

Taslina Nasreen's Poetry: Protest Against Blind Faith and Ideology of Fundamentalism

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Fundamentalism in general means a strict adherence to orthodox theological doctrine. It indicates an unwavering attachment to irreducible religious beliefs. Similarly Islamic fundamentalism strictly adhered to its philosophy. Its ideological framework can be summarized as follows:

The philosophical roots of Islam emphasize Islam as a *sui generis* and have a transcendental set of beliefs which excludes the validity of all other values and concepts. It also marks the differences between the doctrinal foundations of Islam and modern philosophical currents. Consequently Islamic fundamentalism is opposed to the Enlightenment, secularism, democracy, nationalism, Marxism and relativism.

The concept of God's sovereignty is the keystone of its philosophical structure. The premises of Islamic fundamentalism are rooted in an essentialist world view whereby innate qualities and attributes apply to individuals and human societies, irrespective of time, historical change or political circumstances. Hence, an immutable substance governs human existence and determines its outward movement. According to Islamic fundamentalism, the essential nature of human beings is religious and atheism is an aberration. Throughout human history there have been only two methods of organizing human life: one that declares God to be the sole sovereign and source of legislation, and another that rejects God as a force in the universe. These two methods are irreconcilable: the first denotes Islam, the second paganism. Once human beings accept legislation to be dependent on the will of an individual, a minority or a majority, and not as the prerogative of God alone, they lapse into a type of paganism, be it a dictatorship, capitalism, theocracy or communism.

However, human history is an emanation of a doctrinal concept that is implanted by God. He designates human beings as his lieutenants on

this earth. The lieutenancy (khalifa) of a human being is to carry out the commands of God.

Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is believed to have a direct revelation of Allah. He gave directions to him in all matters - cosmic, religion, politics, society, family, economy and duties of a believer. With these teachings, he founded the first Islamic State and led its expansion by fighting and winning over the Arabian tribes. He gave the weapon of Islamic Fundamentalism or of Absolute Faith and Belief to his followers to spread his message. The Islamic ideal has always been a conquering and proselytizing faith.

This paper focuses on the selected poems of Taslima Nasreen's poetry, hence it is essential to underscore a woman's role as conceptualized by Islam.

Qur'an, the holy book of Islam states unambiguously: "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other" (Qur'an 4:34).

The Qur'an likens a woman to a field (tilth), to be used by a man as he wills: "Your women are a tilth for you [to cultivate], so go to your tilth as ye will" (2:223). Such a view is consistent with the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, who emphasized that women were little more than possessions of, and objects of sexual pleasure for, their husbands: "The husband is only obliged to support his wife when she gives herself to him or offers to, meaning she allows him full enjoyment of her person and does not refuse him sex at any time of the night or day."

The Qur'an instructs husbands to beat their disobedient wives: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property [for the support of women]". Qur'an allows men to marry up to four wives; women, by contrast, may have only one husband.

A Muslim man can divorce his wife easily, but a Muslim woman faces great obstacles when she wants a divorce from her husband.

The Islamic court system relegates women to a lowly status. According to the Qur'an, a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man. In cases of rape, no conviction can occur in an Islamic court unless four male eye-witnesses testify to having seen the act occur. This is in keeping with a 7th-century edict issued by Muhammad. The offence of illicit sexual relations carries punishments ranging from imprisonment and flogging to death by stoning.

The property and inheritance rights of Muslim women are meager in "temporary wives"; i.e., short-term sexual companions who typically contract for a relationship that will last for three days, at which point it can be extended if the man desires.

This ideology pervades the consciousness of men and women in a predominantly Muslim society. As a result women are treated as second-class citizens who are inferior to men in terms of intelligence, morals, and faith.

Taslima Nasreen is a Bangladeshi writer who has published poems, essays, a syndicated newspaper column and novels. She has received awards from different countries of the world. She sprang to international fame when her novel, 'Shame', which depicts the Muslim persecution of Bangladesh's Hindu minority, brought forth a death threat from Islamic fundamentalists. Through her writings she has raised strong protest against the practices of Fundamentalism. This paper concentrates only on the poetry written by her.

Her writings have exposed crimes under the guise of religion, particularly the injustice and the oppression against women. Educated and illiterate women alike suffer in Muslim society under the wrath of fundamentalism. Nasreen relentlessly challenged religiously sanctioned agendas that aim to subjugate women. Nasreen is one of numerous women who are fearless and speak against intolerance and oppression

justified in it. She raised her voice against blind faith in Islamic law which stones women to death as a punishment for adultery.

Noorjahan

They have made Noorjahan stand in a hole in the courtyard.
 There she stands submerged to her waist, her head hanging.
 They're throwing stones at Noorjahan,
 Stones that are striking my body.
 I feel them on my head, forehead, chest, back,
 And I hear laughing, shouts of abuse.
 Noorjahan's fractured forehead pours out blood, mine also.
 Noorjahan's eyes have burst, mine also.
 Noorjahan's nose has been smashed, mine also.
 Noorjahan's torn breast and heart have been pierced, mine also.
 Are these stones not striking you?
 They're laughing aloud, laughing and stroking their beards.
 Even their caps, stuck to their heads, are shaking with laughter.
 They're laughing and swinging their walking sticks.
 From the quiver of their cruel eyes,
 Arrows speed to pierce her body,
 My body also.
 Are these arrows not piercing your body?

She vividly depicts the scene of punishment. She wants readers to empathize with Noorjahan as she is punished by stoning to death because of her crime. She claims humans should not allow such barbarism, humiliation, inequality, or injustice in the name of religion or culture. Culture should not or must not be used against humanity. She says everywhere women are oppressed and the source of the problem is male-devised patriarchy, religion, tradition, culture and customs. Because of blind faith, humans are suffering from bloodshed, hatred, ignorance, illiteracy, injustices and poverty.

In another poem, *Self-Portrait*, she doubts the concept of God and looks back to her progress. She feels that she is divided from within. She also feels helpless to resist the discrimination that is so wide spread.

Self-Portrait

I don't believe in God,
 I look upon nature with wondering eyes.
 However much I move forward grasping the hand of progress
 Society's hindrances take hold of my sleeve
 And gradually pull me backwards.
 I wish I could walk all through the city
 In the middle of the night,
 Sitting down anywhere alone to cry.
 I don't believe in God.
 From house to house the religion mongers
 secretly divide us into castes,
 segregate the women from the human race.
 I too am divided,
 defrauded of my human rights.
 The crafty politician
 gets loud applause when he rails about class exploitation,
 But he cleverly suppresses all the terminology
 of women's exploitation.
 All those people of supposed good character, I know them.
 Throughout the world, religion has extended its eighteen talons.
 In my lone brandishing, how many of its bones can I shatter?
 How much can I rip discrimination's far-spreading net?

She claims fundamentalism is an ideology that diverts people from the path of natural development of consciousness. They do not believe in individualism, liberty of personal choice or plurality of thought. She believes in fundamental rights of human beings, in equal rights for women in every society and in constructing a society in which everybody gets a fair deal.

She asserts that the religious laws must be abolished to create a uniform civil code in which women get equality. As a medical student she is well aware of the powers of observation, experiment, analysis and reasoning. She realized nothing should be accepted as a fact without reasoning. Religious laws have become out of place and out of time. She claims no one today would defend chattel slavery in any public forum or allow it under any legal code. Thus, insistence on the continuation of practices which denigrates and oppresses women under the guise of scriptures is a hoax. For her this is the conflict between secularism and fundamentalism. It is a conflict between modernity and anti-modernism. It is the conflict between the future and the past, between the innovator and the traditional.

She has been writing against all kinds of physical and sexual violence, religious terrorism and patriarchal discrimination. She dreams of a beautiful world where no woman becomes a victim of trafficking, acid throwing, rape and sexual assault. She dreams of a tolerant world where human beings respect each other, where there would be no war, bloodshed or violence. Her pen is her weapon in her struggle for ethical humanism. She wants women to think and argue and raise their voices. They must understand the power of imagination and intelligence.

References:

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