

**A Study of Enslavement and Liberation in Taslima Nasreen's  
Selected Poems**

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**Taslima Nasreen**

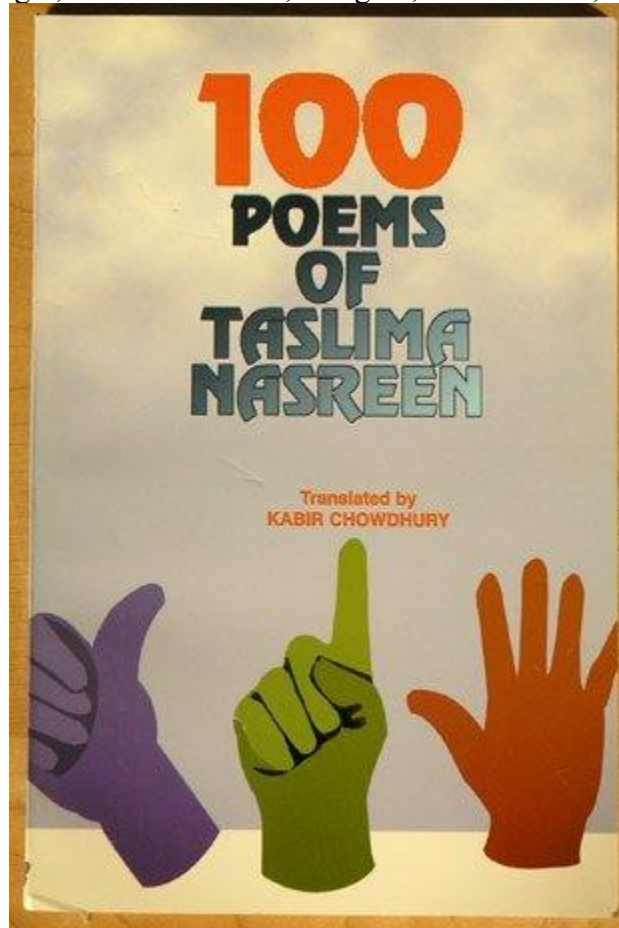
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**Abstract**

Taslima Nasreen is considered as a controversial feminist writer in the world. Her works depict the condition of women in a society governed by a fundamentalist attitude forms the subject matter of her poems. Nasreen fights for women's rights and against patriarchal society, which she

holds responsible for the oppression of women in Bangladesh. This present paper is an attempt to reinterpret Nasreen's selected poems from her collection of poems 'All about Women.' She reveals the realities of a women's life throughout her poetry. Being a feminist, she discusses several issues connected to women and provides solution in this poetry.

**Keywords:** Women's Right, Fundamentalism, Religion, Enslavement, Liberation.



### **Taslima Nasreen**

Taslima Nasreen is a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, columnist and fiercely independent feminist. She is a recipient of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (1994), Madanjeet Singh Prize for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence by UNESCO (2004) and Humanist Laureate from International Academy for Humanism, USA (1996).

“She is either the bravest or most foolish person I’ve ever met,” Nasreen’s friend quoted (Weaver 49). There is no question about the bravery of Taslima Nasreen. She is appreciated as a feminist, who fights for women’s rights and against male dominated society, which she holds responsible for the oppression of women in Bangladesh. This paper is an attempt to reinterpret Nasreen selected poems from her collections of poems ‘All about Women.’ In her opinion, Women live in a state of oppression in Bangladesh and political freedom has not done much to alleviate it. Since 1975, the male dominated society of Bangladesh has been emphasized and women’s rights have been constantly violated.

### **On Enslavement of Women**

Nasreen employs the enslavement of women in her new episteme, it is important to define female subalternity in the Bangladesh context. There is a wide range of subjugation among Bangladeshi women. A poor woman is a subject to extreme male domination since her lack of education severely limits her access to power; male violence is also relatively more common among the poor. Nasreen has expressed her experience regarding violence, exploitation, oppression, subjugation and discrimination of women in the patriarchal society. The term 'New Women' was used at the end of the nineteenth century to describe women who were punished beyond the limits which society imposed on women. Today we might be called 'liberated woman' or a 'feminist.' The 'New Women' typically values self- fulfillment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self- sacrifice.

### **Suffering In and Outside the Home**

Nasreen said women suffered all over the world both in and outside the home. There are so many developments happened in the society, but the situation of women remains the same. The exploitation and maltreatment exist at all levels. But there is no end to the oppression and suppression of women. In the poem "At Back of Progress", the employer is describing thus: "the fellow goes home and beats his wife/ Because of over ironed a handkerchief/ or a shirt collar". (40) Here it seems that the poet seeks to draw attention to the common act of wife beating which seems to pervade the cross section of the society in her country.

The system of dowry encompassing all classes very effectively sums up the different degrees of subalternity devaluing women. The custom has survived with extraordinary might and resilience. Although nobody calls it dowry, a bride's status in the in-law family is directly related to what she brings from the parental family in terms of money and goods. Lack of security in women's life may arise from the absence of dowry.

### **The Poem Dowry**

The poem "The Dowry" expresses the poignancy of this aspect in Hindu society. Samiran Mandal sells his field's crops and his house for his daughter's dowry but all this is not enough.

The bride is cursed everyday  
Gets slaps and kicks  
Gets whipped  
The flowers in her garden wither and fall  
And only thorns blossom there. (8)

The bridegroom beats the bride to death because of her father's delay in giving the dowry. After marriage women become a slave and possession of her husband, totally under her control. He can spit in her face in contempt, beat her, wound her and even kill her.

### **Happy Marriage**

The concept of marriage is sublimated as an eternal bond. In her works, marriage represented as exploitative and it inevitably ends in divorce preceded by the husband's polygamous marriage. In "Happy Marriage" the poet describes ironically how a woman accepted love from her

husband in spite of all maltreatment, because she is dependent to him for her subsistence. She is also completely faithful to him. “Not turning my eyes towards any other man/ I will give proof of my chastity all my life.” (21)

### **Quest for Women’s Identity – *The Women Breaking Bricks***

There is quest for women’s identity. Much of the gender specific crises of women seems to be not God-made but man-made and in a traditional country like Bangladesh. In the patriarchal society of her country, women are regarded as a commodity. They dress themselves, adorn themselves and use different hair styles and cosmetics just to please men.

Women are suffering in the sphere of wages too, as they are not paid as much as men or equal quantum of labour. This theme is described in the poem, “The Women Breaking Bricks”  
For breaking bricks the whole day she

Receives ten taka  
Only twenty one, she has seven children  
Besides her, a man under an umbrella is  
Breaking bricks  
He gets twenty taka a day  
Double because he is a man. (18)

The poem is going to show the pathetic condition of women before and after marriage. Women are oppressed in marital relationship both in subordination and economic exploitation. This poem clearly pictures the male chauvinism and child marriage. Here the woman who is breaking bricks under the sun has seven children, toils all day not enough to buy food for one. There is a man seated beside her, breaking the bricks but under an umbrella earning more money than her. The poet uses allusion of Martin Luther’s ‘I have a dream.’ But her dream is not come true. The last line of the poem is connected to the new women as they explain the resistance to suffering and accomplishment of dreams which are parts of her life.

### **On Sexual Assault - *Bad Omen***

If women are sexually assaulted, they can only be a mute spectator. The assaulter manages to go scot free. The victim does not get any sympathy from the callous society including her family. The poem “Bad Omen,” is about a girl called Kalyani is abducted and raped. Nasreen asks the rhetorical question

And if she loves and stands at the  
Door of her house  
With her wounded, bloody chewed-up  
Torn and mangled body, will her  
Grief-distracted mother lovingly touch  
And nurse back to health her daughter’s  
Man-defiled form? (25)

### ***Female Goods***

In the poem “Female Goods” Nasreen mentions satirically the qualities of bride which is sought by the bridegroom he wishes to marry. She should be fair skinned, tall, slim-waisted, firm

and sharply figured, with long hair to the knees and should have pierced nose and ears. She should be a virgin, shy and modest. She should be good at cooking with all such qualities; the woman's lot is to be almost a slave to her husband and his property.

This female can be used in any way as you like  
If you wish, chain her feet chain her hands  
Put her mind in chains  
And if you wish divorce her. (35)

### To Conclude

The above poems are clearly portraying the women who are treated as a slave in male dominated society. Nasreen wants to change this position. Women would have to live with full freedom. The 'New Women' is well educated and reads a great deal, has a job and is athletic or otherwise physically vigorous and accordingly prefers comfortable clothes to traditional female grab. This aspect representing the New Women are clearly visible in Nasreen's poem "Sad Girl" in which, a girl of sixteen forgets her sorrow and live with joy. "Dance in the whirlpool of light and air as you please." She would savour the joy of youth, far in later life. She exhorts girl to be careful and shows character.

This paper concludes that the real liberation of women can be achieved only when women themselves stand up for their rights. It is a universally accepted one. The empowerment of woman is needed not only in Bangladesh but also in all South-Asian countries. Women raise their voice against all oppression and create spaces in various fields.

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