subsidiary themes among which the theme of interpersonal relationship emerges as a prominent one. In a social set-up where human ties outweigh every other worldly
concern, Taslima Nasreen’s sincere efforts in depicting the human relationship within and beyond social ties need great appraisal.

In *Shodh*, through the story of Jhumur and Haroon, Taslima Nasreen seems to stress the need for love, harmony, space and a little freedom in relations, while before marriage Jhumur and Haroon seem to be a perfect couple, the relationship loses its charm once the egocentric, suspicious and chauvinistic male supersedes the lover Haroon. Taslima Nasreen very closely examines the negative impact that such disharmony in married relationship creates upon the woman concerned.

Apart from the husband-wife relationship, Taslima Nasreen also successfully takes up the other dimensions of interpersonal relationships in the novel. Nasreen stresses the sincerity of emotions and heartfelt need to fulfil one’s emotional requirements. Besides, she also stresses a woman’s right to her body and affirms it through Jhumur-Afżal relationship. Other themes like revenge-seeking, identity crisis, withdrawal are also taken care of in the novel.

In *Lajja*, Taslima Nasreen makes an in-depth study of human relationships and how they are vitiated by the vicious communal atmosphere. After Maya is abducted, Suranjan feels guilty for not providing sufficient security to her. In a tense atmosphere, Suranjan is distanced from his father, mother and friends. Towards the end of the novel, conflict arises between the father Sudhamoy and the son Suranjan but is resolved soon when the former reaches out to the wreck, that is, Suranjan and gives his consent to migrate to India. In the novel, Taslima Nasreen stresses that the human ties are stronger than blood relations. Through the love story of Suranjan and Parveen, it is suggested that a marriage based on love is more successful than the one based on religious identities.

In *Phera*, too, Taslima Nasreen explores the labyrinths of human relationships which sometimes go beyond the usual matrix. She realises that the varied relationships form the framework of any society. More than to her husband, Kalyani feels attached to her lover Badal, for whose sake she leaves a considerable amount of money towards the end of the novel. All her life, she longs to see her girlhood friend Sharifa to whom she had promised to return. It is, however, highly ironical that the same Sharifa behaves most awkwardly and coldly shocking Kalyani out of her romantic idea about childhood friendships. Surprisingly, it is Swapan, a boy only distantly known to her, who entertains her in an alien country Bangladesh as it has now become for Kalyani.
In *French lover* the relationships between Nila and her father and mother are scrutinized deeply. Nila has strained relations with her father as he has extra-marital relationship with Swati Sen because of which her mother Molina suffers all her life and ultimately dies for the lack of proper medical treatment. There is a constant clash between all the married couples of the novel. Breaking off from her husband Kishanlal who considers Nila just an object whose sole responsibility is to keep him sexually satisfied but refuses to grant her any freedom, Nila gets into an illegitimate relationship with Benoix Dupont. This leads to a rift between Benoix and his wife Pascale too.

In Nila, there arises an irresistible urge to live her life on her own terms despite all roadblocks. Through her Taslima Nasreen’s spirit of fighting the antagonistic forces of the society comes to the fore. In the novel, she also brings out some more important but superficially dealt with issues like identity crisis, the problem of linguistic superiority, arts’ supremacy over life, lesbianism etc.

Taslima Nasreen has waged a very courageous war against gender prejudices with strong condemnation of the obsolete institutions with awe-inspiring honesty and integrity. Knitting together her passionate arguments against religious, social and cultural constraints with her own experiences as woman, Taslima Nasreen explores the issues that the South Asian woman is facing today regarding her social status and right to freedom of movement, education and economic independence; and that is what differentiates the crusader Taslima Nasreen from the mere sensationalists who just relish in bodily details.

Besides her fight against fundamentalism, concern about the victims of any sort of discrimination of which gender issues trouble her the most, the problem of home and homelessness, many practical matters like relationship of man to man, biological instincts, psychological problems and other modern issues also appear in Taslima Nasreen’s fiction, and almost all these issues are handled with equal ease and deftness. The modes of projection seem somewhat neglected in the novels taken under scrutiny. Though primarily known for content-based writings, Taslima Nasreen has received a fairly high praise for her individual writing style in the Bengali language. In her novels she makes judicious use of irony, symbolism, imagery, juxtaposition, humour and other literary devices. Her characters are to her a means of projecting her ideas vehemently though sometimes Taslima Nasreen fails to create psychological insight in them. For the presentation of the significant themes like fundamentalism, gender discrimination
and other allied issues, she makes use of the first person narrative, third person narrative and point of view technique. Her plots are sometimes carelessly drawn still they do not fail to arrest the reader’s interest. In Lajja, she exhibits experimental streak by combining political commentary and psychological analysis. In Shodh her use of first person narrative technique lends authenticity to the character of Jhumur who endeavours to assert her identity and independence in social and sexual terms. In Phera, Taslima Nasreen makes an ample use of symbols and imagery from the world of nature to underline Kalyani’s pain and anguish at being deprived of whatever she requires emotionally. In French Lover the Eastern and the Western cultures are juxtaposed to bring out the contradictions and dichotomies that the immigrants have to encounter.

An overall analysis of Taslima Nasreen’s aesthetic skills shows that she is not a very careful artist and concentrates more on content than aesthetics. Critics call her artistically naïve as she at times becomes too loud and vociferous and acquires a propagandist’s tone. The conservative orthodoxy-ridden community of Bangladesh levels a charge against her that she uses obscenity in order to sensationalise and scandalise, and thus attract attention. But all such charges are eclipsed by her passion to fight against all kinds of discrimination.

All her novels are carefully conceived, skilfully structured and successfully executed. Her works, particularly her novel Lajja, have evoked wide public response. They have generated as much light as heat, that is, they have been praised and condemned in the extreme. While reading her works one feels at different times variously engaged, enriched, enthralled, excited, upset and angered. One may not always agree with what Taslima Nasreen says but one cannot help feeling a deep sense of appreciation for her integrity, courage and honesty. She, quite lucidly and clearly puts into perspective institutionalized religion and its dogmas that have lost socio-ethical relevance and promote enmity between various socio-religious groups. She attempts to untangle the complex interplay of the factors contributing to the decline of secular forces and at the same time triumph of communal forces despite constitutional provisions for the implementation of secular values. At the same time, Taslima Nasreen calls for peaceful co-existence of all people irrespective of their religious affiliations and seeks solely rational ways of solving human problems. Thus, the ingrained message of her writings is that secular humanism with a civil uniform code should replace ritualistic and dogmatic religious practices and thus ensure for every human being a life based on the principles of freedom, dignity and equality.
Taslima Nasreen’s works, be they novels, poems, newspaper columns and autobiography in several parts—are universal in the sense of time, space, issues and human relationships, and transcend the personal to attain the universal significance. No amount of petty and adverse criticism can reduce the value of Taslima Nasreen’s art and work done especially for the cause of women and minorities. Taslima Nasreen is a conscious artist and for her writing is a conscious act. The intense emotional investment that her process of writing involves also becomes apparent throughout. It is as a result of her sincere good work, honest endeavour to improve level of life and natural talent of expression that she is counted among the first rank of Bangladeshi writers. With the temperature of intolerance rising high in closed societies, writers like Taslima Nasreen, who advocate tolerance and humanism, are bound to be misunderstood, even fiercely opposed. But the comforting idea is that such writers as Taslima Nasreen are endowed with the grit that overcomes all opposition. My humble endeavour to explore and understand the mind and art of Taslima Nasreen is my tribute to her, along with other writers of her kind and calibre.