

**ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND SECULAR IDEOLOGIES IN
MULTICULTURAL INDIA****DR. SRIKANTH. S.**Assistant Professor,
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Karnataka**ABSTRACT:**

India being a country of tolerance since ages has built a reputation as a country known for giving refuge with honour to all those people who were persecuted in their own country; be it Jews, Parsis or Tibetans. Such a country with divergent cultures, languages and religions has strongly rooted secularist ideals. But very recently, the country with the incident of Dadri (UP) and the killing of the famous Kannada writer, Kalburgi and two Marathi writers namely Dabholkar and Pansare, the issue of religious intolerance became the focus of India and international Media. The killing of three major regional writers of India has posed a direct threat to established secular credentials of India. It has certainly put a dent on the image of India at international platforms. The criminal elements have vociferously let loose and are targeting people connected with artistic freedom. The upper hand gained by religious hooligans has exposed the hollowness of the practice of secularism in India. This act of religious zealots has not only questioned the intellectual honesty of these writers but it has also forced the creative artist of any sort to check and to be more cautious in their artistic freedom. The situation is such that the people in a secular democratic India are afraid of touching anything religious in their creative piece of art. Today, it appears that that India has become the Mecca for dissenters and conscientious objectors. If writer or a painter takes an anti-Islam or an anti-Hindu stand, it is certain that he or she has to receive vehement criticism. Hence, the question to be answered is where exactly is the secular India heading towards? Are religions more important than being secular in building a nation? The paper concentrates much on the above discussed issues along with humanity which is the bottom line of all the secular and idealistic thinking. It also uncovers the importance of secularism in sustaining the artistic freedom.

Keywords: Secularism, Artistic Freedom, Democracy, Intellectual Honesty**INTRODUCTION:**

François Hollande, the French President who was the Chief Guest for India's sixty-seventh Republic day parade made an interesting observation about the event. He was more mesmerised by the Indian cultural extravaganza than the military prowess of India. He was much attracted by the colourful tableaux that displayed the multicultural fabric of India. Hailing from a land of pioneers of Democracy that accords a valuable place to the arts where boundaries are pushed and new thinking becoming possible, it is obvious to see the French



President applauding the cultural diversity of India which became possible due to the importance given to the artistic freedom. Plato, on the other side in his book *Republic* opines that artists are dangerous people and exiled them from his ideal Republic. But today, the modern Democracy can hardly reconcile such views, as it survives only on tolerance. The world today is not in a state to such opinions of Plato; his opinion may well suit a 'hermit country' like North Korea but not to a country that promotes free and liberal thinking.

Democracy is considered as a launching pad of secular ideologies that promotes artistic freedom. A democratic country always stimulates free and rational thinking which is directly linked with a country's progress. Hence, it is shameful and bizarre to see any democratic country putting a hold on such a freedom fearing conservatives and religion. Hence, it is the role of an elected democratic government to stop political interference and pussy footing over the issue of artistic freedom. They should stop cajoling the religious extremists and encourage the scientific temper and rational thinking.

India being a country of tolerance since ages with an edifice built on strongly rooted secular credentials has started to crumble down. All sorts of religious lumpen vandalism with peculiar sorts of creatures like religious fundamentalists have started emerging from its cracks. The country is heading towards moral and ethical bankruptcy at the cost of human values. The country popularly known for its divergent cultures, languages and religions with strongly rooted secularist ideals is at the realm of danger. The recent examples are be it the incident of Dadri (UP) and the killing of the famous Kannada writer, Kalburgi and two Marathi writers, Dabholkar and Pansare. The issue of religious intolerance became the focus of Indian and international media. The hollowness of the practice of secularism in India has been exposed. The killing of these three writers has posed a direct threat to the established secular credentials of India. It has certainly put a dent on the image of India at the international platforms.

The criminal elements have vociferously let loose and are targeting people connected with artistic freedom. The religious hooligans have gained upper hand and are questioning the intellectual honesty of these writers or artists. They have also forced these creative artists to be more cautious in their artistic freedom. The situation is such that the people in a secular democratic India are afraid of touching anything religious in their creative piece of art. Today, it appears India has become a Mecca for dissenters and conscientious objectors. If a writer or a painter takes an anti-Islam or an anti-Hindu stand, it is certain that he or she has to receive vehement criticism. Religions and religious issues have become more important than being secular in building a nation. It appears that the country is heading back towards Stone Age. The secular fabric of India is on the verge of extinction. The fundamental right like artistic freedom which is part of freedom expression is in doldrums. The situation is such that the inhuman atrocities committed under the banner of religion cannot be questioned through artistic freedom.

The situation in India on rational thinking though as improved a lot, the recent developments happening across the nation is quite alarming. As an academician, one cannot expect our kids to balance between the studies of religious texts and/or literature with the knowledge of computers or software technology. If such a thing happens, our future progeny will be the victims of the clash between the forces of continuity and the forces of change.

Secular ideologies naturally promote artistic freedom and innovative thinking. A nation of captive minds with the conservative mindset cannot flourish. The basic feature of Renaissance movement was questioning on reasoning. The people associated with it went to the level of questioning even the existence of God. They debunked religion and posed challenges to God. But today, the situation across the world has drastically changed and people connected with religion expect the world to dance according to their tunes, whosoever questions the theological aspects through their artistic freedom is easily targeted. The fundamentalists who target these artists hardly have any literary merit. They kill and announce ‘fatwa’ without even looking into the piece of work, if some read them for their shock value; others decry them as just sensation-seekers. But, most of them hardly try to delve deep into the art, and instead pose serious threats to the artists. In the same token, an artist cannot hurt the religious sentiments of a particular group in the name of artistic freedom. The best example that I quote is M.F Hussain’s painting where he paints the naked Sita sitting on a naked Ravana, can anyone call this as aesthetically pleasing? Wasn’t M.F Hussain aware of the outcome of such a painting? Didn’t he know that it would create religious intolerance in India? Did he do it to sensationalise his piece of art?

Yes, he did violate certain sanctified norms; his experimentations were hurtful to Hindus. He took liberty only with the Hindu Gods not with other religions. This kind of vigorous artistic interpretations created a room for doubt among art lovers. The same happened in Denmark where a cartoonist took liberty of drawing an absurd cartoon of Prophet Mohammed and received criticism.

In India, there is strong criticism that secularism reviles India and the Hindu culture but ignores Islamic fundamentalism, which in recent years is proving to be a wrong conception as the Hindu fundamentalists have started to cut loose and are posing serious threat to criticism of Hindu religion and Gods. Touching something religious through the artistic freedom is unacceptable to these elements. It is true religious abuse cannot be accepted and permitted by anybody against any religion, in the same token the purpose of religious abuse should not become a hindrance to freedom of expression to stop the desire to reform through arguments and discussions. Religious matters which are posing threats to equality and causing disparity should be criticised and debated through artistic freedom. No religion gives you the permission to kill someone in its name.

V.S Naipaul, quoting his experience from Indonesia was able to extract the true spirit of Islam and its Holy Book, Quran. He asks an important question to Imaduddin, a cleric in Indonesia regarding the modern questions that a Holy Book like the Koran can solve. In his reply, Imaduddin says “human relations. Sense of equality. Freedom from want, freedom from fear. These are the two things people need, and this is the basic mission of the Prophet Mohammed” (Naipaul, 19). This answer is highly significant with the prevailing wrong notion about Islam globally. People across the world have come to the conclusion that Islam is an aggressive religion and violence is associated with it. But nowhere in the Quran, is it said that one has to wage a holy war and kill the people of other religion. Islam is based on secular principles. It promotes equality and instigates people to follow the right path.



India being a secular state has to draw the line somewhere, or else it can give a chance for competitive fundamentalism that can easily damage the nation's multicultural fabric. Moreover, a democratic nation cannot stifle individual freedom by suppressing the artistic freedom. If the democratic government calls an artist to bend and scrape before religious authorities, it is a sign of country heading towards becoming a banana republic. The best example is Pakistan and Bangladesh. An artist cannot be used as a pawn in a larger political game, today one can see the divide among the writers and artists on the issue of religious and cultural intolerance. The writers and artists are divided as right wing artists-writers who endorse the communal principles and the left wing writers-artists who endorse the secular principles.

The governments by allowing these religious zealots to become more powerful have forced themselves to translate their views into state policy. Today, these fundamentalists by killing the three notable writers have destroyed the image of India and have put the liberal society into litmus test. The civilisational Heritage that the country had procured for all these years is in jeopardy. Mores so, who gave these anti-social elements the right to judge our freedom by their values and reactions? Do our governments sanctify the rights to them to decide what is acceptable and what is not? Can they be considered as the accepted arbiters? Banning the books that could cause religious intolerance in India was quite frequently happening till yester years but killing the writers on communal lines sincerely speaking is not justifiable. The truth is that in India, we make a very bizarre association between communism, a totalitarian ideology that has little respect for human rights and whose leading rights have murdered millions of people, and liberal freedoms along with artistic freedom.

As we all know India being a multicultural nation that strictly follows secular ideologies in the past always prided itself for its openness, its freedom to think and argue, its lack of bigotry, but today the situation in India is grim, it is a disgrace that our successive governments have chosen the side of religious extremists against their own history, civilisation and values. The governments which were and are in power in India are busy favouring a particular sect for vote bank politics. The government backed fundamental forces are successfully trying to ignominiously shunt the artistic freedom from India. These religious groups involved in political factions are posing serious danger to the democratic set up by challenging the strongly rooted secular ideologies. The artists too are divided and have become convenient pawns for political gains, some writers across India have started a unique kind of protest against these rising religious intolerance among extremists, they have not only criticised the dirty act of terror committed by these hooligans but also returned the awards they received from the government agencies. This act of some writers was though a bold step and a subtle way of protesting against the injustice committed on these writers, but still a question creeps in to my mind: whether this was really needed? The irony of the situation is some writers whose names people had already forgotten also returned the awards for popularity. Personally speaking, returning the awards as a kind of protest to protect artistic freedom is not a smart move. Instead, these writers should have sensitised the issue in a different way, more by attacking these zealots through writing itself. The articles and columns that could educate the mass through newspapers would have been the best option.

Whether it is Islam or Hinduism, both are not above the sovereignty and integrity of a nation. In a country like India with its multicultural fabric, it is easy to create communal riots.

Any writer or artist who touches the religious matters that are sensitive is easily targeted. Hence, it is the role of intelligentsia and academicians to uphold the spirit of brotherhood and humanity. A responsible citizen cannot see his country divided on communal lines. Indians need to come out of the parochialism within the interest of our nation.

CONCLUSION:

The common man in India is tolerant and believes in the tradition that is secular in content and his life revolves around the daily living that he mixes with different communities in the process. The issue of communalism hardly gets greater importance in his life. Literature and art should focus on these issues rather than sensationalising the delicate matters related to religion. Meanwhile, secularism does not mean appeasing terrorists, while the governments have to play a responsible role in protecting the interests of those writers and artists who criticise religion in a rational way. The Supreme Court of India has categorically declared in the case of the film *One Onu Gramathile* by S.Rangarajan and V.P Jagajivan Ram that “if speech cannot be constitutionally restricted on any of the grounds specified in article 19 (2), freedom of expression cannot be suppressed on account of threat of demonstration and processions or threats of violence” (Editorial, The Hindu). The increasing use of section 295A in the recent days has underlined the changes of competitive intolerance curtailing the space available for freedom of expression.

What is insulting or offensive is judged on a religious terms, orthodox and fundamentalist groups within every religion allowed to be arrogant and they were also given the right to set the parameters of public discourse. By violating the constitutional norms on fundamental right like freedom of speech which is connected with artistic freedom, these religious goondas are not only building public opinion and outrage against these artists but also avoiding free and fair debate on these issues which are clearly not in consonance with democratic and constitutional values. These murderers of democracy by killing the three prominent writers have put humanity in a hazardous situation. Hence, it is in the interest of a democratically elected government to safeguard the interests of artists and uphold the image of India globally by respecting secularism and cultural and religious diversity of India.

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LAJJA : A NOVEL OF CONFLICTED POLITICAL IDEOLOGY**SRIKANTH. S.**Assistant Professor
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Mysore.**ABSTRACT**

The novel at a political level outraged both the public and government due to which Nasrin was subject to a series of personal vilification. In this novel Nasrin has touched upon three sensitive social taboos of Indian sub-continent that is gender, religion and communalism, which infact made her the victim and the result of which she was outcasted from her own country. She was forced to live in exile carrying fatwa on her head. Nasrin's secular stand is quite clear throughout the novel where she detests her own Muslim community for taking law into their hands to commit atrocities against Hindu minorities. Lajja is a novel that can be read in many dimensions. It can be read in feminist perspective, as a novel of historical documentation, as a socio-religious novel and also as a novel of political contradictions, where politics too play a major role. The author though is magnanimous in providing more space for violence and hatredness in the novel, the political concerns of Nasrin is also visible. The writer as a strong belief in secularism and humanism, she expects her country to uphold its secular and democratic credentials through her hero Suranjan which is at stake, Nasrin is able to foresee the future of her motherland. She predicts that if a country that could not safeguard the rights of its minorities can no longer be democratic, let it be Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. Hence it is the prime duty of a democratically elected governments to see every individual citizen in equal terms, it should clear the doubt, anxiety or insecure feeling from their mind and should uphold the democratic principles by providing security and better life. Above all protecting the fundamental rights of the minorities should be its top priority.

“Lajja is a document of our collective defeat”***Taslima Nasrin, 1993 (The Crescent and the Pen, Pg 89)***

Termed as the most controversial novel of South Asian Literature in recent years *Lajja* stands out to be the best debut novel by any writer in the history of Bangla literature at the last decade of twentieth Century. The novel made Taslima Nasrin globally popular and also defamed Bangladesh by removing the democratic and secular tag. The society, establishments, the morality and ethics of the whole nation was exposed. The novel is often called as a historical document by critics for its huge documentation of facts and incidents that took place in Bangladesh after Babri Masjid was demolished in India in the year 1992.

The repercussion of it was so devastating and had a significant impact on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

The novel at a political level outraged both the public and government due to which Nasrin was subject to a series of personal vilification. In this novel Nasrin has touched upon three sensitive social taboos of Indian sub-continent that is gender, religion and communalism, which infact made her the victim and the result of which she was outcasted from her own country. She was forced to live in exile carrying fatwa on her head. Nasrin's secular stand is quite clear throughout the novel where she detests her own Muslim community for taking law into their hands to commit atrocities against Hindu minorities. Her anguish is visible in the preface of the text where she says.

“It is my duty to try to protect my beautiful country from them (fundamentalists) and I call on all those who share my values to help me defend my rights” (Preface, Lajja)

Lajja is a harrowing story that has been wrapped up in thirteen days, the novel narrates the pathetic story of Hindus in Bangladesh. Here Nasrin uses the life of one family who loose everything due to the wrath of Muslim community after the demolition of Babri Masjid in India. The anger is channelized against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and outcome of such an anger is the properties of Hindus were seized, temples were destroyed, wives and daughters were raped. Nasrin gives a factual details of horrifying thirteen days incidents and projects Muslims as aggressively anti-Hindu. No one, not even government nor the Muslim brother-hood were sympathetic towards their fellow Hindu citizens. Bangladesh as a nation is heading towards becoming communal and has become a safe heaven for Muslim religious fundamentalists by having soft approach towards them. This major shift is because of the Muslim organizations that enjoy huge public support particularly from the majority Muslims. Both the Bangladesh National party and Awami league are scared to touch these religious zealots, the result of which today Bangladesh is heading towards becoming a communal nation. The killing of bloggers, killing of secularists and minority Hindus is rampant. Taslima Nasrin as a matured and responsible writer displays her socio-religious concerns through her writings. Though feminism is her forte, Nasrin is more worried about her own motherland, she like Salman Rushdie daringly confronts religious fanatics, which is exceptional in all forms of literatures of the Indian Sub-Continent.

The novel *Lajja* though covers the pain and agonies of Hindu women during the communal clash of 1992 it also foregrounds the changing political ideologies of minority Hindus and Christians. The situation demands in the shift of political stance of minority communities. The Hindus who during the freedom struggle of Bangladesh considered that the country is in safe hands of democratic principles have started to feel insecure. Suranjan Dutta the young Hindu protagonist with the communist ideologies at the beginning of the novel fails to visualize the future of Hindus in his beloved nation. Maya his young sister though persists him to do something for their family, he sticks to his secular beliefs that nothing is going to happen. His father Sudhamoy Dutta too appears to be over confident about the values of which he felt should not to betray, he says,

“If there is no security in your own country,

where in this world can we go looking for it?"

(Pg 06 Lajja)

These lines just show Sudhamoy's secular thinking and his life filled with values, ethics and principles, which naturally imparted to his son Suranjana. He is firm in his stance that whatever may be the outcome of the communal clash he won't leave Bangladesh searching for a safe place in India. Suranjan is portrayed as an irresponsible brother and a disobedient child because though he is Post Graduate, he did not add single Takka to his family's income, he is fully dependent on his father's earning. He is an independent thinker, very much conscientious and logical in his approach. He always believed humanism and secularism as the basic principles of his life. Nasrin projects him on some situations as a confused and disoriented young boy with a modernist and liberal ideas. Above all his love for his motherland Bangladesh is impeccable. His father Sudhamoy displays the same kind of love towards his beloved country, he does not lose hope at the initial stage of the novel, when he was asked to leave for India with his family by Haripada, he says,

"Those who desert this country are inhuman whatever be the condition of this country at the moment, Bengalis as a race are not uncivil. Yes there is some amount of rioting now, but surely all that will subside."

(pg 41 & 42 Lajja)

These lines indicate Sudhamoy's ignorance and also foolishness in visualizing the impending danger, his firm belief in democratic principles is evident. On the other side we have Suranjan his son whose communist principles are fast evading, he like Nasrin comes to the conclusion that it is Religion which is the root cause for all the problems that the modern world is witnessing. It is because Religion, that the society and people are divided, he recalls one of the Karl Marx's saying on religion.

"Problems relating to religion are actually a manifestation of practical shortcomings, as also a protest against them. Religion is the sigh of the tortured and the persecuted, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the soul of the soulless society. Religion is the opium of the masses."

(Pg 133 & 134 Lajja)

Suranjan regrets how the countries, societies and people have been divided just because of Religion. Jammāt-I-Islami in Bangladesh, and some of the Right Wing political parties in India have divided people based on Religion. They do it to get the political mileage and to win the hearts of majority population. Suranjan becomes a standing witness to the drastical shift that a country like Bangladesh undergoes. A political party like Awami League headed by Sheikh Hasina succumbs to the pressure with the scare of losing popularity and allow Jamaatis to gain upper hand over democratic principles. It has gone to such an extent that all the so called democratic parties of Bangladesh have started to appease Muslims who form the majority of the Bangladesh population. Eulogizing Islam has become one time top agenda of all the political parties in Bangladesh opines the author.

The protagonist Suranjan echoes these concerns of Nasrin in the following words,

“Anybody living in a democratic country knows that one basic tenet of democracy is secularism. What I don’t understand is why Islam should be declared the national religion in a country which has eighty six percent Muslims? In Bangladesh the Muslims are in any case religious. It is not necessary to declare a national religion for them.”

(Pg 136 Lajja)

Taslima Nasrin in her famous book of essays titled No country for Women expresses the same kind of concern, she says,

“To tell the truth, when it comes to principle and ideology, there is no real difference among parties like Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamic unity coalition, BNP and Awami League. So what can the country’s future be like at this moment! I am incapable of dreaming of any protest about this country. The country has turned into a den of Muslim extremist terrorists.”

(Pg 126 No Country for Women)

As Nasrin in this excerpt points out Bangladesh as truly lost its secular democratic credentials, Nasrin express this view through her character Suranjan, who in the novel is so destitute, helpless and to greater extent feels isolated from his own Muslim friends. The insecure feeling of Hindus in Bangladesh is the crux of the novel. Nasrin is very much critical about her own countrymen. Whatever that the fear Nasrin had while writing this novel is becoming reality as fundamentalists are gaining upper hand and dictating their own rules over governments in Bangladesh in recent years.

Suranjan Dutta after his sister being raped and killed, his father was physically assaulted and his home being vandalized by muslim fundamentalists decides to be communal. A secular young Hindu leader in the making becomes communal to avenge for the loss. He decides to rape a Muslim woman in order to take revenge for what they had done to his young sister Maya, hence he takes a Muslim prostitute with him and rapes her and finds savage satisfaction. The situation and the circumstances force Suranjan to loose ethics, morality and his political ideology and turns him into communal.

At the end of the novel Suranjan Dutta with this act though gets the satisfaction loses his personality and principles. *Lajja* is a novel that can be read in many dimensions. It can be read in feminist perspective, as a novel of historical documentation, as a socio-religious novel and also as a novel of political contradictions, where politics too play a major role. The author though is magnanimous in providing more space for violence and hatredness in the novel, the political concerns of Nasrin is also visible. The writer as a strong belief in secularism and humanism, she expects her country to uphold its secular and democratic credentials through her hero Suranjan which is at stake, Nasrin is able to foresee the future of



her motherland. She predicts that if a country that could not safeguard the rights of its minorities can no longer be democratic, let it be Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. Hence it is the prime duty of a democratically elected governments to see every individual citizen in equal terms, it should clear the doubt, anxiety or insecure feeling from their mind and should uphold the democratic principles by providing security and better life. Above all protecting the fundamental rights of the minorities should be its top priority.

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JIHAD AND WORLD PEACE

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to explore the true sense of the word 'Jihad' from the Holy Scripture, the Quran and how it has been given a wrong interpretation by some Islamic extremists. The term 'Jihad' for Muslims in modern times has its own religious and military connotation. The Arabic word 'Jihad' is often described as "holy war", but in real terms the word Jihad means to struggle or to strive. Muslims across the world cannot be treated as aliens, majority of the Muslims across the world have strong objections for the misuse of the word 'Jihad'. Of late there are instances of criticisms coming from the Muslim world for not upholding the integrity of Quranic principles by misguided Muslims, who instead of strictly following the noble concept of 'Jihad' are involved in religious intolerance and posing threat to humanity. Such radical Muslim zealots should be strongly condemned and I feel the time for realisation has come to save humanity by removing the negative opinion of 'Jihad' from such hardcore Muslims. The stereotype opinion about Muslims has to be erased from the minds of people from other faiths. The confidence building measures, mutual respect and trust is the need of the hour in shaping this world into a space for better living to our future progeny. To label the entire Muslim community as murders and terrorists is the greatest mistake that we are committing. To blame them as gundas for the foolish act committed by few miscreants is not a wise decision.

Across the world society, the issue of religion is a highly sensitive nerve. V.S. Naipaul poignantly states that "religious or cultural purity is a fundamental fantasy. Perhaps only shut away tribal communities can have strong and simple ideas of who they are. The rest of us for the most part are culturally mixed in varying degrees, and everyone lives in his own way with his complexity".¹ He vehemently reveals the intricately segregated world that is divided on the basis of religions which have compartmentalised the human minds. Religion, supposedly resting on a base of love and peace, now poses a considerable threat to humanity, irrespective of nation. No religion in world history has been subjected to such huge misinterpretation as has Islam. Across the world today, Islam is seen as a religion that is strongly associated with violence, which to a great extent is a false notion. Islam and its Holy Book, the Quran, have never ever promoted hostility in any sense. The teachings of Islam's Holy Book in no wise promote and encourage any act of barbarity. Neither 'Allah' nor the revelations advocate a fervent recourse to carnage. Adhering to non-violence, however, the Quran makes mentions of "Slay them wherever you find them" in verse 2.91 (Quran). Apparently, this very verse has put forth a wrong impression that Islam is a religion of war and bloodshed. This association

¹ Naipaul V.S. *Beyond Belief*. p. 59

to brutality is undeniably a misconstrued concept. This verse, in turn, applies to those who unilaterally attack and pose a danger to Islam. The same is the case of ‘Jihad’ which actually means a peaceful ideological struggle which is to be conducted in a strictly pacifist mode.

‘Jihad’ in a rigorous sense of the term refers to an undisturbed peaceful resistance, conspicuously eschewing violence and rampage. It is invoked to bring about an intellectual revolution whereby ideologically it acts as a cleansing or ‘purificative’ tool for human beings. Unfortunately, the very notion of ‘Jihad’ and ‘Jihadist’ has been misrepresented and misinterpreted for very many years.

Some Muslim fundamentalists across the world have mistaken the very sense of the word ‘Jihad’ and are indulged in mass killing which has made the people of other religion to look at them in a suspicious note. The situation has deteriorated to such a level that the Muslim extremists who have mistook the meaning of ‘Jihad’ have entered the very threshold of Medina and killing the people of their own community. The recent bomb blasts in Afghanistan and Pakistan and killing people of their own fraternity at Masjids is an indication of how ‘Jihad’ and its misconstrued notion has been a kind of looming menace for humanity. It can be seen that even Muslims themselves seems to have lost patience and are eager to prove the world community what actually is the strict or the correct meaning of ‘Jihad’.

The paper tries to explore the true sense of the word ‘Jihad’ from the Holy Scripture, the Quran and how it has been given a wrong interpretation by some Islamic extremists. The term ‘Jihad’ for Muslims in modern times has its own religious and military connotation. The Arabic word ‘Jihad’ is often described as “holy war”, but in real terms the word Jihad means to struggle or to strive.

According to Shayk Mohammed Hisham Kabbani The Chairman of The Islamic Supreme Council of America,

“In a religious sense, as described by the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammed, ‘Jihad’ has many meanings. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer, as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam.”²

‘Jihad’ or a crusade never allows anything like violence to be used as force to kill non-believer of Islam. Military action or violence to preserve the integrity of Islamic tenets is only an option the last resort for a radical Muslim. Not everyone among Muslims at any point of time can use it to destroy the offender of Islam. The innocents, children and women must never be targeted. The misuse of the concept like Jihad is literally contradicting to the sayings of Quran. The concept of Jihad in modern times has been hijacked by some of the hard-line Muslims to give justification for the crimes committed by them. Islam never sanctions violent Jihad, it is not a violent concept nor a declaration of war against other religions. To give religious justifications for the crime committed against innocents is an atrocious act.

² Jihad: A misunderstood concept from Islam-What-Jihad is, and is not.

Osama bin Laden in his speech at ‘Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders’ on 23rd February 1998, says,

“All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims . . . The jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries . . . As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at depending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty . . . On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”³

If America had made a serious note of the speech of Laden on Jihad there would not have been an incident 9/11 2001 attack on World Trade Centre. Only after this incident the word ‘Jihad’ became so popular in the western media. Nobody not even Bin-Laden ever tried to ponder over the true meaning of ‘Jihad’ in Islam. The real meaning of ‘Jihad’ became so irrelevant than after and later it was only associated with violence and hatredness.

The word ‘Jihad’ and its meaning has different connotations in the world today for Islamic state terrorists and Islamophobias, according to them Jihad = Terrorism which actually describes their ignorance. As per Quran there are three types of Jihad.

1. The Jihad against yourself (Inner Jihad)
2. Jihad against Satan (which is a greater Jihad)
3. Jihad against open enemy (Social Jihad) (which is a lesser Jihad)

The Jihad against yourself manifests in many ways, quitting all the bad qualities and serving towards a better life helping the people in need loving your fellow human beings and achieving perfection by sincerely following human values. The second Jihad is to preach the word of God through the Quran through scholarship and through dialogue. Islam like other religious teaches Satan misleads and promotes fear and animosity. It means Satan distorts truth to create violence.

The third and the final Jihad is the struggle or fight against an open enemy. The open enemy as per Quran is the one who persecute the religious faith of Muslims and it also propagates upholding the religious freedom of the world (Quran 22:41). Quran condemns creating any kind of violent disorder or rebellion against any faith or government. “And create not disorder in the earth after it has been set in order” (Quran 7:57). Promoting fear of Muslims with malicious distortions of facts from Quran will only help the increase of anti-Muslim hate crimes across the world.

Jihad in Islam is only a legal warfare carefully controlled by Islamic Law. Though contemporary thinking about Jihad offers a wide spectrum of views, including conservatives who give importance to classical Islamic law and radicals who promote violent Jihad against

³ Knapp, Michael G. *The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam*.

Muslim and non-Muslim rulers. Converting people to Islam by force or coercion can never termed as Jihad, as per Islamic law it's a crime, and the concept of Muslim men rushing out to kill themselves to get seventy virgins in paradise is ridiculous and silly.

Islam is a religion and a way of life that does not separate politics from religion. It's a religion of mercy, unity and peace with one's self and others. Jihad should not be performed against Islamic rules and regulations or in the service of Allah. As stated in the Quran

“God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought you above religion and have not driven you out of your homes, that you should show the kindness and deal justly with them. God loves just dealers.”
(Noble Quran 60:8)

There is a strong message even for ISIS terrorists who target innocent Muslims and people of other faith in the name of Jihad in Quran. The Holy Scripture says,

Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you,

But do not begin aggression, for God loves not aggressors.” (Noble Quran 2:190)

If any individual Muslim violates the above said thought from the Holy book and involve in an act of terrorism he is certainly violating the basic tenants of Islam. Islam believes that Allah created all humans free and equal; it finds difference only on the basis of God-consciousness not on the basis of race, ethnicity and colour. In Islam there is a reward for kindness shown to every living creature, it also encourage the respect towards the life and property of all human beings. The irony is above all the clear cut details available in the Holy Scripture Quran on the concept of 'Jihad', people particularly the western media and public are dubious about it. The misinformation and misunderstanding on Islamic faith is hurting the majority of innocent Muslims across the world. Islam propagates peace, the very word Islam means “submitting to God” and following the path of “peace”. It condemns any act of violence and killing and upholds the universal value of sanctity for human life. It deals with realistic human society not with idealistic society.

Muslims across the world cannot be treated as aliens, majority of the Muslims across the world have strong objections for the misuse of the word 'Jihad'. Of late there are instances of criticisms coming from the Muslim world for not upholding the integrity of Quranic principles by misguided Muslims, who instead of strictly following the noble concept of 'Jihad' are involved in religious intolerance and posing threat to humanity. Such radical Muslim zealots should be strongly condemned and I feel the time for realisation has come to save humanity by removing the negative opinion of 'Jihad' from such hardcore Muslims. The stereotype opinion about Muslims has to be erased from the minds of people from other faiths. The confidence building measures, mutual respect and trust is the need of the hour in shaping this world into a space for better living to our future progeny. To label the entire Muslim community as murders and terrorists is the greatest mistake that we are committing. To blame them as gundas for the foolish act committed by few miscreants is not a wise decision.

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**TASLIMA NASRIN AND THE CONCEPT OF LESBIANISM****SRIKANTH. S**

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ABSTRACT

*The literature that speaks about Homosexuals or Lesbians or Gays is often termed as Queer literature which is categorised under the banner of Fourth World Literature. Taslima Nasrin the most controversial Feminist writer of the Indian sub-continent has got her own individual stance on the concept of Lesbianism. She sympathises with them and has given space for them in one of her famous novel **French Lover**. The paper portrays Nasrin's concerns on Lesbianism*

American writer Rita May Brown an ex-girl friend of tennis star Martina Navratilova while speaking on lesbianism says “No government has the right to tell its citizens when or whom to love”. The only Queer people according to Brown are those “who don't love anybody” (*164 – No Country For Women*).

This statement by her has raised an important issue for discussion, which I would like to include here in my paper. The literature that speaks about Homosexuals or Lesbians or Gays is often termed as Queer Literature which is categorized under the banner of Fourth World Literature. This literature has provided space for such millions of homosexuals to pitch their voice that has been silenced in the name of religion and civilization. They have remained silent since ages, burrowed in their holes with the fear that society may hate them.

The term ‘Lesbian’ originates from a Greek word called ‘Lesbo’, an island in Greece where lived a poet called Sappho 350BC, she in her poems has expressed her love and sexual attraction towards other women. This is the first glimpse of lesbianism that one can see in the history of mankind. Though its been observed by many Naturalists and Theologists that having sex with same gender is quite an abnormal behavior which is only found among humans, Human Rights activists infact oppose any such move that can curtail human rights and freedom. It is only man among all the creations of God who is acting against nature opine the Naturalists and Scientists.

Many writers among the Post Modern writers have been openly supporting Gay sex/marriage. The 21st century writers have been mainly focusing on this issue, but T.S. Eliot in his famous outstanding work ‘*The Waste Land*’ criticizes such a move by the modern man, he treats such advancement as degeneration and falling sexual standards of modern man, whereas the writers like Taslima Nasrin openly attacks this type of thinking she says,

*“I feel sorry for the conservative homophobics
caught up in this rotten, old patriarchal system*



I feel sorry for their idiocy.” (161 No Country For Women)

Unlike Eliot, Nasrin is for radical change in the way people think about Homosex or Gay sex, she vehemently attacks such an age old conservative thinking. Having complete sympathy towards women Nasrin displays inability or helplessness that women tend to have in becoming a Lesbian. Women across the world since ages have been raped, sexually exploited and brutally treated by men folk. The society has a kind of seething indignation towards women. The women rights have been consciously marginalized by the patriarchal society. In such a scenario women tend to feel the men’s companionship distress, disquiet and dissatisfying, this is where the women feel it is better to have a relationship with other women. It is not for the cause of fulfilling only their sexual desires it is also for care, love and companionship. Though they cannot feel the same kind of experience as they have with men, the need of the hour for women is to filling the vacuum that’s been left empty with the absence of men. This trend by and large is increasing all over the world. The desire for having a partner of same gender is being treated as a psychological and biological problem by few scientists, nobody is trying to uncover the sociological factors contributing for such an abnormal urge. The invisible social wall has put a limit to a woman’s movement. Society has given too much of room for men to compete, little to women to survive. It has made her feel alone, religion and society are the real game changers in women’s emancipation, all the rules of patriarchal society is cautiously safeguarded by religion. The wall that has forced some of the modern day Feminist thinkers to think about other options, naturally they have started to feel why can’t a woman be happy without a male companion?

Taslina Nasrin in one of her revolutionary novel *French Lover* puts her heroine into a test. Nilanjana the protagonist of the novel suffers in search of a genuine love, her quest for love from all the male companions including from her first love Sushanta, her NRI husband Kishanlal, her French lover Benoir Dupant becomes futile attempts. She in an alien land France suffers from loneliness. Nila throughout the novel is in a quest for love and identity. All men, whomsoever she meets in the novel exploit her, including her brother Nikhil’s friend Sunil who rapes her in her troublesome period. Nasrin meanwhile uses Nila to advocate her own philosophy of Lesbianism, she shocks the readers by bringing this concept which was hardly spoken about in the past by any other writer from literary circle of Bangladesh and India, but was less used in any form of literature. Nasrin through her character Danielle a Lesbian who had a horrific and traumatizing experience of childhood exposes the European concept of Lesbianism beautifully. Nila who was outcasted by her husband Kishanlal and her boy friend Benoir, becomes an easy prey to Danielle’s trap. She considered Danielle as her true friend with whom she can share her happiness and agony but she turns out to be a greedy Lesbian.

The striking factor in this relationship is Nilanjana the protagonist is not a Lesbian, she is not even aware that such a thing do exist. Her stay with Danielle proves out to be an ugly experience to her, as the Lesbian Danielle sexually abuses her, when she could not get what she wanted from Nila, she shows her the door. So what may be the cause for Danielle a beautiful French girl opting for a companionship with girls rather than boys? The answer for this is the most horrying childhood experience of Danielle, who when she was a young girl was raped by her own father. This infact develops a kind of phobia and nausea in Danielle



regarding men. Nila on other hand finds it so unusual and unnatural, as a normal woman she gazes at handsome Frenchmen which disturbs Danielle. Nila never wanted the tag of homosexual, being an India woman she finds it surprising that how two woman can love each other and experience orgasm.

*“Nila still didn’t understand how two women
could be in love with one another and
how there could be real sex between them,
although on many nights she had lain
beside Danielle and experienced an orgasm”
(116 French lover)*

Nila is baffled and had been shy throughout her brief stay with Danielle. Sexuality that is considered as a social taboo, a secret and a private affair in Indian sub-continent is openly discussed issue in France. This aspect throws light on Nasrin’s views on complete freedom to women. Nasrin is of the opinion that the day when a woman is free to choose her right sexual partners that is the day when woman can experience complete freedom. Denying the right to choose her right sexual partner is violation of human rights opines Nasrin, she says.

*“Those who do not support the rights of
homosexuals fail to support the cause of
human rights. Every person has the right
to be sure of her/his sexual orientation,
find a partner accordingly and live together
with her/him.” (159 No Country For Women)*

The author is stressing more upon the issue of Human Rights, she is for enactment of civilized laws based on Human Rights, it is barbaric to ban or to censor such relationships in the name of civilization which is not agreeable in many ways. But Nasrin herself is in hesitation to be a Lesbian, though she endorses their rights on the grounds of Human Rights, she rejects of being a Lesbian. Though Nasrin had met lesbian friends in her carrier, she never wanted to be one, like Nila of *French lover* she always had fascination towards men which she openly admits.

*“Unfortunately, my body desires men; else I would
have been a lesbian and could have shown
the world how to love, how to live together, how
to shout out in front of a million people.” (162 No Country For Women)*

The excerpt above unleashes Nasrin’s stand on homosexuals, being a staunch fighter of Human Rights, she is against any law that restricts their rights. The rights that has been deprived even by some of the so called democratic nations. Nasrin is more critical about the society and the establishments that has denied women her due rights, the society expects a woman to marry only a man, it’s not able to comply with the fact a woman can love another woman, if it witnesses such a relationship developing between two women it may call them as fallen women. The liberal thinking and shrugging away with the old ideas and conservative thinking can resolve the problems of Homosexuals. It is also the lack of love by men not sex that force a woman to go in search of another woman for companionship, it is



not that they become Lesbians as some men fail to make them contented. The financially empowered woman in the West do not hesitate to embrace Lesbianism, they have that extra liberty to be what they like to be, unlike the dependent women who submit themselves to men in every way. Nasrin's support for Lesbianism is unique in the history of Bangla literature, when the entire Bangladeshi Feminist writers have focused on presenting feminist perspective in soft approach Nasrin has adopted a different radical approach, by creating a character called Danielle in her novel *French lover* she is trying to expose the other side of feminist problems, the pangs and agonies of Lesbians.

*Wole Soyinka, the famous Nigerian writer and a Nobel Laureate says,
"Dr. Nasrin's Voice is the voice of humanism everywhere" (Selected Columns)*

Nasrin is truly a champion of humanism. The secularist thinker and crusader against her own religion Islam in protecting the rights of women, Nasrin's concerns today are widely acceptable. On few occasions though she appears to be outspoken Nasrin in her works daringly speaks the truth and sticks to her opinion in all the platforms. Her straight forward writings as made her popular all over the world. Here this paper tries to explore the concerns of Nasrin on the issue of Lesbianism that's been neglected by many writers. Being a hardent supporter of feminist principles Nasrin never compromised on anything throughout her life though there is fatwa on her. Nasrin is proud of being born as a woman, her feminist ethos her ecoed in the following words.

*"today, I am proud to be a woman
I think every drop of my blood is
pure, every pore of my skin sacred
my nerves honest and sincere
because I am a woman." (p-111, Selected columns)*

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