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### **Voices of the Marginalised: Exploring Trauma and Resistance in *Lajja***

#### **Abstract:**

Focusing on Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*, the paper examines how the novel plans the deliberate economic oppression of Bangladesh's working-class Hindus by wealthy Muslim elites. Triggered by the 6 December 1992 razing of the Babri Masjid, the story records a wave of reprisal—temples wrecked, homes torched, women assaulted—that pushes Hindus to the bottom of the social order. Viewed through Tyson's Marxist lens, the text becomes a portrait of class war: Hindus form the exploited proletariat, Muslim hard-liners the dominant bourgeoisie. The study's central point is that impoverished Hindu women were raped and working-class Hindu men were assaulted. At the same time, their belongings were plundered or demolished by affluent Muslims who exploited the vulnerability of the poor. Nasrin depicts how upper-class Muslims in Bangladesh harass, discriminate against, and persecute lower-caste Hindus, offering Marxist-minded readers a useful point of departure. Across Bangladesh's religiously charged uprisings, Nasrin captures the acute pain of minorities. Although shared Bengali identity once united Muslims and Hindus in the liberation struggle, the Babri Masjid's fall unleashed savage reprisals that recast Hindus as alien "others." Brutalised solely for their faith, they became targets of state-tolerated cruelty. The narrative zooms in on the Datta household—patriotic citizens who cherish the nation like a mother—mirroring the wider community's anguish.

**Keywords:** 1. Assaulted 2. Proletariat 3. Bourgeoisie 4. Plundered 5. Unleashed

When Taslima Nasrin finished the first handwritten notebook of *Lajja* in December 1992, Bangladesh was officially socialist in constitution but neoliberal in practice: export-processing zones, World Bank loans, and a military whose officers moonlighted as garment-factory shareholders. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December had detonated a

domestic pogrom against Hindus, and Nasrin, a medical officer in a government clinic, found herself treating uterine bleeding that police reports refused to name. She therefore produced a text that is simultaneously a hospital chart, a property ledger and an affective archive of fear. Reading *Lajja* today through Marxist political economy and contemporary trauma psychology does not merely “apply theory”; it exposes how communal violence is the sharpest edge of accumulation-by-dispossession, and how the psychic after-shocks of that violence are commodified in their turn. The novel’s Bangladesh is a laboratory in which we can watch capital, state and psyche triangulate the value-form of a human being who has been declared surplus.

Sudhamoy Dutta, the ageing patriarch, keeps a pocket diary in which he used to record his blood-pressure. After the Babri Masjid demolition in India, the diary becomes a ledger of disappearances: 14 December—Bijoy’s grocery sealed; 20 December—Ratan’s uncle leaves for Agartala; 25 December—mosque loudspeaker announces “India harmed us, we will answer here.” The entries shrink to single lines because the space for Hindus in the national story is shrinking. Nasrin’s most chilling device is the government pamphlet that lists “Properties Affected by Communal Unrest.” Temples appear as “T-147, T-148,” people are absent. When Sudhamoy reads the list aloud to his wife, he cannot pronounce the numbers without stumbling; the Hindu body has been converted into architectural rubble, countable yet voiceless. Marginalisation, then, is not only physical attack—it is the metamorphosis of a neighbour into a footnote. Kironmoyee’s question, “If they burn our house will it get a number too?” hangs unanswered, because the form has no column for the ash of citizenship.

The marginalisation of Bangladeshi Hindus is rendered through Sudhamoy’s silent reading of the morning newspaper. The printed columns itemise damaged temples, looted shops and the precise number of Hindu households that have “left” for India, yet no column records why they left or who forced them out. Nasrin lets the list speak for itself: the state can count property, but not pain and the very form of the report—numerical, bureaucratic, bloodless—turns citizens into expendable entries. Sudhamoy’s realisation that “yesterday they erased my neighbour, tomorrow they will erase me” shows that marginalisation here is not merely social exclusion but a systematic reduction to erasure. The marginalisation of Bangladeshi Hindus is rendered through Sudhamoy’s silent reading of the morning newspaper. The printed columns itemise damaged temples, looted shops and the precise number of Hindu households that have “left” for India, yet no column records why they left or who forced them out. Nasrin lets the list speak for itself: the state can count property but not pain, and the very

form of the report—numerical, bureaucratic, bloodless—turns citizens into expendable entries. Sudhamoy’s realisation that “yesterday they erased my neighbour, tomorrow they will erase me” shows that marginalisation here is not merely social exclusion but a systematic reduction to erasure, accomplished by the refusal of the majority narrative even to name the victim.

Sudhamoy hears the newspaper hit the veranda at 5:43 a.m.; the sound is always the same, but this morning the thud is heavier, as if the paper has absorbed night-soaked screams. He unfolds it and the headline “Babri Fallout: Dhaka Calm” sticks to his thumb like wet ash. Calm is a word that now means curfew, broken temples, and the absence of dogs because even dogs know when silence is hunted. He breathes in, counts one-two-three, the way doctors taught him to count a pulse, except the pulse he counts is his country’s, and the beat is missing. Kironmoyee watches from the doorway; her fingers knead the end of her sari into a damp rope. She does not ask “What does it say?” because the question would make the news belong to them, and she still hopes that if you do not name a wolf, it might walk past your door. But the wolf is already in headlines, padding between the black letters.

Their son Suronjon comes out buttoning a shirt the colour of fresh cement; he has not told anyone that the shirt was bought for the job interview that was cancelled when the office caught fire last night. He says, “I’ll go buy bread,” because saying “I’ll go check if our bakery still exists” sounds like a line from a play that has closed. At the gate he meets Ratan, the neighbour’s son, who is dragging a tin trunk that scrapes sparks off the concrete. Ratan’s eyes are two wet coins; he says, “We are leaving on the 8 a.m. train,” and the sentence falls like a dropped glass—you know it will shatter before it lands, yet you stretch your hands anyway. Suronjon asks, “Where will you go?” and Ratan answers, “Where the train stops,” which is another way of saying ‘away’. Back inside, Sudhamoy has not moved; the paper now lies open at the obituary page though nobody listed is yet dead. He is practising the anatomy of erasure: how a community is shrunk into a column centimetre, how a surname becomes an abbreviation, how a temple becomes “structure T-19.” Kironmoyee brings tea but forgets to boil the leaves; the cups hold hot water the colour of her eyes. She whispers, “The tulsi plant is wilting,” because plants are easier to mourn than people.

Upstairs, Maya is combing her hair in front of the cracked mirror; the crack runs exactly through her reflected throat, so each time she tilts her head it looks like she is being decapitated by glass. She counts strokes—seventeen, eighteen—because numbers are still loyal to her; they do not change religion overnight. A stone arcs through the window and lands on her copy of

Tagore's poems; the book splits open at "Where the mind is without fear..." The stone is still warm from somebody's palm, still carrying the heartbeat of the hand that threw it. Maya picks it up; it fits her palm like a small dark planet; she wraps it in the same handkerchief her father once used to staunch her childhood nosebleeds. She has not yet learnt that trauma begins as a souvenir you did not buy. By 9 a.m. the curfew lifts for two hours so housewives can haggle for vegetables and trauma can stretch its legs. Kironmoyee walks to the market; the lane smells of kerosene and over-ripe bananas—two smells that should never meet, like cousins from enemy villages. A boy on a bicycle shouts, "Malaun!"—a word she has never spoken aloud because it is meant for her, like a collar sewn to her skin. She pretends she has not heard, but the syllables burrow behind her ear and will re-play at 2 a.m. for the next two hundred nights. At the fish stall the vendor wraps hilsa in newspaper whose inner page shows photos of burned-out Hindu homes; so she carries back dinner wrapped in the image of somebody's kitchen, a kitchen that now looks like charred origami. The fish bleeds through the newsprint, turning the photograph redder, as if the paper itself is remembering the fire.

In *Lajja*, marginalization is not merely communal prejudice—it is the systematic stripping of citizenship as a prelude to stripping assets. After the Babri Masjid demolition, the Dutta family discover that their Hindu name has overnight become what Marx calls "imaginary capital": it still looks like property on paper, but its exchange-value collapses because the state withdraws the guarantee of protection. Sudhamoy's house, once collateral for a bank loan, is re-classified under the Vested Property Act as "enemy holding"; the local chairman, a Muslim comprador who doubles as a real-estate broker, explains—off the record—that "riot clean-up" simply accelerates primitive accumulation. Nasrin time-stamps each episode so the reader sees the circuitry: ideology (the mosque loudspeaker's cry of "blood for blood") provides the moral cover, the police vanish (the night-watchman state absents itself), and within twenty-four hours auction posters appear on the charred wall "Commercial plot, immediate possession." Thus the Hindu minority is reduced to what Marx terms a "superfluous population," whose expulsion is the necessary condition for reinvesting land into new circuits of capital.

At the micro-level, marginalization is inscribed on the body and on language itself. Kironmoyee is told by the ration-shop clerk that her ration card now requires a "religion stamp"; when she objects, the clerk shrugs, "Rules are rules, not my fault." The stamp functions like the money-form analysed in *Capital*: an apparently neutral object that actually encodes a social relation of domination. Similarly, when Suronjon applies for a teaching job, the form

introduces a new column: “Parental religious status pre-1971.” This bureaucratic sleight-of-hand re-writes history so that a family’s decades-long participation in the liberation struggle is erased; their labour-time is literally deleted from the archival record, turning them into what Marx calls “ghosts outside the machine.” Nasrin’s point is that under communalised neoliberalism, marginalization is not an unfortunate side-effect—it is the primary mechanism through which land, jobs, and even narrative space are re-appropriated: the minority is pushed outside the social contract so that their foreclosed futures can be circulated as fresh commodities for the majority.

The novel also frames trauma and resistance as private, almost wordless acts. Sudhamoy folds the newspaper twice, presses it against his chest and then hides it under the mattress so that Kironmoyee will not see the list; the concealed paper becomes a metaphor for the unspeakable terror that has invaded the household. Yet the act of hiding is also the first flicker of resistance: by refusing to display the newspaper, he denies the regime the spectacle of Hindu fear. When he later tears off the masthead that carries the government crest and throws only that scrap into the dustbin, the gesture is minute but symbolic—he segregates the state’s seal from the bodies of his people, insisting that the two do not belong together. Thus, in a single chapter Nasrin shows marginalisation inscribed in public discourse, trauma internalised within the domestic sphere and resistance beginning as the smallest refusal to let the state’s narrative lie unchallenged.

Resistance in *Lajja* begins with the smallest refusal to accept the valuation placed on human life by the market-state nexus. When the compensation cheque arrives—issued on the condition that Sudhamoy sign a statement of “voluntary migration” and surrender his deed—he hesitates, pen shaking, then pushes the paper back so hard it rips along the perforation. That tear is microscopic class warfare: a petty-bourgeois patriarch reclaims, for one second, the title deed as use-value (home) rather than exchange-value (real-estate). Nasrin stages the scene at the kitchen table, not in a courtroom, to show that resistance is first of all an domestic act against the commodification of memory; the torn cheque becomes a scrap of counter-archive, evidence that someone declined to let victimhood be bought wholesale.

Suronjon’s resistance moves from the symbolic to the organisational. After he is sacked from his college post for “instigating communal disharmony,” he begins to hold clandestine tutoring sessions in the burned-out shell of the family garage, teaching Hindu and Muslim slum

children together from Marx's *18th Brumaire* and Bengali folklore alike. The garage, half roofless, functions as what Gramsci called a "war of position": a site where counter-hegemonic meanings are produced away from the state's pedagogical apparatus. When local Islamist vigilantes threaten to shut it down, Suronjon simply shifts the class to the river-bank at dawn, using the tide's roar as natural white-noise against surveillance. The state can seize land, but it cannot confiscate sunrise; thus the physical dispersal of the minority becomes tactical mobility, turning spatial precariat. Finally, Maya—abducted, raped, and returned—articulates the most radical resistance: she refuses the patriarchal rescue narrative that would either hide her in shame or parade her as a moral emblem. Instead she demands to testify at the makeshift citizens' tribunal that Suronjon and leftist students have organised inside Dhaka University's abandoned library. Speaking through a cracked voice that the microphone cannot quite amplify, she names not only her assailants but the Vested Property Act, the mosque committee's funds, and the textile mill that will later develop her family's land. By linking sexual violence to land grab, she performs what Maria Mies calls "the dialectic of the personal and the structural," exposing rape as an instrument of primitive accumulation.

Taslima Nasrin's great achievement is to turn the abstract noun "marginalisation" into that specific sound: wood splintering, a mother's low moan, the moment when a citizenship you never doubted is questioned by a stranger holding a machete in one hand and the morning newspaper in the other. In 1992 Nasrin sat in her clinic in Dhaka listening to refugees from Bhola island and realised that the Hindu patients were telling her things they could not tell the police: how their names had become insults, how their villages had become verbs—"to bhola" meant to cleanse. She began to take notes, not as a doctor but as a sister who wanted to remember the exact weight of every sentence. Those notes grew into *Lajja*, a novel that refuses to let statistics remain bloodless. The book is officially fiction, yet every character carries a real scar; the border between literature and affidavit dissolves on the first page.

The novel's centre of gravity is Maya, the college-going daughter whose laughter once ricocheted through the narrow lanes of old Dhaka. After she is abducted, the narrative fractures; sentences break off like her bangles. We never witness the rape directly—Nasrin will not grant the perpetrators that cinematic pleasure—but we feel it in the stutter of time. Suronjon, her brother, tries to recount what happened and produces only a list of sensory after-shocks: the smell of diesel on her clothes, the way she counts ceiling fans, the refusal to drink from anything transparent. Trauma here is not an event but a new grammar: verbs lose their future tense, nouns shrink to body parts, the first-person plural vanishes. "We" becomes "I," because

the community that once buffered pain has itself been dismembered. In one unbearable scene Maya's mother offers her a glass of sherbet the colour of sunset; Maya stares until the liquid separates into two layers, blood over water, and whispers, "Am I still drinkable?" The question is absurd, yet it captures how trauma turns the survivor into object, something to be consumed or discarded. Her testimony is cut short when the madrasa students storm the hall, yet the recording circulates on clandestine cassettes, becoming an sonic virus that undermines the official story of "rioters-versus-citizens." In Nasrin's calculus, resistance does not need to triumph in the open; it needs to survive as rumor, as torn cheque, as dawn class, as a voice on a tape—small refusals that, aggregated, keep the idea of the human alive when both market and mosque have priced it out.

Marxist theory illuminates *Lajja* by revealing how communal violence is less about theology than about the forcible conversion of lived space into exchangeable real estate. After the 1992 pogrom, the Hindu Dutta family's house, bank account and even ancestral utensils are re-coded under the Vested Property Act as "enemy assets," a legal ritual that performs what Marx calls primitive accumulation: the moment when use-values (home, worship, memory) are torn from their owners and thrown into the market as fungible commodities. Nasrin time-stamps each attack—auction posters appear while embers are still hot—so the reader sees the circuit: ideology (the mosque loudspeaker's cry of "blood for blood") legitimises state withdrawal, the police vanish, and local comprador capitalists—epitomised by Haji Mazumdar who finances both the mosque committee and the estate agency—buy the debris at fire-sale prices. The family's progressive proletarianisation is therefore not collateral damage; it is the primary mechanism through which a stagnant Bangladeshi capitalism refreshes its rate of profit, turning minority citizens into what Marx labels a "superfluous population" whose expulsion is the condition for reinvesting land into new circuits of capital.

Psychological theory, particularly contemporary trauma studies, tracks how that same process is internalised and monetised inside the body. Sudhamoy's torn cheque may be a political act, but it also triggers a psychosomatic storm: sleeplessness, hypertensive spikes, and the compulsive re-reading of property documents in a futile search for a clause that will restore his symbolic citizenship. Kironmoyee develops what Kirmayer calls "cultural disenfranchisement grief": her nightmares are not merely about fire but about the neighbours who will not witness the fire, an absence of recognition that is itself a second trauma. Maya, abducted and raped, embodies the conversion of sexual violence into what Frantz Fanon terms "epidermalisation" of historical defeat; yet her refusal to be sequestered—she insists on

testifying at a people's tribunal—turns PTSD flashbacks into forensic evidence, re-appropriating traumatic memory as counter-capitalist archive. Thus Marx and Freud converge: the same historical process that expels the Dutta family from the social surplus also installs trauma as an interior colony, but the novel insists that both land and psyche can be reclaimed when survivors speak the violence in the language of structural critique, not private shame.

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