

A Theoretical Analysis of Geopolitical Perspectives on Identity Crisis in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

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Abstract

The focal point of this article is to critically analyze Taslima Nasrin's Lajja (Shame, 1993) and to focus on the significant impact of geopolitics and religious fundamentalism on society to address the question of identity in the context of religion and nationality. The novel portrays the socio-cultural problems that emerged from the massacre of the masjid Babri and the consequent attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. The Datta family experiences racial displacement amid rising waves of religious terrorism targeting minority Hindus. The paper examines how their sense of self is tested and transformed in the face of these events. This paper thoroughly examines Lajja, focusing on the impact of religious prejudice and its consequences in the social and political sphere through Geopolitical theory. It also offers a significant analysis of how religious extremists can exploit religion to create divisions within societies and marginalize certain. The novel's narrative makes it timeless and relevant, highlighting the significance of fostering harmony and understanding among diverse beliefs within communities, particularly about the divisions caused by religious and philosophical conflicts. This contributes significantly to the context of religious acceptance in contemporary literature. The paper examines how their sense of self is tested and transformed in the face of these events, focusing on the impact of religious prejudice and its consequences in the social and political sphere. It also offers a significant analysis of how religious extremists can exploit religion to create divisions within societies and marginalize certain.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, social, political, postcolonial, feminism.*

Introduction

Nasrin, a renowned Bangladeshi writer and feminist, has sparked a thought-provoking exploration of Islam in *Lajja* by focusing on the postcolonial religious fundamentalism and feminist issues in Bangladesh. Nasrin is widely acknowledged for her fearless approach as a feminist, challenging the limitations imposed by Islamic patriarchy in Bangladesh, though her distinct viewpoint has gained strong disapproval and is considered controversial by Muslim fundamentalists. The novel's main character, Sukumar Datta, represents the struggle of someone whose sense of self is shaped by external influences rather than their beliefs. Sukumar is an atheist and communist, highlighting the conflict between his convictions and the expectations placed on him by society. The author's account illuminates the complex and sometimes controversial connection between identity and nationhood in a postcolonial setting, where religious identity is closely intertwined with national pride:

'My last question,' said Suronjon, 'is why are we trying to bring Bangladesh back into the complicated vortex of the two-nation theory that caused the separation from British India and created a different country? Who is doing this ignoble thing? And whose interest will this serve? "From today, the Muslims, Hindus, Christians, or Buddhists will not be known in national life by their religious identity. They are all Pakistani citizens irrespective of their race or religion and will be known simply as Pakistani." Pakistan was perhaps better, don't you think?' asked Suronjon. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 125)

Lajja explores the distressing experiences of the Hindu family(Datta) as they deal with the unrest that followed the Babri Mosque's destruction. Nasrin creates a narrative that directly addresses religious extremism and reveals its devastating effects. Nasrin emphasizes the profound consequences of religious intolerance on personal lives, familial relationships, and National identity through Dattas. Thus, the

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narrative illustrates the collective struggles and fears experienced by the group, conveyed through the individual suffering of each family member.

As the Dattas face increasingly frequent attacks, they find themselves stripped of their home and sense of belonging. The novel vividly portrays the traumatic journey of escaping and living in a foreign land. The characters experience notable growth throughout the story; for instance, Sudhamoy Datta represents rationality, championing secularism and peace amidst religious antagonism. Sudhamoy experienced a severe paralysis attack. Kironmoyee Datta highlights the challenges women encounter in a patriarchal society and also seeks to evade this assault by fleeing. At the same time, Suronjon Datta undergoes a shift in his sense of self as he grapples with the harsh reality of religious understanding. Neelanjona becomes a victim of abduction, rape, and got killed. Maya becomes a victim of Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh for being born into the Hindu minority community.

Literature Review

Yadav (2020) notes that Nasrin voices her opposition to the mistreatment of women and the various forms of domination that women face in Islam. Pathan and Jasrai (2016), *Lajja*-Shame, a highly debated work by Taslima Nasrin, represents a daring effort to reinterpret the concepts of faith and humanism in a profoundly unsettling way. In the face of controversy, Nasrin endeavors to reshape the understanding of what it means to be human. Banashankari (2015) remarked on the thematic elements of *Lajja*, which illustrates the challenges Hindus of Bangladesh face in a Muslim context. Minu Mehta (2014) observes that in *Lajja*, the strength of gender identity is so dominant and encompassing that it overshadows and conceals all other aspects. Hasan(2013) states that, in times of escalating riots, the Hindu community in Bangladesh finds themselves retreating into a state of fear. Suronjon meanders through the bustling streets of Dhaka, enveloped in a haze of semi-consciousness. The turmoil and conflict observed in South Asia can be linked to the influence of religious extremism.

Methodology

By examining Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* from a historical and political perspective, we uncover how the narrative is influenced by the socio-political context of South Asia, especially in Bangladesh, in the early 1990s. It unfolds during the tumultuous period of the communal riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India in 1992, a pivotal moment that profoundly affected Hindu-Muslim relations throughout South Asia, particularly in neighboring Bangladesh. Utilizing a historical approach, the researcher examines the manifestation of communal tensions within the novel and analyzes how Nasrin challenges the political and religious frameworks that incite such violence. This method facilitates a detailed analysis of how *Lajja* not only mirrors historical occurrences but also challenges the inadequacies of both Bangladeshi and Indian political frameworks in safeguarding their religious minorities from extremism and violence:

It was 7 December. The day before, in the afternoon, a deep darkness had descended on the banks of the Sarayu River at Ayodhya. Kar sevaks had brought down a 400-year-old mosque. This destruction happened twenty-five minutes before the kar seva—that is, selfless service announced by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was expected to begin. The kar sevaks worked for nearly five hours to pound the entire structure, complete with its three minarets, to dust. The top leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the VHP, the Rakshtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), and the Bajrang Dal were all there when the events took place. Central security personnel, the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), and the Uttar Pradesh police did nothing; they stood there watching the brutal acts of the kar sevaks. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 5)

The historical methodology employed here focuses on placing the novel within the broader socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. The narrative illustrates the challenges encountered by a Hindu family residing in a predominantly Muslim community as they endure persecution and violence in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid incident. The historical context plays a vital role in comprehending the novel's depiction of religious extremism. Through analyzing the communal riots that followed the demolition, the researcher aims to uncover the historical dynamics present in the novel, especially the emergence of religious nationalism and

its effects on minority groups. An examination of historical contexts may delve into how Nasrin employs her characters' experiences to mirror the genuine challenges encountered by religious minorities in Bangladesh, particularly highlighting the marginalization and violence faced by Hindu communities amid the growing tide of Islamic fundamentalism. This historical perspective further facilitates an examination of the novel's extensive commentary on the crisis of identity—illustrating the challenges faced by individuals from minority groups as they seek to harmonize their religious identity with the political demands imposed by a dominant state:

People like Sudhamoy, who were part of the minority in Bangladesh, had not escaped the clutches of the fundamentalist Muslims in 1990, and so it was unlikely that they would be able to escape their clutches in 1992. This time too, the Sudhamoys would be expected to retreat into their ratholes. But why? Because they were Hindus? Because Hindus in another country had broken a mosque? (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 17)

The examination of political methodology facilitates an understanding of how state politics and religious ideologies influence identity. The identity crisis faced by the Hindu minority in *Lajja* is intensified by the Bangladeshi government's inability to safeguard its citizens, resulting in a deep sense of isolation and discontent. Through the lens of political theory, Nasrin's critique of the national identity of individuals reveals the prohibitive aspects of Islamic national identity, framing Hindu citizens as outsiders. The identity crisis experienced by the characters in the novel transcends individual struggles, serving as a mirror to the broader political and religious tensions that shape the political and social context of the country.

Geopolitical Theory

Geopolitical theory is a conceptual framework in literature that examines the influence of geographical areas on the interplay between geography, politics, and power, as shown in many literary works. Understanding the intricacies of global political dynamics requires a fundamental understanding of geopolitics. It is experiencing significant transformations in its comprehension of territory. The phenomena of colonialism, imperialism, migration, nationalism, and globalization profoundly impact autonomy. This can be examined by applying geopolitical theory to yield significant insights into these effects. *Lajja* highlights the critical role of geography and its impact on the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. These concepts symbolize power dynamics within politics and religious impact on individuals, offering a deeper insight into the human experience within a particular geopolitical setting through the Datta family.

The study of geopolitical theory looks at how politics, geography, and power interact to affect both domestic and global affairs. Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* offers a structure for examining these patterns, particularly in the context of the post-colonial landscape of South Asia. The exploration of geopolitical theory involves a detailed examination of the ways in which ideologies shape state policies, as illustrated in *Lajja*. Nasrin analyses the deterioration of Bangladesh's secular principles, highlighting how political groups manipulate beliefs to reinforce their power. This is consistent with broader geopolitical debates about the struggle among religious nationalism and secularism, which cast doubt on the idea of nation-states as cohesive units. The circumstances surrounding the Dutta family illustrate the tangible effects of geopolitical conflicts, emphasising the repercussions faced by marginalised groups that bear the brunt of ideological disagreements.

Discussion

Geopolitical Power Dynamics

Lajja analyses the impact of religious and political disputes in Bangladesh and their effect on individuals' lives, with geopolitics playing a crucial role. After its publication, Taslima Nasrin experienced harassment through threats of violence and death through phone calls and anonymous letters. *Lajja* was banned in Bangladesh primarily due to its critical portrayal of conventional Islamic practices and its depiction of religious extremism. The novel critiques the discrimination experienced by minority groups, especially Hindus. In the preface of the novel, Nasrin has stated the reason for its prohibition in Bangladesh:

The Bangladesh government banned *Lajja* two months after the book was published because it was the government's responsibility to protect Hindus, and it had completely failed to do so. *Lajja* is still banned in Bangladesh. No one in Bangladesh has the strength to go to court again against this Ban. Many believe that I have criticized Islam in *Lajja* and the Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh have issued a fatwa against me-both untrue. I have not criticized Islam and the fatwa is not because of *Lajja*. The fatwa is because I have criticized Islam in many of my other books. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg ix)

The plot revolves around the Dattas, a Hindu family who endured escalating persecution as a result of the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition in India, which sparked unrest and violence in Bangladesh, which is a Muslim-majority nation. Through the novel, Nasrin critiques the precarious cohabitation of religious communities and the political exploitation of religious identity. The demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya sent a profound shockwave through the Muslim community in Bangladesh. A profound animosity developed among them, leading to expressions of their fury through acts of vengeance directed at the Hindus of Bangladesh, as though each bore some culpability for the events that transpired at Ayodhya. This illustrates the direct geopolitical repercussions of a political and religious occurrence in India, leading to violence against the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. It highlights the complex relationships between cross-border religious tensions and how political leaders may permit or exacerbate these tensions to retain authority:

Suronjon lay in bed and looked at the morning's papers. The banner headlines of the paper said, "BABRI MASJID DESTROYED, DEVASTATED". In his view, matters like the birthplace of Ram and a mosque sprouting in that soil did not bear much thinking about. He believed that the destruction of the sixteenth-century structure was not only hurtful to the Muslims of India but that it also affected all Hindus. It had destroyed the general sense of well-being and hurt the collective consciousness. The matter of Babri Masjid would cause mayhem in Bangladesh too. Temples would be ground to dust, Hindu homes burnt, shops ravaged. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 5)

Nasrin emphasizes the challenges encountered by the Dattas, symbolizing a more significant geopolitical conflict between secular principles and the increasing influence of religious nationalism in Bangladesh. Sudhamoy experiences profound disillusionment due to the state's inability to safeguard its minority citizens. Sudhamoy's grief emphasizes the shortcomings of the vision for Bangladesh as a nation where diverse religions can harmoniously coexist. Although he actively contributed to the war of independence out of a sense of patriotism, his religious identity currently places him at risk within a geopolitical circumstance that is heavily influenced by Islamic nationalism:

But why? Because they were Hindus? Because Hindus in another country had broken a mosque? Why should responsibility for that be foisted on the Sudhamoys? (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 17)

The novel presents a persistent conflict between migration and identity as the Datta family confronts the potential of escaping to India to evade religious persecution. This conflict underscores the complexities encircling national identity, geopolitical dynamics, and the notion of belonging. Sudhamoy illustrates the emotional turmoil experienced by minorities compelled to contemplate migration due to geopolitical influences. He experiences a profound bond with his homeland; however, the emergence of a religious riot creates a threat to his family's safety. This creates unrest in his understanding of identity and sense of belonging:

'Sukumar, this is the homeland of the Muslims,' advised neighbours as they left, too. 'There is nothing certain about our lives here.' 'If there's no security in the land of my birth, where in the world can I expect to be safe?' asked Sukumar Datta in reply. 'I cannot run away from my country. Feel free to leave, if you want to go somewhere else. I cannot leave all this-these coconut trees, betel-nut plantations, rice fields and my home spread over a generous two Bighas of land- and become a refugee at the railway station in Sealdah.' 'Why should I leave my own country to go somewhere else?' Sudhamoy had said in response, 'If I die I'll die here on my own land, and if I live, it'll be in my own country.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 10-11)

Surajnan, the son of Sudhamoy, initially dismisses Hindu nationalism and embraces a secular identity by showcasing himself as an atheist. But, as violence against Hindus escalates, he experiences disillusionment and bitterness. It illustrates the impact of geopolitical forces on individual identity and political convictions:

'Baba, all through last night, I've been thinking about something,' said Suronjon, grasping his father's hands. 'I know you will not listen to me. But I'm still asking you to heed what I say. Do what I say, Baba. Let's go away.'

'where?' asked Sudhamoy.

'India.'

'India?' Sudhamoy was shocked as though he had heard something outlandish. He reacted like the name was obscenity, a forbidden word, something that should not be said loud.

Slowly, Kironmoyee's cries stopped. She fell face down on the floor and lay moaning.

'Is India your father's home or your grandfather's?' asked Sudhamoy, frowning angrily. 'Is anyone in your family from India? Why are you thinking of going there? Aren't you ashamed to think of running away from your own country?'

'Will my country let me live, Baba? What has your country given you? What is it giving me? What has your land given Maya? Why is Ma crying? Why do you groan at night? Why am I not able to sleep?'

'There are riots in all countries. Aren't there riots in India? Aren't people dying there? Do you have any idea how many people are dying there?'

'Riots are good, Baba. But here, we don't have riots. Here, Muslims are killing Hindus.'

'You're calling yourself a Hindu?' asked Sudhamoy excitedly.

'We might be atheists and humanists.' Said Suronjon, restraining his father, 'but people call us Hindus. They call us unfidels. Never mind how much you love this country or how deeply you feel you belong- this country will push you away. Never mind how much we love our people, they will push us away. You can't trust these people, Baba. You have treated so many Muslim families for free but in these times of trouble has anyone come to stand by you? Like Maya, the rest of us, too, will be found floating under the bridge. Baba, let's go away.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 314)

Sirajnan's disillusionment reflects a profound sense of hopelessness regarding secularism amidst escalating religious violence, illustrating the significant impact of broader geopolitical dynamics on individual lives. By examining Datta's family, Nasrin delves into the broader consequences of political and religious violence, demonstrating how geopolitics influences identity, belonging, and individual freedom:

There was a silent question in Suronjon's beating heart. Dawn was breaking. Light streamed in through cracks in the window.

'Let's go away,' said Sudhamoy.

'Where shall we go?' asked Suronjon in surprise.

'India,' said Sudhamoy.

Sudhamoy was ashamed to say it, his voice trembled, yet he spoke of going away because the strong mountain that he had built inside him had gradually began to crumble. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 320)

Historical and Socio-Cultural Background of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's cultural and historical background must be considered to appreciate the significance of *Lajja*. One of the most significant events that takes place in the novel is the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, in the year 1992. The Hindu community, which is the central element of *Lajja*, suffered profound consequences as a result of the increase in interreligious conflict and violence in Bangladesh, which was precipitated by this incident. The novel offers a glimpse into Bangladeshi society, exploring the challenges faced during the nation's postcolonial era and the struggle to establish a unique identity. *Lajja* is set against the backdrop of the demolition of the 16th-century Babri Masjid, which triggered severe repercussions in Bangladesh. Temples were desecrated, and the Hindu minority was subjected to senseless and brutal violence by religious extremists. Acts of terror inflicted immense suffering upon both men and women, resulting in devastating consequences such as rape, physical assault, property destruction, and robbery. These atrocities left their lives in ruins and caused unimaginable misery. As in the preface of the novel, Nasrin has mentioned:

I wrote *Lajja* when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack Hindus. It all happened during December 1992. The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction of the Babri Masjid by attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh, burning their homes, destroying their temples and shrines, and raping Hindu women. I had to protest this terrible violence in *Lajja*. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg ix)

There was a rise in awareness of religious identity; non-muslims were forcefully categorized as Hindus through a vague framework. This created a perilous situation that jeopardized the pluralistic nature of Bangladeshi society. They faced scrutiny over their identity, with their religious beliefs being the defining characteristic. Their collective identity as a nation was severed due to the historical establishment of Bangladesh as a predominantly Muslim land. Dattas makes the difficult decision to depart from the land, carrying a heavy emotional loss and grappling with a profound struggle for personal identity and cultural belonging.

Lajja delves into a wide range of challenges confronting contemporary Bangladeshi nationalism. It holds a distinctive place in the archives of Bangladeshi Literature, as it unveils the long-standing conflicts within the Indian sub-continent and boldly condemns the inhumane actions of religious fundamentalists towards the minority Hindu population. The forceful reaffirmation of Muslim identity hurt the general Hindu mindset. Both communal and secular Hindus were left perplexed.

The Binaries of Identity

Identity politics has been a prominent topic of discussion in both political and academic circles for several decades. The issue of identity arises when individuals face difficulties in establishing their sense of self due to the lack of acceptance from those who already possess a similar identity. In the novel, Sudhamoy proudly declares his identity as an atheist, communist, and Bangladeshi. He does not actively practice Hinduism. However, based on binary logic, if someone does not identify as a Muslim, they are forcefully categorized as a Hindu. Due to this forceful act of categorizing non-Muslims as Hindus, Dr. Datta is constantly faced with an endless array of compromises. He is forced to part with his ancestral property at a meager rate, he is denied well-deserved promotions, he is compelled to abandon traditional attire, and his wife is pressured to conceal the visible markers of her Hindu marital identity by stopping the application of vermilion and giving up her white conch shell bangles. Nevertheless, Sudhamoy maintains an optimistic perspective despite the challenging environment in his nation.

Suronjon is grappling with uncertainty surrounding his identity as he experiences a shifting sense of identity, struggling to define himself fully. His endeavor to establish his sense of self doesn't quite reach a definitive form. He shows a lack of empathy towards his family and disregards their concerns. He couldn't understand

why he should be afraid of his friends and others merely because they come from another religious community. Suronjon, in a defiant state of mind, presents the following argument:

Did he have to leave his home just because he was called Suronjan Datta? His father was called Sudhamoy Datta, his mother was Kiranmoyee, and his sister's name was Neelanjona Datta and so, would they too be expected to leave? Would they have to take refuge in either Kemal's home or Belal's or Hyder's, as they had done two years ago? (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 3)

Suronjon, being an atheist, does not believe in the existence of a higher power. Despite lacking personal connections to temples or the idols within them, the deliberate targeting and destruction of Hindu places of worship, along with the violence inflicted upon Hindus, compels him to reassess his understanding of the world. It is truly astonishing to him when he is blamed for the destruction of a mosque in a foreign country where he has never set foot in. His frustration intensifies as he observes the clear division of the country into opposing binaries, Hindus and Muslims:

'Do you know that they broke the Sowarighat temple yesterday? The Shyampur temple, too?' said Kironmoyee sadly.

Suronjon stretched.

'Did you ever go to temples?' he asked. 'why are you upset that temples have been destroyed? Let them destroy some more. Where's the harm? Let these nurseries of religion be smashed to smithereens.'

They get angry if a mosque is broken down. Don't they know that Hindus are furious if temples are broken? Or is it that they don't understand? They are breaking hundreds of temples to compensate for one mosque. Isn't Islam a religion of peace?' Kironmoyee said in response. 'The Muslims know that the Hindus of this country will not be able to do anything even if they are angry. Therefore, they are doing whatever they want to. Has anyone been able to touch a single mosque?' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 81)

Ultimately, Suronjon realizes that the financial burden of remaining in his native land is overwhelming. To effectively counter the militants on the opposing side, he must fully embrace and embody his Hindu identity, adopting a more assertive and proactive approach. Suronjon's situation is similar to that of many bright, forward-thinking young people worldwide. The most painful aspect for him is not the religious persecution but rather the oppressive system that imposes an unyielding identity upon him, leaving him completely powerless to resist. He desires to relocate to an open-minded and accepting India that respects his freedom to choose his religious beliefs. His home country does not provide any such opportunities.

Nasrin recounts an incident highlighting Suronjon's realization of his imposed Hindu identity. He knew his Hindu identity during childhood but didn't fully understand its significance. During Suronjon's time in lower primary school, he found himself in a heated disagreement with a classmate named Khaled, who happened to be Muslim. At the height of this dispute, the boys resorted to hurling the most offensive insults at each other. At that moment, Khaled expressed frustration by calling Suronjon a 'Hindu.' Suronjon firmly believed that the term 'Hindu' carried negative connotations similar to derogatory terms like 'swine' or 'dog':

Suronjon had never learnt to differentiate people on the basis of religious identity. As a child, he did not even know that he was Hindu. When he was in Class III or IV in the Mymensingh District School, he was once caught in an argument with a boy named Khaled about something they learnt in class. As the argument reached a crescendo, Khaled called him names like 'son of a pig.' Suronjon, too, gave it back in kind.

Khaled: 'Offspring of a dog!'

Suronjon: 'You are the son of a dog.'

Khaled: 'Hindu!'

Suronjom: 'You're a Hindu!'

Suronjon thought that 'Hindu' too was a swear word. For quite a few years, he had thought that Hindu was a pejorative, mocking term. (Lajja, 2014, Pg 36 – 37)

As Suronjon grew up, he discovered that Hinduism referred to the religious community he was a part of. When he reached a certain age, he confidently asserted that his primary identity was that of a human being, with his Bengali heritage coming second. No particular religion influenced the creation of this race, and the leader's vision was for his people to transcend communal divisions and coexist in complete harmony.

It was only as he grew up a bit that he understood that there was a community of people called Hindus and he belonged to that community. After sometime, he began to believe that he belonged to that community. After some time, he began to believe that he belonged to the the human race and a community called Bengali. The Bengali community had not been created by any religion. He wanted to believe that it was non-communal and inclusive. He believed that the term 'Bengali' signified non-divisiveness. He also believed that Bengalis wrongly thought that foreigners who were of the same religion were their own people, and that Bengalis of a different religious community were the Other, and this consequently created mistrust amongst Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims. (Lajja, 2014, pg 37)

Nasrin explores the intriguing dynamics of compromise that occur when there is a discrepancy between an individual's self-perception and the expectations imposed by social agents. Therefore, Sudhamoy is burdened with an imposed Hindu identity. When categorizations and simplifications are employed together, they can result in a strong inclination towards stereotypes. These compromises play a crucial role in driving change by bringing forth new perspectives in social discussions and actively contributing to forming social arguments. Observing how the interplay between behavioral confirmation and proving oneself contributes to the formation of identities. Behavioral confirmation occurs when the identity provider effectively influences the behavior of the identity receiver to align with their expectations. At the same time, Self-identification involves the reversal of this process. The identity receiver can align their behavior with their self-views or identities. Both processes contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Identity is the fundamental essence of an individual, shaped and acknowledged by society. To establish their own identity, individuals rely on the presence of others. This fosters a sense of superiority among different groups, as they firmly believe in the superiority of their group over others. Their personal identity is closely tied to the success or failure of the groups they belong to and the level of inclusion or exclusion experienced by others in their group. According to Mercer, ethnocentrism is a natural extension of egocentrism. Regardless of the unjust, brief, and limited nature of their group, individuals still tend to hold prejudice in favor of their group over others, as predicted by social identity theory (Mercer, 2009). Establishing a distinct identity is crucial. Comparing different groups is essential for understanding differentiation and identifying how one group differs from another. Various groups will partake in particular activities to showcase their dominance over one another. Through stereotyping, individuals are often portrayed in a negative light, their opponents are vilified, and those who are different are transformed into perceived enemies. The Bangladesh society emphasizes the Hindu identity of the Dattas family. The coexistence of more limited and broader identities within a single hierarchy can strengthen or create tension between them.

In this research article, we explore how religious identity can play a dominant role in shaping social groups. Also, it often overshadows national identity. In a world that values diversity, individuals usually seek connections that set them apart from others and unite them with like-minded individuals. Identity is, therefore, built on both rejection and acceptance as fundamental principles. In the past century, a significant focus has been on strengthening both personal and group identities. Nasrin's *Lajja* effectively depicts the diverse forms of religious extremism, showcasing the detrimental effects they inflict on people as well as communities.

Communal Tension and Religious Extremism

In the preface of *Lajja*, Nasrin begins her writing with the powerful statement, "Let another name of religion be humanism." (*Lajja*, 2014). In this research article, we delve into the examination of how extremists use distorted beliefs and language to manipulate convictions and cause violence. Nasrin explores the far-reaching effects of unquestioning belief, which can lead to strained personal connections, the unraveling of societal bonds, and the abandonment of fundamental principles of humanity. Nasrin aims to demonstrate the origins of communal violence by highlighting how extremists manipulate individuals to serve their hidden agendas: She seeks to depict religion as an imminent threat to humanity. She also explores how these extremist elements deliberately sow tension and resentment within communities, disregarding the importance of inter-communal harmony. The lack of religious order resulted in the hardship of religious minorities in Bangladesh. *Lajja* explores the significant threats that religions, particularly Islam in Bangladesh, present to the Hindu minority community:

'Apparently peace is the ultimate goal of all religions, but even at the end of this century we continue to see how religion is the cause of much strife, bloodshed, and disgrace among human beings. Nothing but the flag of religion can crush human beings and humane emotions so completely.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 50)

The oppression of minority groups is primarily driven by communalism, which is rooted in religious beliefs. *Lajja* illustrates how social upheaval and political maneuvering intensify religious discord. The author reveals the complex interplay of political motivations that exploit religious disparities for personal benefit, fostering ongoing communal strife. By showing the fundamental motivations behind this manipulation, Nasrin prompts readers to critically examine the intentions of individuals who incite religious discord for their personal or political advantage. Additionally, in the novel, Nasrin investigates the effects of patriarchal institutions on underprivileged groups, with a special focus on women. Through an examination of the challenges faced by women in a society marked by religious strife, Nasrin reveals the fundamental injustices present and advocates for women's equality as a crucial element of societal advancement:

The attackers are raping women- wives before their husband's eyes, daughters and sisters in full view of their fathers and brothers. There have been instances where mothers and daughters have been raped together. They are telling the relief workers: "We don't need relief. Help us cross the border. We want to leave." (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 246)

Nasrin's *Lajja* offers a captivating exploration of the different manifestations of religious extremism. The novel delves into the harmful beliefs that foster animosity, aggression, and prejudice are present among other religious groups. Nasrin explores the emergence of extremism through an intense devotion to one's faith, resulting in the marginalization or persecution of those who do not share the same beliefs. *Lajja* vividly portrays the devastating impact of extremism through its exploration of fundamentalist views and violence among communities, which results in the oppression of minority religious communities:

When two groups fight each other, it is called a riot. They have riots. And people say we're having riots here! What we have here is communal terror. You can call it torture and violence. One lot is gleefully smashing and killing the other.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 273)

A group of individuals blazed the Dhakeshwari temple. The law enforcement authorities exhibited no inclination to intervene in the situation. The primary temple, where devotees gathered for prayers, was reduced to ashes:

There was nothing safe about the October of 1990. A group of men set the Dhakeshwari temple on fire. The police stood by and did nothing to stop them. The main temple burnt down; they destroyed the *naatmandir*-that is the temple for the entertainment of the gods, the temple of Shiva, the guest house, and the family home of Sridam Ghosh, right next to the guest house. They destroyed the Gaudiya Math, its *naatmandir*, and the guest house of the *math*. The temple was plundered. The main temple of Gaudiya Math was destroyed. The Joykali temple on the other side was smashed. A room within the boundary walls of the Barhmo Samaj was bombed out of existence. The decorated throne of the gods in the Ram Sita temple

was destroyed. The main chamber was destroyed as well. The math at Naya Bazar was broken. The temple at Bonogram was shattered with shovels. (*Lajja*, 2014, Pg 7)

The treatment of Hindus in Bangladesh during these communal riots by the Muslim community was marked by significant cruelty. They suffered extreme violence, leading to their demise. Many Hindu families found themselves landless due to the necessity of abandoning their homes. Their women experienced repeated acts of violence and violation. Even the children of the society were not spared by the extremists:

'Riots are not floods, where you can move people away from the water and danger and get them something to eat and be done with it. Riots are unlike a fire, where you can put out the flames and be safe. During a riot, human beings put their humanity on hold. During riots, all the toxins in people's minds are released. A riot is not an act of nature, nor is it an accident. Riots are a distortion of humanness,' sighed Sudhamoy. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 240)

However, Sudhamoy never considered leaving his homeland. During the migration of their relatives, they urged Sukumar Datta to accompany them, emphasizing that this land was the homeland of the Muslims, which rendered life in their current country precarious. However, Sukumar Datta was resolute in his commitment:

In Sudhamoy's memory, his relatives- Kaka, Pishi, Mama, Mahima- left one after the other. The train from Mymensingh Junction moved towards Phulbaria.

'Sukumar, this is the homeland of the Muslims,' advised neighbours as they left too. 'There is nothing certain about our lives here.'

If there's no security in the land of my birth, where in the world can I expect to be safe?' asked Sukumar Datta in reply. 'I cannot run away from my country. Feel free to leave, if you must. I'm not leaving my father and grandfather's home to go somewhere else. I cannot leave all this-these coconut trees, betel-ut plantations, rice fields and my home spread over a generous two bighas of land- and become a refugee at the railway station in Sealdah. If I die, I'll die here on my own land, and if I live, it'll be in my own country.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 11)

The lasting significance of *Lajja* is evident in its capacity to illuminate the repercussions of religious extremism and its effects on society. This work advocates for the importance of collaboration between faiths, emphasizes the need for compassion, and highlights secularism's role in protecting individuals' rights. Sudhamoy was often humiliated and beaten by Muslims, forcing him to get converted to Islam:

Very often, they would hang him from the roof beams and beat him. As they beat him, they said that he should become a Muslim. One day, after Sudhamoy had steadfastly refused to become a Muslim, they lifted his lungi and said that since he hadn't agreed to becoming a Muslim, they were going to circumcise him- they sliced off his penis. They laughed like they had when they'd made him drink urine. Sudhamoy then lost consciousness. He had no hope of getting out alive. The other Hindus were tied up there in that camp were frightened into converting to Islam. Even then, they were not allowed to live. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 95)

Nasrin's *Lajja* explores the complex relationship between gender and religion, highlighting the patriarchal characteristics inherent in fundamentalist beliefs. Maya's character exemplifies the dual challenges encountered by women, navigating the complexities of being part of a religious minority while also confronting the realities of patriarchal systems. Nasrin confronts the outdated gender norms sustained by religious extremism and promotes women's independence and empowerment in their religious identity. Understanding Taslima Nasrin's views on Islam and women's rights necessitates an examination of the specific context of Bangladeshi society. Traditional gender roles, economic hardship, limited education, overcrowding, religious beliefs, political instability, and natural disasters significantly impact the lives of women in Bangladesh. The conditions experienced by women in these contexts differ considerably from those in Western countries.

In *Lajja*, the primary factors contributing to the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh were rooted in cultural and ethnic differences. *Lajja* offers a critical examination of Bangladesh's political and social environment, delving into the delicate state of religious liberty within a predominantly Muslim society. Nasrin questions the notion that religion should determine an individual's nationality or feeling of belonging. This work explores critical issues regarding the obligations of the government to protect the civil rights of religious minorities, as well as the significance of promoting a diverse and inclusive community:

The fundamentalist party of Bangladesh said: The Government of India is responsible for the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The Hindus of Bangladesh are not responsible for the mistakes of the Government of India. We are not antagonistic towards the Hindus of Bangladesh or temples. We have to be motivated by the spirit of Islam and maintain Communal harmony.' (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 126)

A key focus of *Lajja* is the exploration of violence within communities and its significant impact on the people. Through the experiences of the Datta family, we see the concussion, terror, and relocation faced by the Hindu minority families. The narrative further explores the impact of violence on individual psychology, resulting in a diminished belief in humanity and an experience of alienation. In *Lajja*, the depiction of women reveals their reduction to mere objects, exploited by male predators to fulfil their desires. *Lajja* illustrates specific men who are poised to exploit young Hindu girls to fulfil their base desires. Rape constitutes an offense perpetrated against individuals solely based on their gender as women:

The entire subcontinent was in the grip of riots that had been sparked off in the name of religion, there were awful cruelties inflicted upon minority communities, and since Suronjon was part of a minority community, he was aware of the full extent of the cruelty. The Hindu citizens of Bangladesh were not responsible for the tragedies in India. How would Suronjon possibly explain this to anyone? (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 126-127)

Lajja presents a critical examination of the decline of secularism in Bangladesh and the dangerous repercussions that follow. Nasrin highlights the significance of a community that advocates the values required for a harmonious living. Her characters illustrate the difficulties encountered by individuals who endeavor to uphold secular principles while contending with the pressures of religious extremism. Nasrin's characters, profoundly influenced by the surrounding violence, represent endurance and optimism, working towards a society that rises above religious partitions. This work encourages an examination of the harmful effects of religious extremism and advocates for the promotion of interfaith understanding and peaceful living together. *Lajja* provides insight into the devastating impact of religious extremism and intercommunal strife. Sudhamoy and his family, who once thrived in a diverse and harmonious community, then face unexpected hostility stemming from their Hindu beliefs. Nasrin skillfully illustrates the fear, sorrow, and devastation the characters face, emphasizing the harmful effects of unchecked religious zeal. This narrative acts as a warning, highlighting the importance of communication, comprehension, and compassion in addressing the polarizing influences of extremism. *Lajja* is an essential contribution to the collection of grief tales since it examines the traumatic experiences of displacement and the anxiety that befell the displaced victims.

Conclusion

The geopolitical analysis enables the study to investigate the intricate dynamics between religion and political authority in Bangladesh, as depicted in the novel. Nasrin expresses strong disapproval of the Bangladeshi government's inability to safeguard its Hindu citizens amid the riots. This analysis can be examined through the political science framework, especially regarding governmental strategies, national identity, and religious affiliation. Through the lens of political analysis, Nasrin's novel can be examined for its reflection and critique of the political environment in Bangladesh during the early 1990s, a period marked by the ascendance of Islamic nationalism and the gradual erosion of the secular ideals upon which the nation was established. *Lajja* presents a compelling examination of this transition, illustrating how the tacit

endorsement or neglect by the state of religious extremism results in the victimization of at-risk minority groups.

The analysis delves into the geopolitical dynamics between India and Bangladesh, which significantly influences the events depicted in the novel. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in India incited communal unrest in Bangladesh, illustrating the profound impact that internal occurrences in one nation can exert on another, especially within a geopolitically delicate area such as South Asia. Through a detailed examination of the Datta family's experiences and the complex interplay of religion, gender, and nationalism, Nasrin encourages readers to consider the delicate nature of communal harmony and the pressing necessity to address religious intolerance. *Lajja* is an important literary piece that stimulates discussions surrounding religious extremism, human rights, and the quest for a fair and just society. In *Lajja*, Nasrin illustrates the complex and conflicting religious dynamics between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh. While the narrative draws inspiration from the actual events surrounding the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a prominent mosque in India, as well as the ensuing Hindu-Muslim violence, it fundamentally highlights the role of religious extremism fostered by fundamentalist ideologies:

Everything has been plundered and burnt- they took clothes and shoes from houses, sheets, and pillows, poured kerosene, and set them alight. Fires have burnt rice fields and coconut plantations. They have forcibly stripped men of their lungis. They have raped the women they've come across and taken away their saris and jewellery. (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 246)

Through a geopolitical analysis, this study explores how Nasrin illustrates the impacts of Indian politics on the fabric of Bangladeshi society. The depiction of religious extremism in the novel offers a critical lens through which to examine the emergence of religious nationalism in India and Bangladesh. Nasrin argues that the intertwining of religion and politics in both nations has fostered a climate where violence and intolerance can thrive, significantly impacting minority groups:

"Hindus, do you want to live? Then it is Bangla that you must leave! Go away to India!" is the slogan reverberating all over Bhola. Hindus are being asked, "When will you leave?" and threatened with "We'll chop you up and feed you to the cows." (*Lajja*, 2014, pg 246)

Nasrin points to religious fundamentalism as the underlying factor contributing to violence in Bangladesh. Religious fundamentalists leverage religion in conjunction with culture, caste, ethnicity, and nationalism to advance their political objectives. The dissemination of an ideology characterized by animosity and intolerance towards individuals of differing faiths or those who dissent from particular religious interpretations is evident. Coercive methods are utilized to exert control over individuals, and direct violence is employed to suppress dissent from both inside and outside sources within the community. An individual's identity is influenced by their self-perceptions regarding the surrounding world, which are shaped by factors such as belief system, ethnicity, and social and financial standing. In *Lajja*, a crisis such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid prompts a scenario where individuals are defined solely by their religious identity. There exists a dichotomy suggesting that individuals who do not identify as Muslim are perceived as adversaries. A Bangladeshi started to be exclusively characterized by his religious identity. His previous experiences have been obliterated, rendering his historical narrative inconsequential.

However, India used *Lajja* as a diversion tactic to shift global attention away from the religious violence and communal unrest that erupted in India after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. This act of vandalism sparked intense conflict between Hindus and Muslims, leading to widespread riots and international criticism of India's inability to uphold peace and prevent the involvement of Hindu nationalist organizations (Hasan, 2010, pg 540). A conflict emerges between an individual's desired self-placement and the societal imposition of identity. Thus, the emergence of identity politics is observed. Sudhamoy and Suronjon identify primarily as citizens of Bangladesh. However, during times of crisis, their religious identity becomes the sole aspect of their identity that holds significance. They find themselves relegated to a status of inferiority in a nation they once believed to be their own. However, the core message conveyed by all

faiths is love and unity. As Nasrin stated in the preface of the novel, though it was written thirty-one years ago, *Lajja* is still relevant today and will continue to be appropriate as long as religious conflicts and violence persist between different groups, "*Lajja* will remain relevant as long as the incidents described in it continue to happen and as long as there is conflict between people of one religion and another" (*Lajja*, 2014, pg ix). Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* aims to eliminate the influences of religious fundamentalism and communalism in modern society.

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