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Rhetorical Analysis of Women's Status and Social Injustice in Taslima Nasrin's Speech and Interview

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Abstract

This paper explores Taslima Nasrin in terms of the issues related to women's status, freedom of expression, secularism, and religious fanaticism, using her speeches and interviews. She opposes ritual practices of Islam in particular and all religions in general, which limit women's rights and freedom of expression. She herself has become the victim of the subjugation due to her revolutionary ideas for the empowerment of women. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to find how women are marginalized in multiple ways by religious practices that have created problems in societies, making a division among the fanatical people. She shows how religion and patriarchy have been trying to dominate women without advocating for freedom and equality. Secularism and dogmatic ideas have caused the segregation of women. Her emphasis is on the reformation of those narrow concepts. Based on her interviews and speeches, rhetorical analysis is made regarding the status of women in Islamic countries and religious fundamentalism. This paper applies descriptive method to make analysis of her speeches and interviews which are the primary source of the concepts. The finding refers to take collective effort for the liberation and empowerment of women. Speeches and writings can best be used to persuade people for the status of women and reformation in the society.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, injustice, patriarchy, secularism, suppression, women's status

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Introduction

Taslima Nasrin is a revolutionary Bangladeshi writer, critic, and physician who is against female domination and injustice. From her childhood, she had been encouraged by her father to look into the issues critically. After she grew older, she broke away not only from religion, but also from all customs thinking that they constantly suppressed, oppressed, and degenerated women and the people in minority. Similarly, women in her society have been dominated and discriminated in many ways making them inferior without freedom of expression. Many people either laymen or scholars from both the east and west regard that Islam and feminism have extreme negative correlations, because Islam is supposed to have sanctioned polygamy and an inferior status to women in comparison to men in all spheres of life. Due to such partitions, many Hindus and Muslims were made homeless and were forced to leave their permanent homeland. The leaders of those places were unable to find the evil design of the emperors and there was birth of Bangladesh on the basis of religion from Pakistan. For the struggle emergent these days, there is a connection with the exploiters of West Pakistan in the name of religion. Even copying the idea from the British mainly West Pakistani rulers, mainly Muslim fundamentalists tried to divide and rule the people of Bangladesh uprooting their mixed culture and imposing Islamic fashion of language.

From her oratory skill, Nasrin tries to establish her position as a critic who has the right to criticize the injustice activities going on in the society either on the basis of religion or superiority of male. In her speech of March 2018, she opines as, “Like religious people have the right to express their religious views, I should also have the right to express my non-religious views. And I should not be killed for that (“The Quint,” 00:00:01-00:00.12).” She strongly denies about supporting violence, and she is ready to leave India where she is staying temporarily if she has to make accommodation with injustice. In this regard, she again stands her position as a person advocating for women’s freedom and in an interview on CNN she says as, “I have a dream. I dream of a beautiful world where women would be no oppressed (“itvindia,” 00:00:32-00:00:40).” She also has reservation about religion and she says, “If any religion keeps people in ignorance, if any religion allows the people to prosecute other people of different faith and if any religion keeps women in slavery then I cannot accept that religion (“itvindia,” 00:02:05-00:02.25).” Relating how she was forced to leave the place where she was born and how she has become victim of its poverty, faith, migration, partition, violence and even theory of nationhood. Her views on religion are also revolutionary, and she says that any religion in the world should not keep people in ignorant. Mainly, she opposes Islam and the ideas in the Quran that they have

no boarder outlook as they promote violence and injustice. She points out that due to Islamic religion women do not get equal opportunity as men and they do not get property. She criticizes all world religions as they oppress women and she becomes sceptic to all religions. Not only the fundamentalists but religion itself is against women which only promotes male values. Her works cover a wide range of genres, such as newspaper columns, poetry, and popular novels in which she strongly opposes injustices of any kind.

The main cause of Nasrin's shifts to women's issues and against religion was her own experience of sexual abuse in her adolescence period and her work of a gynecologist. In another speech she opines about Islam as, "Islam does not consider women to be separate human beings, manage the original creation and womankind is created secondarily for the pleasure of men. Islam considers women as slaves or sexual objects, nothing else. Women's role is to stay at home and to obey husband. ("Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.," 00:10:55-00:11:14)." Her ideas are for the support of feminism and she also talks about marriage in which only protection of men and women are made run after their husbands. Quran gives total freedom to men and considers women psychologically inferior. Even in case of rape Islamic laws are not favourable because they demand four male witnesses. Women were charged for adultery but women have no right to charge their husbands for the similar manner. For the conflict going on in the societies also she considers it between rational, logical thinking versus irrational, illogical thinking. She is so determined to continue what she has done as she has no regret what she has done so far. She would continue her struggle against all the extremists, fundamentalists and intolerant forces without any compromise until her death. This paper tries to seek persuasive matter in Nasreen's works using ethos, logos, pathos and rhetoric of women's writing as theoretical tools. The aim is to investigate how she rhetorically positions herself and tries to reach out to the audience with her promises of change in both society and religion. A rhetorical analytical perspective contributes to a more profound understanding of how she talks about Islam, women's issues and religious fanatics in her speeches, interviews and writings. It addresses the problems concerning the status women, change in religious practices and liberation and empowerment of Muslim women.

Rhetoric: Theory and Practice

Ordinary people use it either at random or through practice and from acquired habit whereas learned men use it by knowledge and skills more tactfully than the ordinary people. About the origin of rhetoric, Richard Leo Enos says, "Rhetoric did not originate at a single moment in history. Rather, it was an evolving, developing consciousness about the relationship

between thought and expression” (cited in Herrick 31). From this point of view, it can be asserted that by regular practice of human communication the theory of rhetoric evolved. Through some planning and for accomplishing their goals people began to use rhetoric. Before Greek people used powerful language to persuade the audience and systematically it emerged from the period of ancient Greece. Basically, rhetoric presents a small portion of the art of persuasion. Rhetoric sometimes seems as similar with discourse and it used interchangeably with ideology and concerned with the notion of power. It has both positive and negative aspects and the audience should be conscious of it detecting both aspects. In this regard, George A Kennedy includes as:

There are dangers in rhetoric—political extremism, racism, and unscrupulous sales techniques, for example—but by studying rhetoric we can become alert to its potential for misuse and learn to recognize when a speaker is seeking to manipulate us. There is great positive power in rhetoric as well, which we can use for valid ends. (x)

Thus, people need to learn it from being cheated being able to decipher what is true and what is not. It is also related with how language and other symbolic forms influence the way the audiences think, feel or act along with discourse. Rhetorical analysis can assist to understand some of the reasons for the underlying discourse people make.

Ethos is a Greek word that means reliability, credibility, custom and habit. It is basically an appeal for the speaker's authority or honesty. In other words, it can be called the moral ownership of the speaker in the eyes of the listener. With the help of ethos, the speaker assures the listener that he has such good knowledge and moral credibility that the speakers of a particular subject can address in many ways. Being an important or eminent person, the speaker uses effective arguments to the listener and tries to establish himself a knowledgeable person of the subject by appealing to the morality or character of a person. In this connection, Ulku D Demirdogen states, “Ethos, was the first element in his theory of persuasion, which referred to the character the speaker wished to present. It could be defined as the charisma and the credibility of the speaker” (191). Ethos reflects the ability of the speaker in convincing the listener and depends on how much the listener trusts the speaker and how much the speaker is trustworthy for the listener.

Pathos another proof suggested by Aristotle is mainly concerned with reason that appeals to the passions or the will of the audience. In this regard, Ulku D. Demirdogen writes about pathos as, “Aristotle’s appeals to pathos are psychological appeals as they rely on the receiver’s emotions... an ability or skill which might be called as empathy or emotional intelligence in

contemporary terms”(192). It means some virtues like justice, generosity, courage, gentleness and wisdom are also involved with pathos or appeals to emotion. Any speaker tries to impress his/her audience by argument as pathos is mainly concerned with the audiences. The role of audiences cannot be ignored in communication. By pathos the speaker is able to impose his/her message by appealing emotion of the audience.

Logos is the situation of considering the context by the speaker to appeal the intellect or reason. It depends on how the audiences process information in logical ways by the behavior of the speaker. Aristotle advised the speakers to use enthymemes in which the major premise was already believed by the audience and logically ideas can be presented. In this connection, Tamar Mshvenieradze opines about logos as, “Logos is a very important for argumentative judgment as one of the dimensions of persuasion. Logos means persuading by the use of reasoning which includes critical cognition, analytical skills, good memory, and purposeful behavior, which is the most important argumentation. For Aristotle Logos is rationale, logical and argumentative discourse” (1939). Mainly, logos is concerned with the emotion of the speaker. To influence the audiences by this/her appeal, the speaker needs to assess the patterns of information processing and can persuade them.

Rhetoric of Women's Writings and Nasrin's Motif for Social Change

The rhetoric of women's writings is concerned with the issues of gender, class, language, literature and culture demanding equal justice, freedom and opportunities. Feminist promotion determines tensions knitted deep into the fabric of our society and incites an unusually extreme and insightful rhetoric of moral conflict. The status of women is determined primarily by birth, and their social position is at odds with fundamental democratic values. Regarding the feminist rhetoric, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell mentions as, “Consequently, feminist rhetoric is substantively unique by definition, because no matter how traditional its argumentation, how justificatory its form, how discursive its method, or how scholarly its style, it attacks the entire psychosocial reality, the most fundamental values, of the cultural context in which it occurs” (75). Women's issues are not only related with the visible problems faced by women but also with the reformation of all psychological problems women are facing. The rhetoric of women's writing emphasizes the participation of women in dialogue, self-revelation and self-criticism, decision making through self-persuasion, and the strategic use of techniques for violating the reality structure for the process of making women's writing a separate genre of rhetoric. In this regard, Helene Cixous et al. emphasize as, “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as

violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (875). Women's writing is a unified, separate and radical genre of rhetoric with distinctive substantive-stylistic features. Women are prompted to write that stands for a supplier of sexual urge and drive for creativity. For creativity their bodies are the basis and by exploring their own bodies they can reform male centred beliefs, language, values, and norms.

Nasrin claims that she wants to change the society making women aware about their rights without accepting religious laws and patriarchal system. She has written many genres, such as newspaper columns, poetry, and popular novels and has generated unprecedented reactions against her opinions. She was blamed as a traitor appointed by imperial forces to criticize Islam and fundamentalists demanded for her execution. Such threats made her leave her medical practice and become a full-time writer and activist as a fatwa was issued against. She also learnt more about women's problems from her own experience of sexual abuse in her adolescence period and her work as a gynecologist. She also supported the banishment of the burka in 2019, by the government of Sri Lanka as an expression of women's freedom. Again she opines for the rights of women and people in minority addressing the world to pay attention to these problems as, “The world is constantly vigilant that no one hears the sentiment of those who are opposed to human rights and women's rights. When will the world learn to stop pleasing the extremists and begin to respect reason and humanism instead (“India Foundation,” 00:12:07- 00:12:23).” Her ideas are for drawing the attention of the world to be conscious about the issues raised by her. She thinks that the world is guided more by power not by intellect and reason. For the conflict going on in the societies also she considers it between traditional ideas versus modern and scientific thoughts. She does not have any feeling of regret for what she has done so far. She is fully determined to continue her struggle against all the extremists, fundamentalists and intolerant forces without any compromise until her death.

From her speeches, Nasreen tries to prove her as an atheist, feminist writer and human right activist who is always in favour of the people in minority and oppressed. She also opines that religion should favour peace and if it promotes violence it needs to be reformed. She points out many verses in the Quran which motivate Muslims to kill others such as non-believers and non-Muslims. This way, Islam is promoting violence, terror and intolerance. In an interview regarding terror attack in Bangladesh she says, “There is no peace in Islam. You would find lots of violence and intolerance in Islam. You know Islam is not comfortable with human rights, women's rights, democracy and freedom of expression (“India Today,” 00:03:09-00:03:24).”

She further shows the connection of Islam with many terrorist organizations and taking the reference of Islamic verses they are killing non-believers. As she says, "Those ISIL, Boko Haram, and other terrorist organizations cite Quranic texts that most Muslims think that they are secret. Actually, you know those ISIL, Boko Haram, and other terrorist organizations that they say that Islam urges us to kill non-believers. So they are killing non-believers ("India Today," 00:03:26-00:03:57)." She points out that Islamic religion does not provide equal opportunities to women as men. She criticizes all world religions as they are all anti women and they are made for men. Not only the fundamentalists but religion itself is against women. Without making object on the belief of some people, she opposes the practice of religion because it is against humanism, human rights, women's rights, and freedom of expression.

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in Nasrin's Ideas

Nasrin criticizes religious fundamentalism that is going on in Bangladesh which oppresses, suppresses and degenerates women. She uses rhetoric in her writing, speeches and interviews to persuade the audience in order to draw their attention to her views. The concentration of her interviews, writings and speeches is accomplished with the appeal of her interviews, writings and speeches with ethos, pathos and logos and her delivery styles. Persuasion, as a part of ethos, is used to impress the listener to take appropriate action or to support a specific point of view in spoken and written communication by the speaker. Referring the idea of Aristotle related to the art persuasion and the ability to find it, Tamar Mshvenieradze clarifies about as, "The greatest scientist proved that the rhetoric method was the" art of persuasion" thus "the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion"(1939).The speaker or writer can use facts and logical reasoning, emotions and their character, authority and credibility to influence the listener. By the writings, speeches and interviews she is acclaimed as a writer who promoted the women in the Third World. In this regard, Bishnupriya Ghosh writes as, "Nasrin becomes a "subaltern" figure in both Western and Third World discourses and even in feminist attempts to champion her cause" (41). She is able to draw global attention by raising voices against injustices. She is not only known as a feminist writer but also a social activist.

Nasrin claims herself as atheist, secular humanist and a feminist writer who always supports oppressed people. She has been living in exile due to her opposing ideas about Muslim and condition of women. After living in exile, being physically attacked, banned her books in Bangladesh, and being issued a fatwa against her, she had made many speeches, interviews, and writing opposing the injustice activities. Regarding her case, Iqbal A. Ansari

states, “The Taslima Nasreen case-which concerns the right to freedom of speech in conflict with the right of faith communities to dignity, along with issues related to women's rights-is not being treated by the media with the nuanced sensitivity that it deserves”(15). Then there are arguments regarding the issues of secular and liberal fundamentalist labels in Muslim social and ethno-religious issues. The main concern of her revolutionary ideas is against injustices and inequalities going on in societies mainly in Muslim culture and she demands for the freedom of women and reformation of Islamic religion.

Nasrin is powerful in using ethos. Ethos is often the first thing that is noticed, so it creates the first impression that influences how matter is perceived. Regarding it, Antoine C. Braet writes, “The "ethical proof' is formed by ethos (character or personality) of the speaker” (311). The speaker creates ethical proof by his credibility which are reflected in his/her practical wisdom, moral virtue and goodwill. She exposes her ideas mainly on secularism, feminism, freedom of expression, religious fanaticism and human rights to prove her credibility. For this, she says, “By my early teens, I had abandoned religion and turned toward secular humanism and feminism which sprang from within me and went in no way artificially imposed...As I grew older I broke away not just from religion but also from all religious customs, indeed the very culture which constantly oppressed, suppressed, and denigrated women (“India Foundation,” 00:02:14- 00:02:55).” Talking about women’s domination, bad aspects of imposed religion, culture, customs, and traditions, she becomes able to prove her ideas as persuasive. Similarly, she talks about the matter of helping women by making them conscious showing the weaknesses of religion. She tries to motivate to follow the ideas of secularism defying old religion as she opines, “I wanted to help women that they are oppressed because of religion. I wanted to encourage them to fight for their rights and freedom. My voice which challenged misogynistic tradition and religion gave women the chance to think differently (“Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.,” 00:24:18 -00:24:34).” She even claims that many women have become antagonist, atheist and free thinker rejecting the male chauvinistic values imbedded in all religions.

Nasrin uses logos in her opinions. She presents the metaphor of making the heart of her audience her home as she does not feel any home. She has the feeling of helpless and hopeless to be homeless. She presents a saying that the heart of her supporters as her home, safe heaven, shelter and refuge. She uses the metaphor to prove persuade the audience as, “There is no place in this world that I can call my house but the people who support me, sympathize with me and express solidarity with me, they are my home., they are my country. My home is love,

the love I receive from women all over the world. That is my home. The love I receive from atheists, free thinkers, secularists and humanist is my home. The love I receive from you is my home (“Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.,” 00:33:43-00:34:16).” Her use of metaphorical expression appeals her reason of being homeless and secular. She presents the proof of being homeless and appeals reason and intellect for persuasion.

Nasrin uses pathos to facilitate acceptance of the speaker. Pathos refers to the audience’s feelings and relies for persuasive effect on triggering audience emotions such as happiness, sadness, satisfaction, pity, or fear. Antoine C. Braet defines about it as, “The "pathetic proof" or pathos depends upon "putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind" through the speech” (314). The persuader conveys a sense that he/she understands and relates to the needs, values and desires of the audiences. From her speech Nasrin tries to present logic, data, claims, and evidence for persuasion. As she presents herself as a critic she has presented argument having the right to criticize the injustice activities going on in the society either on the basis of religion or superiority of male. Showing the proof of being homeless due her efforts of making women free from all kinds of injustices, she states as, “I have been living in exile since 1994. I know I have no other alternatives but to live in exile for the rest of my life. I feel I have nowhere to go, no country or home to return too. I say India is my country. India is my home (“India Foundation,” 00:19:17- 00:19:40).” By many other ideas she has used the language of persuasion to appeal the emotion of her audiences and she is showing her attitude to the audience appealing them that she is honest who speaks true things. She is also going to impress the audiences saying how sorrowful life she is living. This type of appeal helps the speaker persuade the audiences.

Nasrin also opines that women should be educated and able to oppose male domination by writings. Helene Cixous et al. emphasize women to write for other women who are unable to write as, “I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs” (776). Similar to their ideas, Nasrin encourages women to discard male values to fight bravely for their rights as, “There was a burning desire within me to see women are educated and independent. Women stand up for and demand their equal rights and freedom. I wanted my writings to contribute in some ways to the empowerment of these women who had always been oppressed (“India Foundation,” 00:06:39- 00:06:58).” Nasrin by her speech and writings urges women to be conscious and bold by making her claims stronger in case of women’s rights and domination of all kinds.

Similarly she urges women to involve in writing although they are opposed. In this regard, she clarifies as, it is always the male writers and male painters describe women's bodies. They are the people who describe women's pleasures and they draw women's body nudes. No problems! Whenever women do it they are called 'whores' or you know porn writers ("The Quint," 00:06:40-00:07:05)." Women receive many abuses when they try to do new things. Persuasive appeals facilitate the broader acceptability and she has used them successfully to establish her points and assist to strengthen the issues of changing the world from the grip of extremists making women independent.

Conclusion

The main message of Nasrin's writings, speeches and interviews is to urge all people of the world to take initiation in process of the empowerment of women, reformation of religious practices, and the promotion of the freedom of expression. In this twenty first century, we talk about many types of rights including animal rights and empowerment of all kinds of people who are marginalized and segregated. She focuses on the protection of marginalized groups because they are always oppressed in any country by the people in power or in majority either in term of gender or race or culture, religion and economic status. Her works are full of harsh criticism for Islam in particular and other religions in general which never promote freedom of expression and women's rights. Her speeches and writings are concerned with dignity and compassion, democratization, equality, and the respect of all. She is quite aware of the techniques of persuading the audiences before her by her various works. The strong element of her works is the portrayal of pathetic condition of women in all communities due to imposing the provisions of religion which were made by men to preserve their dominating power. While analyzing her opinions expressed in all forms, she is found to be using the art of persuasion for her audiences by her credible ideas which are full of intellectual ideas, emotional expression of promoting freedom of expression, and dramatic appeal of making women educated. From the rhetorical analysis of Nasrin's speeches and interviews, it can be concluded that they motivate the audiences by examples, data, personal experiences, emotional appeals, credibility of the speaker, and logical reasoning with inferences of persuasion for the reformation of dogmatic religious, social and cultural practices and for female rights. She urges us to be ready to reform our religious ideas which are based on narrow concept and they cannot include all the people of the world. Similarly, domination of women is prevalent everywhere and collective effort is needed to change the status of women who are marginalized in multiple ways either by male

domination or by religion. The confidence she has developed for the sake of humanity makes her claims stronger even after being exiled and living in terror. Further research can be made to find the rhetoric of social problems in her works to reveal the other hidden aspects in her speeches, interviews, and writings.

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