

Freedom of Speech Vs Blasphemy in Rushdie's Satanic Verses and Nasreen's Lajja

Abstract

In Rushdie's "*Satanic Verses*" and Nasreen's "*Lajja*" reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error. Freedom of speech is a fundamental human right. Its enumeration in history stretches far back into antiquity, but was eloquently voiced by great social philosophers, including Lock, Voltaire and Mill Article XIX of 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid the foundation for freedom of speech as customary international law which includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontier.

Keywords: Blasphemy, Rushdie's Satanic Verses, Nasreen's Lajja.

Introduction

Blasphemy law protects religious belief from being insulted or refuted. What is sacred to one religion is blasphemy to another. Islam blasphemes Christianity by saying Jesus was a Prophet and not God, Christianity blasphemes Allah, the God of Islam, by saying that Jesus was God.

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947 on June 19, to a liberal and affluent businessman, When he was fourteen years old his father sent him to England for higher education. He was embellished & Rugby. School where he had his first taste of British racism, an experience which he later dramatized in the *Satanic Verses* and which inspired him to wield his pen against racial prejudices.

Satanic verses (1989) a capacious book with a convoluted plot and dazzling language and magic realist – effects attempts to explore the questions of good and evil through the experience of two Indian actors Gabriel Farishta and Salahuddin Chamcha. They fall from an air- crashed plane into that cherite England and metamorphose into Archangel Gabriel and Devil respectively. Rushdie examines the nature of divine revelation from the viewpoint of a non-believer and weaves fantasies around traditional accounts of Prophet Muhammad's life. Gabriel's hallucinations call up passages that rocked the world. A send up of history, myth, religion and film, the novel interweaves British racism, Islamic fundamentalism and the popular culture of metropolitan India to examine the failure in this age of consumerism and cosmopolitan rootlessness to achieve spiritual death. It is this book which changed Rushdie's life and created a maelstrom unheard of, in literary history. He was trapped in the whirlpool of global and religious politics. The novel banned in several countries including India was charged for offending the religious sensibility of the Muslims and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa on Valentine's day (14 February 1989), sentencing Rushdie to death. The controversy which came to be known as the 'Rushdie affair' split the world and triggered a civilization clash between liberal humanism and Islamic fundamentalism. Writers and artists united to form the International Rushdie Defence Committee and pressurised the Iranian authority to withdraw the threat. It did not work nor did Rushdie's public apology to the Muslims, For ten years Rushdie lived in fear and under constant security, moving from one place to another and changing house.

During the year which immediately followed Khomeins intervention, the reaction to the novel was the subject of at least five conferences and five books in the United Kingdom alone. In view of this it might well seem that everything that can be said about the *Satanic Verses* affair has been said.

The self revelatory novel quietly dismantles myths around the institutions of marriage, family and religion with irony, humour and a certain matter of factness. In this powerful narrative, ruthless honesty and deep compassion coexist in shocking juxtaposition.

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Another fatwa sentenced author, that needs concern is Taslima Nasreen. Nasreen a Bangladeshi poet novelist and feminist journalist is a forbidden name in Bangladesh. A medical doctor turned writer she has been getting fame as a controversial writer was forced to flee Bangladesh (1994) after her novel "**Lajja**" (**The Shame**) was banned. She allegedly called for changes in the Quran antagonizing sections of the country's population that prompted death threats against her. Taslima as a refugee has been always paying the price of exercising her freedom of expression in a democratic but patriarchal society. Taslima fearless in print and homeless in life, she moves from her revolutionary explosive records to fanaticism, drastic truth regarding Islamic religion, the Islamic teachings and condition of women's life in men's world to the pathetic and historical notes of exile. The structurally uneven **Lajja** sought to explore the predicament of a liberal Hindu family caught in the sudden and catastrophic communal backlash. The book was released in 1993 and was almost immediately banned by the government of Bangladesh on grounds that were inflammatory and likely to lead to communal violence.

The novel **Lajja (1993)** is about a Bengali family, the Duttas who are Hindu by birth, but are atheists in their belief system. The book is about the 1992 riots in Bangladesh following the Babri Masjid demolition during which there was wide spread violent riots in Bangladesh against its Hindu minority community. The novel **Lajja** has a hitting title, Shame: a feeling of disgrace, brought upon an individual and family through external forces around. The story, proves how there is no space where class creed and cultural ideology cannot be the norm for human interaction.

After **Lajja's** publication Nasreen began receiving death threats from an outfit called the Council of Islamic Soldiers. The attack on Nasreen intensified when in an interview (9 May 1993 Calcutta) she reportedly called for a "thorough revision" of the Koran. Later she contented that the interview

misrepresented her position and she issued a clarification to the newspapers on 11 May 1993.

"My view on this issue is clear and categorical, I hold the Koran, the Vedas, the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives of their followers as out of place and out of time. We have sociohistorical contexts in which these were written and therefore we should not be guided by their precepts. We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we have to make progress and let humanism be our faith. Clarification not with standing the reproduction of the 9th May interview in newspapers in Bangladesh on 4 June 1994 changed her life forever.

To conclude as said by Benjamin Franklin "without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as public liberty, without freedom of speech, which is the right of every man as far as by it has not hurt or control the right of another and this is the only check it ought to suffer and the only bounds it ought to know.... Whoever overthrows the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freedom of speech, a thing terrible to traitors" Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen both are great authors and they actually represent an intellectual Muslim society which do not like to live in some superiority complex or in some inferiority complex from the growing world. Educated Indian Muslim like late APJ Abdul Kalam was and Shahrukh Khan, Javed Akhtar and many more are doing the same thing but rest of the Muslim world like to live in state of denial and they don't even want to accept that their orthodox mentality, ideology is falling them behind. Dan Brown wrote against church but no so called FATWA was ever released by the church on his name. Why Fatwas (Ban) are against Muslim writers and by the Muslim clergy only?

References

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