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THE POST-COLONIAL WOMAN IN TASLIMA NASRIN'S 'LAJJA' (SHAME)

ASHALATA RAMAN

Abstract:

Taslina Nasrin a contemporary woman novelist, born and brought up in Bangladesh, vocationally trained to be a doctor, presents the agony of the post colonial citizens of BanglaDesh. Their quest for self-identity is the pivotal point in her novel 'Lajja' - Shame. The post colonial woman belonging to the minorities in Bangladesh is epitomized in Kironmoyee. She is often seen with a still posture "eyes filled with plaintive entreaty. "Let us live, let us go away." But her own desire has to be sacrificed because of her loyalty to her husband. When she was rooted out of the ancestral home along with the other members of her family. She found it hard to adjust to her new surroundings and would often wake up crying at night as "She remembered the beloved home she had left behind. She would wonder if the little scaffold she had made for the bean plant was still there. She would remember how the guavas in their garden were really the best in town, and she hoped that the green coconut trees were still being taken care of" (p. 20).

INTRODUCTION -

As a mother she is greatly affected by the displacement. It is not just the emotional value of the old house but its economic value and the added space value it offered to her family that causes the greatest distress in her. She sighed very often, "I should have been breeding fish in the pond and planting new vegetables. The children should have been eating fresh fruits from the trees. And now all our money goes in paying rent."

Her only wish was to cross over to India in order to find peace and security. She has to cope with her frustrated son, her patriotic husband and a growing daughter of marriageable age. The riots and communal violence further increase her fears because her grown up son was becoming increasingly rebellious. Her husband's physical well being worsens with a paralytic attack. She pleads desperately to her son, "Listen to me ... it is dangerous to go out". But her disobedient son only turns a deaf ear to her anxious protests.

Her identity as an individual is mitigated by the continuous acts of self denial and sacrifice. She had to change her name once and lived under a Muslim name. 'Sindhoor' the red powder of a married woman's symbol had to be avoided for fear of being identified as a Hindu. She used to sing Kirtans beautifully. Married at the age of sixteen, and a daughter of a famous advocate, she did not find lack of love in her husband's house. He had encouraged her to learn Rabindra Sangeet and she had sung them with such feeling and beauty. But after independence, she becomes reluctant to sing in public because of the religious discrimination and humiliation she experienced as a woman of the minority community.

In spite of the stress and strain Kironmoyee had the amazing power to hold the family together. She never complained about anyone, not even about her useless son. Though she had to pass through so many of the bad patches, she only lent herself unreservedly for the welfare of her family.

In her early married years she was hopeful of migrating to India, but it was a strange family she had married into. She would secretly shed tears. Her father's letters urging her to migrate to India would only aggravate her longing.

Her patriotic husband had immense faith in his native land and convinced her that Brahmaputra

had enough water to sustain them. She had thus no option but to abide by his decision. Except for this one possessiveness, her husband was extremely good to her and as a result she did not seek for selfish escape. From a bottomless spring inside her so much more love flowed for her husband.

She suffers a strange sexual deprivation as well. Since 1971, when she was just twenty eight years old due to some physical inability her husband was not in a position to make love to her, Kiron accepts her fate with resignation, "Are you going to leave me and go away?" asks her seared husband and Kiron only answers calmly, "This life of ours does not come back to us, so we must make the best of good things and the bad." Her physical demands make her to spend sleepless nights. She suffers from an involuntary desire to long for physical contact. Whenever the shadow of her husband's friends fell on her lap, she longed, "And how wonderful it would be, if a shadow made of flesh and blood could rest its head on her lap." (p. 114). Her physical cravings did not last very long. Her body soon became used to the deprivation and as age caught up with her, her past longings faded to a distant shadow. This has further added to the loss of identity for the past twenty one years. Yet, deep in her heart and soul a whole sea of love tossed and twined, washing away the physical wounds every time they showed up.

She has tremendous ability to manage the financial affairs of her house. She had saved when it was possible and now there was no money she willingly sold her jewelry. She had never been lavish and had no desire for buying sarees or ornaments for herself. Forever sacrificing, she was also capable of suppressing all her desires, including her desire to worship idols openly. Her son was an atheist and her husband did not believe in external rituals except in true service to humanity. The accumulated suppressions reach the bursting point and explode without a warning one-day. The tumultuous fury of a flooded river broke out from her thin frame when she could find no more human consolation. There was no one to whom she could turn to for a support to lean on. Maya, her only daughter was abducted in front of her to be gang raped and murdered; her husband's illness and her son's apparent irresponsible and deviant behavior trigger her depression. She takes out her idols as if to pray for a life free from worries, anxieties, insecurity torture and death. Her inconsolable heart breaks out in anxious mutterings of the Lord's name. Then in an unexpected and unpredictable thunder storm of sorrow the heart rending wails burst forth from her.

"Without warning Kironmoyee rent the silence of the house. She wailed and the sound of her crying seemed to rise from the depth of the earth. So intense and unbearable was the sound of her wailing that Sudhamoy sat up in shock and Suranjan came running." (p. 212)

This sudden reaction had done its final service to save the wrecked family. Sudhamoy decides to leave off his stubborn patriotic desire. He decides to go to India in spite of the shame that swept over him. It is then that he realizes that "that was the way it would have to be because the strong mountain that he had built within himself was crumbling day by day." (p. 216)

THE SECOND GENERATION POST COLONIAL WOMAN:

Maya, the girl child, is not neglected or marginalized by her parents, but discriminated by the society as a Hindu girl. Her innocence, love, youth, faith, body, freedom and rights are cruelly obliterated. She was very affectionate and responsible. She took tuitions to support the family. She was generous and lent money to her jobless brother to buy cigarettes. She had irresistible zest for life and wanted to enjoy the good things of life. She loved Jahangir passionately and hoped to marry him. She abided by the norms of the society and expects her brother or father to take her to a safe place. She asserts her individuality later by going to Parul's house to take shelter. She was practical and could take sensible measures to ensure safety. She was not caught up with useless sentimentalism or idealism. All she wanted was to live and love. She was called back from Parul's house when her father had a paralytic attack. She obediently came back and with so much concern, love, sympathy and affection took the duty of nursing her ailing father and supporting her anxious mother. She easily forgave her brother who was quite indifferent and irresponsible. She willingly risked her personal safety by coming back to her Hindu home. In the core of her heart there was no racial, religious or linguistic barriers. She only had the elemental human passions - to love and to be loved.

It is quite tragic that such a simple girl with her boundless fun and zest for life, was humiliated, dragged along by a group of young men and gang

raped, murdered and thrown into the water where her bloated body floats unclaimed. As her name suggests, She dwindles into mere shadow of her dreams. Yet, even after her death, She had done a service to her family. Her father had been shocked into the realization of the futility of his patriotic idealism.

The novel thus represents individuals who are severed from their roots, victimized, oppressed or subjugated by a social order which is dominated by fanaticism.

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