



FRENCH LOVER: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE UNKNOWN HEAVEN AND DECOLONISATION OF SELF IN A DIASPORIC SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

In the post colonial scenario, expatriate writing occupies a prominent place in the study of cultures. The exiled Third-World writer, Taslima Nasrin is a radical woman writer of Bangladesh, who wrote her novel *French Lover* when she was in exile. Taslima Nasrin with her fearless and straightforward tongue delineated many characters as her spokespersons, through which she converse her views with the world. Taslima's *French lover: A Novel* (2001) is a work that delineates the struggles encountered by the protagonist, Nila in her life journey from misconceptions to realisation, in a hostile foreign land. Recent boom in postcolonial studies and cultural studies provided a perfect framework for so many new theories and studies in literature.

Through the lens of theory of diaspora, under post colonial studies, this is a study that critically analyses one of Taslima Nasrin's novels *French Lover: A Novel*. This novel is the story of a modern, educated Indian woman, Nila, as torn apart between two countries, two cultures, its past and present scenarios, and also between two identities. This paper closely examines the protagonist Nilanjana's experience of racial antagonism, cultural conflicts, identity crisis, her attempts of assimilation, her East - West encounters and the subsequent life changing realizations, she faced while living in an alien land, France, which is deemed as the land of freedom and equality. This research article entitled as French Lover: An Exploration into the Unknown Heaven and Decolonisation of Self in a Diasporic Scenario is an earnest endeavour that focuses mainly on Taslima's portrayal of East - West conflicts and encounters that resulted in the decolonization of self. It would be interesting to analyse how Taslima, as a writer draws effectively the contrasting images of East and West through the protagonist, Nila.

Keywords: Exile, Coloniser, East-West encounter, Double consciousness, occidental prejudices, stereotypes, Decolonisation of mind

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INTRODUCTION

Taslina Nasrin is one among the various exiled writers, born and brought up in a conservative Muslim community. In the context of a

series of communal riots in her country, Bangladesh, she established herself as a major global personality and an important voice in contemporary feminist literature. She, being a powerful writer, physician,

radical feminist, human rights activist and a secular humanist, her words fall like thunderstorm in the conservative minds of the society and they in turn yelled for her persecution. Even after all the controversies she continued her war against religious orthodoxy, patriarchy, the outdated, ill-conceived practices of the society and fanaticism. Her literary career started at a very young age as a poet and as columnist and has to her credit more than thirty books as poems, essays, novels and autobiographies. Her breakthrough controversial novel *Lajja (Shame)* published in 1993 amassed a world wide acclaim which portrays the struggle for the survival of a patriotic Bangladeshi Hindu family in a hostile Muslim environment. The 'angry young woman' was steadfast in her decision to go forward and fight against all the blood thirsty vampires who were waiting at her door step to suck her blood out ruthlessly.

The 'Female Rushdie' took Swedish nationality and remained in Europe for several years in exile and subsequently returned in 2004 to Kolkata, her adopted city of India which shares a common history, culture and language with her homeland Bangladesh. In 2008, she was expelled from her adopted land, India and moved to Sweden again. Now she lives in United States. Thus, Taslima Nasrin being double exiled from her own homeland and subsequently from her adopted homeland; experienced the throes of displacement, alienation, dispossession, and the loss of ethnicity in alien foreign lands with double intensity. In almost all of her famous novels like *Shodh* (1992), *Lajja* (1993), *Phera* (1993) and *French Lover: A Novel* (2002) we can trace the undertones of her diasporic consciousness delineated through the themes of racism, theme of home and homelessness. As readers, we often encounter portrayals of recurrent images or scenes of forced migration to a foreign land, unacceptance of the native people, and the limited, oppressed and struggling life of refugees in her works. Taslima Nasrin, the exiled Bangladeshi writer, has brilliantly portrayed in the novel, *French Lover: A Novel* (2001), translated from Bengali by Sreejata Guha, this dilemma of an immigrant who is strutting across two countries – homeland and adopted homeland. Nila's long, endless, aimless

sojourn away from home brings into her a perpetual physical and emotional dislocation, which signifies her diasporic consciousness. But this sojourn later proves to her to be a journey of realisation and a change of perspective because, she realized that "Life isn't easy in this foreign country" (Nasrin 79).

Discussion

While answering the questions of Sujoy Dhar in an interview, Taslima Nasrin says about her novel, *French Lover*:

I wanted to portray a woman caught in the conflict between the Western and Eastern cultures. It dwells upon racism, the insecurity of minorities and the slave mentality of the people of the subcontinent in regard to the whites. You may call me a feminist. But I think I am protesting only against oppression and I would continue to stand by people who are meted out injustice. Why should people suffer in this world?

These words are the foundation of this article that analyses the experience and consciousness of a woman caught up in the conflict between the Western and Eastern cultures. Nila's act of immigration cannot be studied superficially; it has some socio political connotations as well. It was a process of disillusionment for Nila who was initially hypnotized towards the Whites. She found Indian tradition and culture suffocating especially as a woman and look forward to a more liberal society. But Paris, the new land of freedom brought to her the cultural shock and she was left bewildered and uprooted at this new encounter. Being a secular humanist, Taslima Nasrin wanted to reform her people through her writings. Like the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o who refused to write his works in English, she too opted for her mother tongue as medium of expression rather than English - the language of the colonizer - as her main audience is the Bengali speaking community. Even though the characters are weakly represented, she managed to fulfill her objective (as she said in the interview) through Nila's and other characters' experience in Paris, the dream city.

Nasrin belongs to the so called Third-World country, which is deemed as underdeveloped and

was colonised for centuries by Europeans who call themselves the most developed, cultured, civilised and rich. Thus, creates a very stark contrast between East and West. Even though, after independence, they started their relay of asserting their own identities, globalisation and the subsequent hybridity of culture, threw them back into the same old tale of cultural conflict and uncertainties caused by double consciousness, regarding the values of their nativity, and the western criteria of development.

Postcolonial literature often portrays the harsh reality of Indian immigrants who, influenced by the widening process of globalisation, often picture in their mind the image of the Third-World countries as dirty, unpolished, uncivilised and sick in comparison to the First-World countries which they believe to be more disciplined, civilised and well-mannered. This mentality of people of Eastern countries is brought to light in this novel. Nasrin concludes that this mentality is a by-product of their sense of being uprooted and rootless as well as their attempt to imitate the actions and life style of the whites in order to become like them. This attempt of "mimicry" as Homi Bhabha terms it paves the way to develop "double consciousness" – in Du Bois words. Kirpal also argues that "Expatriate novelists try to relate the origin of their country's underdeveloped condition to the colonial encounter and to the presence of neo-colonialist policies in the nominally independent countries. Their desire to awaken the native to the real enemy and to the need to decolonise" (151) is also evident in Taslima.

"Nila asked herself, 'Is this heaven?' Then she answered herself, 'yes, it is'" (Nasrin 12). Every immigrant undergoes a cultural shock when he/she confronts two distinct histories and cultures – one, of their own homeland and other, of the foreign land, where one has come to live one's future life. Nilanjana Mandal is one among such millions of immigrants who moved abroad with the dream of living their life to the fullest. Nila's journey was an exploration and she was filled with hopes though, she was uncertain about the practicality of her decision of "setting off for the unknown" (Nasrin 80). Especially, Indians – they have a very ancient history of their common obsession with anything

foreign like obsession with foreign products, westernised standards of living, foreign degrees, working in another country and so on. Nila too was entangled in this fascination and her disillusion starts with the unveiling of these obsessions and false adorations.

She always perceived this new world from a distance like watching from a window aloof and far. Taslima Nasrin uses this image of window as a leitmotif, which constantly appear in the novel symbolising Nila's changing perspectives as we read in the novel - "Nila's eyes shifted from Kishan to the window – to the paradise outside" (Nasrin 25). Earlier, she was very much obsessed with the culture, beauty, literature and almost every aspect of West through the knowledge she gathered more from her voracious reading of Western philosophers. She believed France to be a heaven, where every thing is so perfect and good that all are happy and contented. Paris was a paradise when she was watching it from outside, but was it real or just an illusion? Nila finds an answer for this big question towards the end of the novel, after observing from within rather than from outside. Her fascination was for something unseen and unfamiliar. So, her journey in search of the unknown was really into the trailblazing realisation and experience of the center – margin construct which is constituted on the binary notions of East / West, master / slave, imperial / colonial, coloured / white, we / 'other'. Nila in her predicament slowly and very clearly apprehends her new abode better than before. Thus, her journey was marked by encounters and realisations.

The novel's first chapter title with which the story unfolds, itself opens with the silhouette of Dumdum placed against Charles de Gaulle in binary opposition to each other. Taslima Nasrin juxtaposes the image of Charles de Gaulle, the vast, highly furnished, one of the largest international airport in France with the 'other' image of Dumdum, an airport clad in basic amenity situated in a crowded municipality of Kolkata, India. This lacuna created in the beginning of the novel is seen as persisting through out the novel till the end. Nila herself felt like an alien when she, "The girl, with chapped lips, draped in a red silk sari with gold on her ears, nose

and hands, got off the aeroplane gazing at the white people, stumbling on the moving staircase; she walked in the direction of the moving crowd, amidst the chatter and the buzz" (Nasrin 1). Taslima Nasrin, through this description establishes her protagonist, Nilanjana Mandal's need to fill this void. Because, Nila was a newly wed Indian bride, carrying the burden of Indian culture arrived at a technologically developed and busy world of callous and unfamiliar people. As Somdatta Mandal claims, this "recurrent theme of comparing 'home' culture with that of the 'new' world where the diasporic writer is settled" (45) can be easily traced in Taslima too.

The protagonist of the novel, Nila, ceaselessly tries to fill this gap between homeland and host land, for an easy and effortless assimilation process to enter into the social life of this foreign land. On the contrary, this lacuna worsens and she ends up feeling marginalised in the new land. On the first day itself she came to know that France is a country which segregates its people by their skin colour. Nila fall an instrument as well as a victim to racial discrimination in the hands of the writer in the very beginning of her arrival at airport in the novel. The typical Indian bride, "With smudged bindi on her forehead and sindoor smeared in her hair, the girl came face to face with a Black and a White" (Nasrin 1). Taslima Nasrin by projecting this binary opposition offers before Nila an opportunity to choose between the two. Taslima described this situation with vivid imagery; "She passed the Black and moved towards the White, ignoring the dark new moon for the bright, white moonshine" (Nasrin 1). She, who was filled to the brim with admiration for the whites, ignored the Black official and went towards the White. Nila, there confronts the harsh reality of racial discrimination and marginalization – "She could pass for the goddess Durga, couldn't she? But the White didn't care about goddesses. Without raising his eyes, he pointed to the Black" (Nasrin 1).

Here, Taslima Nasrin not only stresses the racial discrimination and prejudices the westerners have in their mind towards any dark skinned person but it also shows the polarity of an immigrant, by emphasizing 'white' fascination which is there in the mind of the colonised. Nila experienced a new kind

of captivity in the land of freedom – on the basis of race – much to her surprise, because she was the only one who experienced all these trials in that huge boa constrictor. "She felt the corner was like a cage in the zoo. Everyone looked at her through the invisible cage as they walked past – they saw a strange animal with black eyes, dark hair and dark skin. The girl kept her eyes, the guilty ones, on the ground" (Nasrin 3). This marginalisation was so humiliating and it mutilates one's inner self in such a way that Nila, the victim of racism, went out of the airport "desperately concealing her dark skin, red silk sari, the sindoor on her forehead and hair, gold ornaments, the blue passport and the loose currency" (Nasrin 9). She, for the first time, was caged because she had a dark coloured skin when compared to the Westerners and she felt the guilt of being born with that colour of skin and in a poor country like India. Her first attempt of assimilation was by simply evading the real reason that caused delay while in airport. She was desperately trying to cover up the fact of racism and the humiliation she underwent. But this attempt of mental acculturation was disrupted by Sunil and Chaitali by placing the harsh reality of racism and marginalisation in front of her – "The reason is the colour of your skin – its not white enough . . . And your passport – it's not of a rich country" (Nasrin 10). Slowly, she began to develop a sort of insecurity due to her skin colour. She now acknowledges that she is different in colour to the 'other' world and she felt this difference when ever she, "a brown-skinned girl sat among a sea of white faces" (Nasrin 66).

The biggest irony is in the fact that, initially Nila too was a racist, and believed herself to be "almost - whites" (Nasrin 10), a colonial mentality that Britain had left for Indians to segregate among themselves and others. In the opening of novel, she was filled with disgust for the black skinned Senegalese man who was persecuted for not having a valid passport and visa. Not only Nila, but also Kishan, Sunil and Chaitali too had this same opinion. They all hated these black people and considered them to be the germ of all miseries they are facing in this foreign land because, these black people simply cheat the government without doing any work and instead involve in antisocial activities

thereby risking the life and livelihood of the “almost - whites like them”(Nasrin 10). This Indian obsession with white skin could be more a colonial mentality – an intense longing to act and look similar to their former master. Nila, in her journey of realisation, confronts the reality that she is not greater than the black Modibo – both are immigrants who are oppressed, marginalised from the main stream, clueless and aimless. She became more humanistic towards the end of the novel and considers her fellow being as equal. This was the realization she got from the first encounter with the West, on the grounds of skin-colour.

Next, Taslima questions the common Indian tendency of considering the colonial language, English, as more fashionable and prestigious than their mother tongue to use. Nila, Taslima’s mouthpiece reflects about this in the novel when she came to know that Sunil and Chaitali’s only child does not know Bengali language but only French language even though, her parents speak Bengali at home. Taslima, through the perspective of Nila, remarks that:

Nilā had seen this in Calcutta too: Bengali children were sent to English medium schools and spoke English at home, as if Bengali was a low-class language. The same logic applied there too: English helped in getting jobs, while knowing Bengali added no value. In spite of this factor, Nilā had studied Bengali literature. (Nasrin 44)

Taslima Nasrin criticizes the notion of considering English language as a yard stick to measure one’s education, class and culture. Nila thinks, “In Calcutta the knowledge of English separated the civilized from the barbarians. She had always assumed that civilized people, in any country, always spoke fluent English” (Nasrin 3-4). This is not a misconception Nila alone had, but it is the typical mentality of the common public of India. This is one of the many aspects from which Nila wanted herself and others to decolonize their minds. Taslima wanted to cast off the spell the coloniser’s language had on Indians and especially on the people of the ‘second city of the British Empire’, Kolkata.

Nilā’s attempt to go against this common mentality was also an attempt to fight against the

influence of coloniser’s language, English. It was the strategy our colonizer had put forward in the yore to dominate over us. It is evident from the speech delivered in the British Parliament by Lord Macaulay in February 1835:

I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such moral values, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage. Therefore I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them to be, a truly dominated nation.

Taslima was a writer who chose her mother tongue, Bengla over the foreign language, English. She thus refused to submit to the dominance of superimposed standard language. Nila also argues against this common mentality by saying that “twenty-one crore people spoke this language and so it couldn’t be that worthless. It was the sixth most spoken language in the world . . . deeper she had plunged into the language . . . like coming upon a secret gold mine” (Nasrin 45). Towards the end, Nila was irked by the fact that “Foreigners dubbed themselves French the minute they got their citizenship and they forgot all about their country” (Nasrin 189) as she was before. She knows very well that, as an immigrant stops using his own mother tongue there starts the rupture of indigenous culture and thus paves the way to his subsequent cutting off from the roots or homeland. Here, she felt the need for decolonization of self.

Food and related traditions, customs, etiquettes all are culturally created. Thus, food is a symbol that carries so many cultural meanings and implications. So, when they encounter for the first time a different culture, difference in food habits and etiquettes affects process of socialisation in the new land. Nila too is affected mainly by this. This was her second encounter with West where food

became the medium or instrument by which Nila felt stifled by the increasing gulf of cultural difference as if you are being cornered or labeled as 'uncultured' and 'uncivilised' a typical oriental attribute.

On the day, Nila invited her western friends, Danielle and Catherine for dinner, Nila experienced a major cultural shock. Nila was uncomfortable with their etiquettes and eating procedure and so was all. It felt all messy for her. Danielle and Catherine too felt the same; they didn't like her way of serving and the too much spicy food which she cooked for them. Nila's way of serving the dishes was unique to her culture and was very much different from them because "Nila wanted to give the greens first and then the vegetables and then the fish fry followed by the fish curry and finally the meat, because that's the way to get the best taste" (Nasrin 77). Danielle and Catherine have a different opinion and they disregarded Nila's suggestion making her regret about the fact that "they'd never get the taste of the individual items" (Nasrin 77). Westerners would not eat so many dishes at a time and Nila even forced them to eat more which made them feel awkward and uncomfortable. The cultural difference was so vast that Nila failed to "explain to them that guests were like gods to the Bengali. They'd always give them the bigger piece of fish, the best seat, the nicest bed. It was difficult for Bengalis to say 'I love you', but they'd show it by giving and feeding" (Nasrin 77).

Nila's third encounter was almost in congruent with her previous experience. It was in the dinner party at Nicole, Danielle's friend where Nila felt herself to be a total "castaway" (Nasrin 87) among the group of six; she was the only odd one out who was not really used to the western etiquettes. This was indeed embarrassing and so she was preparing for a moment, when they would comment "on her unwieldy use of cutlery, she could also have laughed and said, 'Actually, we are used to eating with our fingers. The food tastes heavenly and brings you closer to it'. But the silence at the table only made her squirm some more and feel uncomfortable" (Nasrin 94). Even in her restless alienation she feels when among Danielle's friends, Nila tried to work out any similarity or belonging

with these people or country to negate her loneliness. Interestingly, she inferred that "Bengalis and the French had five in common, the former spent five hours to cook and five minutes to eat and the French cooked in five minutes and ate over five hours" (Nasrin 94). This encounter actually intensified Nila's regrets for wanting belonging, alienation, identity crisis and all. It was almost in the pain of rupture that Nila, spoke to Danielle "Didn't you see what a fool I made of myself over there? I don't really fit in . . . Actually I am not cut out for this society" (Nasrin 96).

"White man's burden" is a concept which became popular after the titular poem written by Rudyard Kipling. 'White man's burden' is a concept that shows the White man's moral obligation to rule and civilise the non-white people of the world until they fully become independent in their economic, cultural, and social affairs. On the other hand, it is the term that shows the racist perception of coloured people as inferior to white people.

Taslima Nasrin portrayed Danielle and her friends as representatives of people who still follow the 'White man's burden' concept – a colonial mentality even in the post colonial era. Danielle says, "TV channel wouldn't be interested in rich people of India . . . Besides, it's good for India if they focus on the poverty, she'll get more aid . . . when they show us poverty, we sit up and think . . . this is almost like a whiplash for us" (Nasrin 97). Taslima wanted to zero in on the overtly tendency of western people, of representing India as being writhing in socio-economic issues like poverty, filth, backwardness. In a way it is true as well as false, when it comes to fixing India's identity to the stereotypes as 'poor, dirty country'. The 'westerners' tend to stereotype the Third-World to show of their superiority over the developing countries. Taslima, here underlines and endorses what the West thinks about India, as well as what a country like India can do for its own people. India had progressed a lot from its colonial past still they fail to annul its stereotyped colonial identity of being uncivilised, undeveloped, poor, and uncultured. It is because India's development should focus more on the laymen and the destitute. This is the point Taslima is accentuating.

Nila always dreamt herself to be a Princess “with long dark tresses, trapped in the house of a wicked giant” and also wallowed in on the thought of a Prince in France who would rescue her by breaking the huge gates with a magical wand. This dream was almost silly but the significance lies in the encoded meaning of the story. This fairy tale demonstrates the popular image of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 93) – another perspective of “The White Man’s Burden”. Taslima Nasrin places this tale as a prelude to Nila’s most important encounter with the West – the relationship Nila will have with the French handsome man, Benoir. Because the masculine fantasy of Benior, leading a rescue mission for the brown woman, Nila can be traced in many of his dialogues, like he says to Nila that “when that Bengali friend of yours raped you, I offered you security, I helped you chase away the demons” (Nasrin 288) as Black men are all brutal, barbarous devils. For Nila, Benoir was almost a phenomenon or an incident that changed her whole life, “In Nila’s life, unknown to herself, Benoir Dupont had happened” (Nasrin 170).

Like any other white, Benoir too believed in the stereotypical image of Indian women as sensuous and beautiful. Nila was for him “the Indian woman of . . . dreams, patient, tolerant, competent and generous to a fault” (Nasrin 270). He in his fancy, was actually “keen to uncover the mystery of this mysterious woman” (Nasrin 164), Nila. On the contrary, Nila enjoys making love to Benoir as it feeds her vanity to know that there is somebody in this whole world after the mother who finds her worthy of love even after her skin colour which later, proves to be her shallow imagination. Nila, without any coercion, succumb herself to Benoir hearing his magical words “Nila, drink me”. Nila, like Alice, a little child in this wonder land, Paris, shrink her ‘self’ and yielded to the White coloniser. Taslima Nasrin places this act of submission as a parallel to India’s surrender to the coloniser, the British. Nila acts as a perfect link between sexual and political oppression and thus Nila as a colony becomes Taslima’s significant metaphor in this novel.

Though Benoir said, Nila is his “unbridled passion. Without you I am a dead soul” (Nasrin 228),

he had all his contempt for India and its people. He commented to Nila that “Eating is no big deal to me, it may be to you. There’s nothing more valuable to you than rice because half your country starves to death” (Nasrin 229). Again, she felt this contempt, Benoir had towards the East and their habits, when she ate once with her hands then “his eyes became round with surprise as if he was looking at a savage” (Nasrin 268). This humiliation was unbearable for her and she intensely desired to tell him “to go away. She’d spend her lonely life alone” (Nasrin 230) but she couldn’t because she was still under the magical spell of that White, even though she was aware of the fact that “she was from the East, the exact opposite of the West” (Nasrin 269). But slowly, she felt herself to be “like a poor, distressed subject, like I’m being whipped by the kings, for no reason” (Nasrin 239). She was now indirectly experiencing the colonial past of her country and its people.

This realisation and afterthought of oppression and control she was experiencing out of consent rather than coercion, acts as ‘pull’ or pressure on Nila that compelled her to walk out of her relationship with Benior Dupont, the White Coloniser. Even though Benoir suggests for a marriage, she was least inclined to do so since it means ‘possessing’ and ‘being possessed’. She retorted to him that “I have given you a taste of the different for a long long time. You have had your fill of the exotic, enough in fact. I had no self-esteem or self-confidence and that’s why I came this far for your love . . . a stupid, silly eastern woman” (Nasrin 286) and she, almost like her forefathers, who drove away the British coloniser from India, said to Benoir firmly that “Benoir, please collect your belongings from this house and leave immediately” (Nasrin 289). Thus she drove away the coloniser who has penetrated into her private space and tried to subjugate her mind and the body.

She was not only the symbol of sexual oppression but also represents the psychological humiliation, underwent by the native while in colonial period. Nila personifies the impotent rage subdued in the minds of the entire oppressed human race and she is the one who paved a way to the marginal diasporic people, in order to start a

rebellion against the soft-powers in this post-colonial and neo-colonial scenario. Kirpal says, "Estrangement, the obverse of assimilation or true "marriage", occurs because of the inability of the white race to treat the coloured races as equals, as partners in a contract. The historical master-slave relationship, the racial arrogance reasserts itself" (55). Nila's break away from the relationship with Benoir is more an attempt to assert her self. In her journey of decolonisation and demystification, she explores life and liberation. This very need for liberation can also be traced in Taslima's symbolic title *French lover*. Nila is not the lover of a French handsome man, Benoir but she is the lover of 'freedom' which France as a country represents.

In all her journeys, she was "friendless" as well as brutally "hunted" in all encounters with the West and finally ended up as an "animal whose backbone was broken, who was crumpled, crinkled and drowning" (Nasrin 205) but she had the courage, resilience and the potential to retaliate in the same coin and to live her life ahead. It was almost a trial, as she said to Danielle "time is never wasted. This time was spent in acquiring wisdom and I needed it. Or I would have spent my life under a misconception" (Nasrin 291). In the course of this trial, she realised that what she felt 'heaven' was not real, it was all coloured by her personal affinity and aversion. She explored the unknown, she just confronted the West directly rather than peeping through a window. It was a self-realisation ensued from the beams of radiant self-discovery. Almost a beam to her path-breaking realisation was that:

Nearly four thousand years ago the fair Aryans came from Central Asia and drove the dark Dravidians further to the south of India. They sang in praise of the fair, who were better and the dark worse, the fair were the masters and the dark the slaves, fair was greater, the higher caste, that was their society, their faith. It was a conviction embedded deep in their blood. Two hundred years of British rule had strengthened that belief: white was better, more learned, the masters. Nila's blood had also carried that belief . . . and even if she tried to shake it all away, a little bit

remained somewhere. She knew it wasn't easy getting rid of that tiny bit, but she was happy to have achieved it finally. (Nasrin 292)

Nila now experienced the colonial history of her ancestors, this was because, "distance, and rejection in the white man's land – explicitly for his skin and implicitly for economic, historical reasons – produces in the immigrant, a deeper consciousness about his oppressed condition and his distorted past" (Kirpal 94). What Taslima aimed at in portraying Nila in such an endeavour is to draw an outline in front of her readers to know who they are, in relation to what they were and thereby to acquire adequate self-knowledge and self-pride. Taslima's mission of decolonisation is similar to what Viney Kirpal argues:

The Third World migrant novelist tries to understand the colonialist host society and to disenchant fellow natives back home about the myth of the white man's superiority, honesty and sense of fairplay. He essays to exorcise the colonial relationship of master-slave encountered in the white man's land . . . of . . . materialistic, individualistic, racist, power-hungry, exploitive system. (5)

Now, Nila's perception is wide and clear enough to evade her hitherto misconception and thus decolonised her mind so as to move ahead in her new life with a clear mind and perception, without any pride or prejudice. Benoir was selfish and he never loved Nila rather he was driven to Nila just out of his need. Thus, Nila, the almost-orphan girl from Calcutta feels superior to Benoir and gathers courage to subvert and thus refuses to be his slave anymore.

Conclusion

Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, holds the view that a writer is the voice of his own society and his principle aim is "re-education and regeneration" and thus a writer becomes a catalyst through which "his society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration" accumulated out of its colonial past (qtd. in Kirpal 5). Taslima Nasrin, the Third-world writer does this almost like an expert teacher and expressed her views in mother tongue as she wants

to “re-educate” and decolonise her own people. She just wanted to inculcate in them a sort of resilience and subverting potential against any kind of oppression, like her strong willed protagonist of this novel.

Though the novel portrays the problems and miseries faced by women, their hopes as well as aspiration; in a wider scope, she delineates the symbolic journey of a typical, modern, Indian woman, from her misunderstandings and misconception to the great realisation and assertion of self. Nila was initially, like any other Indian was fascinated and obsessed with anything that is of the West. She aimed at exploring France’s great history and culture, which she read through books. Her life in France was a trial to dismantle many of her misconceptions. It was a process of demystification or decolonisation of mind. The confused, disillusioned, and pessimistic Nila, at the end of the novel found victorious in her mission of decolonisation though she fails in her personal life and goals.

The East-West confrontation is the main theme in Taslima Nasrin’s novel. She often focuses on how her protagonists try to balance their life in two economically and culturally distinct countries. Taslima Nasrin incorporates here the oriental views along with the occidental prejudices to bring in home this idea. Taslima presents some characters, in this context, as torn between conflicting worlds, found to be in their constant pursuit of quest for a true image or true self. Thus, Taslima places both white and non-white characters as antipodes, representing their respective culture and race. These fictional characters act as her spokesperson to posit her arguments. When Nila and all other immigrants represented the marginalised, racially segregated, working class minorities from developing Third World countries, the white characters like Danielle, Catherine, and Nicole all represents the much developed, sophisticated, ‘superior race’ as they claims. The novel brilliantly depicts the encounter with these two conflicting sectors which are opposite as well as equal in some aspects. The cultural conflict is one of the major elements of postcolonial writing which affirms the eternity of hiatus between East and West. This

cultural conflict puts the postcolonial society in the dilemma of in-betweenness – whether to follow its own native practices of tradition, habit and culture or get along with the culture of the white people. Nila is cured of this very dilemma and conflict for ever.

This work metaphorically celebrates the role of indomitable human spirit in one’s journey of life. Nila the protagonist simply out of sheer will-power that she was able to subvert the colonial oppression exerted towards her by Benoir. He penetrated into her personal space all of a sudden even without her permission or knowledge as if it was a “storm . . . with a destructive madness” (Nasrin 185). In due course, Nila realised and retaliated in the same coin and refused to be his slave. At the end of the novel, Nila concludes that for her the real journey has just been started – a journey of unburdening the mind and a mission of decolonising the mind from all the shackles that confined her.

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