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Research

Masculinities at the Crossroads: Theoretical Insights into Gendered Violence and Social Class in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

by Sanjana Chakraborty and Dhananjay Tripathi

Abstract: The present article critically examines the intricate tapestry of gendered space within Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014). It aims to unravel the social positionality of men within minority communities in conflict scenarios. Primarily based on the theories of Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel, and Raewyn Connell, among others, the paper underscores the complexities surrounding gendered violence and the formation of male identity. It highlights the emergence of subaltern masculinity, layered with the embodied realities of masculinity. This fosters a sense of "otherness" among men belonging to minority groups. It furthers the psychological and physical trauma borne by male bodies in the discourse of gender-based violence. This paper delves into the intricate intersections of racial and ethnic identities within social class dynamics, unraveling the multifaceted expressions of masculinity within diverse communities. Through a lens focused on gendered violence, I explore the unique challenges and experiences faced by men navigating the complex terrain of multiple intersecting identity factors. The research probes into the systematic invisibility of victims who identify as men on the gender spectrum, juxtaposed with their unjust association with the image of the perpetrator. In essence, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse surrounding the connections between masculinities and social class, unraveling the multifaceted layers of gendered violence against men within the unique socio-cultural context depicted in *Lajja*.

Keywords: gendered violence; identity; intersectionality; masculinities; otherness; social class

Résumé : Le présent article offre une analyse critique de la complexité des espaces réservés aux hommes ou aux femmes dans *Lajja* (2014) de Taslima Nasrin. Il vise à éclaircir la position sociale des hommes au sein des communautés minoritaires dans les scénarios de conflit. S'appuyant principalement sur les théories de Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel et Raewyn Connell, entre autres, l'article souligne les complexités entourant la violence fondée sur le genre et la formation de l'identité masculine. Il met en lumière l'émergence d'une masculinité subalterne, à laquelle s'ajoutent les réalités incarnées de la masculinité. Cela favorise un sentiment d'« altérité » chez les hommes appartenant à des groupes minoritaires, qui renforce le traumatisme psychologique et physique que subissent les corps masculins dans le discours sur la violence fondée sur le genre. Cet article se penche sur les intersections complexes des identités raciales et ethniques au sein de la dynamique des classes sociales, révélant les multiples facettes de l'expression de la masculinité au sein de diverses communautés. En adoptant un point de vue axé sur la violence fondée sur le genre, j'explore les défis particuliers et les expériences vécues par les hommes confrontés à l'entrecroisement complexe de plusieurs facteurs identitaires. La recherche examine l'invisibilité systématique des victimes qui s'identifient comme des hommes sur le continuum des genres, juxtaposée à leur association injuste avec l'image de l'agresseur. Essentiellement, cette étude enrichit le discours théorique sur les liens entre masculinité et classe sociale, en révélant les multiples facettes de la violence fondée sur le genre à l'encontre des hommes dans le contexte socioculturel unique dépeint dans *Lajja*.

Mots clés : violence fondée sur le genre; identité; intersectionnalité; masculinités; altérité; classe sociale

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Introduction

In theorizing masculinities and social class, gendered violence perception often confines male victims to a female image. Understanding that men are also subject to societal power dynamics, akin to those experienced by women, necessitates an examination of the factors shaping male perceptions of masculinity across different social contexts. This research unveils the concealed realm of gendered violence against men within minority communities, as depicted in the novel *Lajja* (2014), and thereby aims to debunk stereotypes, raise awareness, and foster a more inclusive comprehension of gender-based violence. By shedding light on the complexities of male identity within the nexus of gender and socioeconomic class, this paper delves into the intersectionality of masculinity vis-à-vis social class, elucidating the ramifications of marginalization on male victims of violence and their psychological well-being.

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014) was published, originally in 1993, as a reply to the atrocities brought down upon the Hindu and other minority communities in Bangladesh, as a ripple effect of the 1992-3 Babri Masjid demolition. In her novel's preface, Nasrin states:

> I wrote *Lajja* when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack Hindus.… The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction … attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh … destroying their temples … and raping Hindu women. (Preface to *Lajja* 2014, ix)

Lajja means "shame" in Bengali; the manuscript associates this with the shame and humiliation upheld through silence. The narratives of sexual harassment act as an illustration of this shame which is portrayed through Nasrin's Bengali men, Suronjon and Sudhamoy. The novel encircles the after-effects of the 1993 Babri Masjid demolition and narrates the life of the Datta family in these Hindu-Muslim riots, which Nasrin portrayed through the male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy Dutta. In Bangladesh during those riots most Hindu families were abducted, molested, killed, or forced into conversions. As per reports, the Babri Masjid demolition in India led to riots and violent attacks on Bengali Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities that took place from December 1992 to March 1993.

The report *Minorities at Risk* chronologically records national riots and related social incidents during the period of Babri Masjid conflict (UNHRC 2004). For example, in December 1992, Muslims mobbed and attacked various Hindu temples across Bangladesh. These incidents were followed by a disruption in India-Bangladesh cricket at Dhaka National Stadium, due to the destruction of Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists. At least ten people died, many Hindu women were raped, and hundreds of Hindu homes and temples were destroyed (UNHRC 2004). In October 1993, Hindus in Bangladesh curtailed their Durga Puja (Hindu religious festival) due to atrocities committed against them. This news was reported by All-India-Radio (AIR) on October 16, 1993. Just six months after *Lajja's* publication in July 1993, the country banished the book and several radical Muslims marched the streets of Dhaka for the arrest and execution of Taslima Nasrin, a female Muslim writer who has been critical of male chauvinism and Islamic fundamentalism. In November of that year, a "fatwa" was released in her name by the *Council of the Soldiers of Islam* (a religious fundamentalist group) claiming she insulted the Islam religion in the world forum. The significance of selecting this novel as a point of analysis is established within the narratives of Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014). This paper underscores the necessity of reconfiguring literary representations in feminist texts like *Lajja* and segregating the male experiences of cultural minorities after communal upheaval. This study focuses on the scars carried by the male bodies who fall prey to this type of cultural marginalization and subalternity.

Psychological Trauma of Gendered Violence on Male Bodies

Through a nuanced analysis of gendered violence, this study illuminates the often-unacknowledged challenges faced by male minority community members who have endured both physical and psychological trauma. The paper highlights the pervasive discrimination fuelled by patriarchal biases, emphasizing how violence is inherently gendered and reinforces masculine norms. By exploring the intersection of social dynamics, gendered violence, and cultural shifts within minority communities, this study offers a varied perspective on the multifaceted impact of violence on diverse gender identities, challenging prevailing narratives that primarily focus on female and child victims.

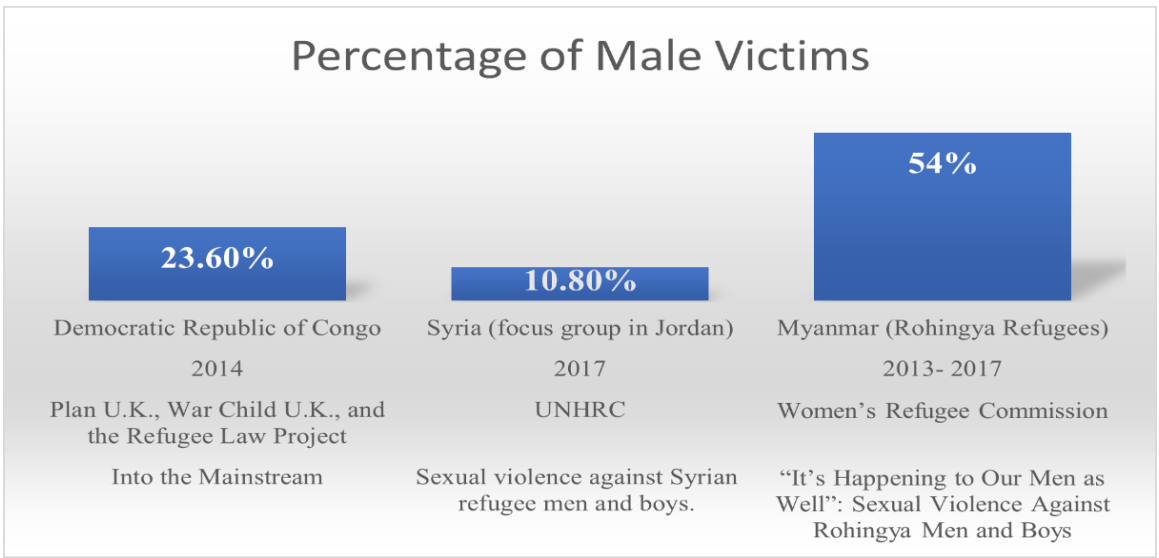

Fig 1: Graphical Representation of Male Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict Areas.

The data shown in Figure 1 are extracted through various sociological initiatives undertaken by renowned institutes such as Sarah Chynoweth's report, *We Keep it in our Heart,* commissioned by UNHRC (2017), the Into the Mainstream-Refugee Law Project (2014), and the Women's Refugee Commission (2013-17). This representation emphasises a prevalent issue of gendered abuse targeting men, especially in conflict-ridden regions. Gendered violence, an eminent concern in public health and human rights discourse, epitomizes manifestations moulded by societal paradigms that dictate gender roles. The prevalence of the invisibility of men who are victims within specific social

spaces highlights the entrenched power differentials between genders, conflicting human rights and substantial negligence to public health. Acknowledging an often-overlooked reality, it is evident that males can be victims of gendered violence, particularly at the hands of other men, especially when they (the victims) deviate from the expectations of hegemonic or ruling masculinity. A meticulous analysis of the text, *Lajja* unveils a profound transformation in the lives of the Datta family men, Sudhamoy (the father) and Suranjon (the protagonist). Their journey unfolds as they grapple with the challenge of not conforming to the terms of hegemonic masculinity within the societal context of a Muslim country. The research presented here sheds light on the diverse complexities surrounding male victimization within the dynamics of gendered violence.

This study interpolates these dynamics of gendered violence and its subsequent effect on Bangladesh's trajectory since independence reduced religious diversity from approximately 23.1% to 9.6% during 1971 (Shahisullah 2016). The same reduction in religious diversity is illustrated in Figure 2, whose statistical data was retrieved from Minorities Rights Group (Shahisullah, 2016).

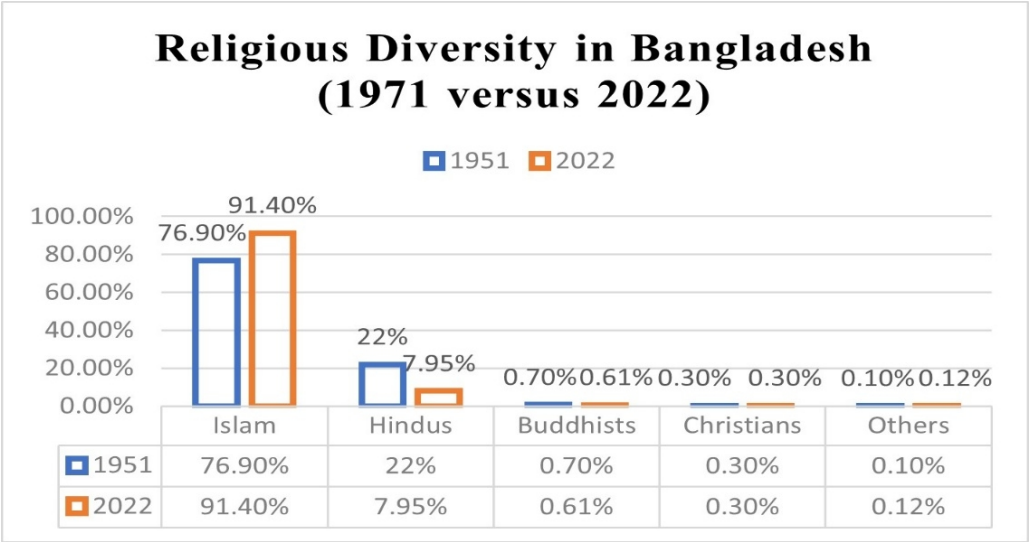

Fig 2: Graphical Representation of Religious Diversity in Bangladesh (1951 versus 2022)

This representation vividly shows a nation-state's move toward one religious community and a significant reduction in other communities, especially Hindus. According to the *Times of India* (2024), minorities, like Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, have been forced to resign from various workforces due to threats and harassment. Recently, *The Print* reported that an adaptation of *Lajja* was staged at Delhi's Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi in November 2024 (Halder 2024). The adaptation showed how Nasrin's 1993 novel—still banned in Bangladesh—remains relevant today. As there was no Citizenship Amendment Act in India to provide refuge to Hindus fleeing the country when Taslima Nasrin's novel came out, a new play based on the novel serves as an unspoken yet emphatic nod to the CAA. Thus, this paper analyses these real-time scenarios of religious and cultural discrimination and mingles them with South Asian parameters of masculinity to explore the subalternity of minority men in Bangladesh.

Theoretical and Analytical Approach

This study incorporates a qualitative approach that merges literary analysis and close reading with an intersectional analysis of social implications through *Lajja*. The paper portrays the gendered violence implicated in male bodies of minority (racial/sexual/religious) communities. The research blends close textual reading with gender theory and reports on gender-based violence against men within conflict situations, which emphasizes the plight of marginalized masculinities, through Suronjon (protagonist and son) and Sudhamoy (his father) creating a space for subaltern male identities. Sudhamoy's perspective explains the psycho-social impact of systematic violence on Hindu men in Bangladesh during the 1993 communal riots of the Babri Masjid incident.

In *The Masking of Masculinities*, Harry Brod observes: "Men's studies scholars repeatedly face a problem in explaining their task.… Women's lives have been so privatized—some feminists call it the "male-stream"—tradition. Men's studies have no such immediately appealing claim to make since men have been the subjects of scholarship (Brod 1987, 2).

Thus, this study primarily utilizes Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's (2005) subaltern lens to understand male victimization in conflict situations through thematic analysis of minority communities. It observes Nasrin's depiction of masculinity in her narrative by focusing on specific themes in the text, such as reactions to shame and representations of resilience and vulnerability amidst socio-political shifts.

Unexpected Social Clashes: Reconfiguring Male Bio-metaphors

Masculinity is profoundly defined by the cultural traditions of gender norms. This formulation is interwoven with socio-economic metaphors embodied through male bodies, which is then portrayed as an artificial state that boys and men must navigate, suggesting they are not inherently born with a fixed masculinity; rather, they are shaped by the prevailing hegemonic gendered social codes within their cultural milieu.

This section delves into gender politics influenced by unexpected socio-political clashes that create spaces of subaltern masculinity. It observes how Nasrin vocalizes the atrocities bestowed on minority (religious) communities due to the 1993 Babri Masjid socio-political conflict. She uses the narrative of a Bengali Hindu family in a Muslim-dominant Bangladesh in 1993. Using male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy, Nasrin focuses on the vulnerability of Hindu men who fail to fulfill the hegemonic role of protector during the Bangladesh conflict and thus lose their male privileges.

This study is primarily based on Connell's study of hegemonic masculinity in *Gender and Power* (1987) which legitimates the social code of manhood. She further developed this idea in her work *Masculinities* (1995, 2005). While Connell revisited her original theory with James Messerschmidt in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005) they mention the *Hierarchy of Masculinity* in this work, a hierarchy which outlines four categories of masculinity. First, *hegemonic masculinity* comprises traits such as heterosexuality, fair skin colour, stoicism, and perpetuation through patriarchy. Second, *complicit masculinity* neither aligns nor challenges hegemonic norms. Third, *marginalized masculinity* adheres to cultural expectations but fails to access the hegemonic privileges. Last, *subordinate masculinity* opposes hegemonic traits and is often associated with effeminacy. This conceptual framework elucidates the complex interplay between various manifestations of masculinity and the fluid dynamics of social class based on the economic standing and religious belief system.

During the time of the Babri Masjid riots, Muslim fundamentalists attacked minority communities, especially the Hindus, who were mainly Bengali. In *Lajja*, it is observed that the responsibility of the Babri Masjid demolition in another country by Hindu fundamentalists was foisted on the shoulder of "Sudhamoys" (Nasrin 2014, 17). The plural usage of "Sudhamoys" represents a singular character vocalizing and representing the plight of many Hindus in Bangladesh during that time. They "had not escaped the clutches of the fundamentalist Muslims in 1990, and so it was unlikely that they would be able to escape their clutches in 1992" (Nasrin 2014, 17). They were expected to leave their home and nation. This fostered a fear of forced displacement and vulnerability which eventually became a reality for many Hindus. Thus, it placed them within the parameters of marginalized communities.

Triple Vulnerability of Minority Masculinity in 1993 Bangladesh

The explicit placement into the category of marginalized creates the space of subaltern masculinity. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) coined the term s*ubaltern,* in his Prison Notebooks (1971 in English)to elaborate on socio-economically marginalized groups within colonial politics. The term was used to identify the cultural hegemony in a postcolonial context that corroborates social exclusion and displacement of specific social groups to deny their voices. This created the binary space of "them" and "us" and further emphasized the subaltern paradigm.

Later, this term was developed into the postcolonial studies subgroup, Subaltern Studies, by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee. This paper, however, uses this concept with Spivak's lens of subalternity which states: "It is not just a classy word for 'oppressed' for the other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie… everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference" (Spivak 1992, 45; also cited in De Kock 1992, 45). Spivak further clarifies that the creation of a subaltern identity is based on the "mechanism of discrimination" (De Kock 1992, 45). Thus, this paper argues that, during conflict situations, minority communities navigate the realms of layered vulnerability. Nasrin's men—Sudhamoy and Suronjon—embody what can be termed as a *triple vulnerability* within their homelands. This vulnerability weaves the tapestry of *Othering* and paves the way for making their masculinity as *subalterns.*

Drawing on Spivak's concept of subalterns, the narrative in *Lajja* captures the layers of vulnerability faced by minority masculine identities. Their identities are forced into the space of "difference." First, in the world of *Lajja*, being a Bengali Hindu man within a Muslim-majority space makes these men religiously vulnerable and consistently othered. The role of religion affects the social placement of men as "religion produces socio-cultural systems through processes of domination, subordination, inclusion and exclusion, all spiced with an aura of factuality" (Geertz 1973, 90).

Second, their Hindu Bengali identity correlates to the cultural identity created their minority status. Mrinalini Sinha states, "The Muslims in Bengal, who as a group had a slight numerical advantage over Hindus, were similarly usually exempted from the popular elaboration of Bengali effeminacy" (Sinha 1995, 16). This colonial subordination imbued with sexual harassment pushes them to unredeemable positions of continuous subjugation.

Third, their masculinity is thus shaped by this hegemonic masculinity, which Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define as established by dominant socio-cultural groups while emasculating the minority. This *triple vulnerability* pushes Suronjon and Sudhamoy to subaltern masculinity and snatches away their agency and visibility through communal violence, socio-cultural biases, and gendered hierarchies. Sudhamoy and Suranjon embody marginalized masculinity and showcase two sides of the male image hampered by the hegemonic masculinity in a Muslim country. They are trapped within their homelands because of their subaltern identities, which leads to desperation, alienation, and emasculation.

The subaltern embodies no identity and lacks representation. The subaltern is oppressed by the "reproductive heteronormativity" (Spivak 2005, 478) which restricts their "social mobility" (Spivak 2005, 476). This restriction elucidates subalternity which is also termed "stuckedness" (Hage 2009, 4). Hage defines this as an entrapment where "a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Hage 2009, 4). This shifting gendered hierarchy furthers the subalternity of Sudhamoy and Suronjon, where social class is formulated based on "economic collectivity" (Spivak 2005, 476). This is exemplified by Sudhamoy's disqualification for an academic promotion in his teaching career. He states, "Do you think something will happen with the file, dear man? he would ask.... Will my work get done, Forib Sahib? he would ask.… Sudhamoy's juniors got their promotions. His file had been buried under the files of Dr. Korimuddin and Dr. Yakub Mollah, but they soon began working as associate professors. (Nasrin 2014, 29).

His Hindu identity consistently delays a well-deserved promotion, reflecting the intricate layers of *triple vulnerability* —religious, cultural, and socio-political subjugation—which results in loss of social agency. His compromised economic standing serves as a poignant illustration of the profound impact of evolving socio-political power dynamics on the fundamental facets of male identity. This reflects the intricate interplay between economic agency and social status within the broader context of masculinity. Sudhamoy did not fit the conventional archetype of "real manhood," which equates with economic stability. Moreover, his religious and cultural identity added to the systematic dismantling of his masculinity towards emasculation: "Finally, Sudhamoy Datta retired as an assistant professor. His colleague Madhob Chondro Pal whispered in his ear … as they bade him farewell, "In a country of Muslims, we should not expect too many opportunities for ourselves. Even what we're getting now is a favor" (Nasrin 2014, 30).

Social class intricately interweaves with racial and ethnic identities, contributing to economic disparities that profoundly impact the construction of masculine identities. Thus, it is observed that minority men encounter barriers to

economic mobility, unequal pay, and limited access to resources. Economic challenges thus shape perceptions of success and failure, influencing the definitions of masculinity within the context of financial stability and independence.

Shifting Male Bio-metaphors and Bengali Masculinity

The Bengali men are equated with the aspect of "feebleness" as observed through Sinha's work. In *Colonial Masculinity*, she quotes Macaulay: "the physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy.... His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid" (Strachey 1888 (1911), 450; also cited in Sinha 1995 , 15). This languid state of being, which was a product of a colonial mindset, impacted the Bengali men's identity during communal violence (1992-3) and in many cases till the contemporary times.In her seminal work Mrinalini Sinha observed, Colonial Masculinity (1995), that the colonial motive of divide and rule was established by creating a rift between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Specifically, after the Partition (1905 and 1947) of East Bengal (now Bangladesh), the colonial lens exempted Muslims in Bengal from the brand of *effeminacy*. In Nasrin's narrative, the politicized religious belief system by fundamentalist Muslims bestows gendered and racial violence: "Suronjon saw his mother pull the windows shut … they could hear the slogans. "Pick up Hindus/ One or two/ And snack on them." … Suronjon remembered that they had heard the same slogan in 1990.... And who were they? ... They were people like Jobbaar, Romjan ... almost like younger brothers…." (Nasrin 2014, 23).

These processions with religious hate speeches and bullying inflict trauma on Bangladesh's minority communities, mainly Hindus. The reference in Suronjon's narrative of a similar scene in 1990 specifies how communal violence marginalizes the Bengali Hindus and minority groups. This understates how the psychological weapon of public shame was an efficient strategy to emasculate men, making them voiceless against the screams of culturally dominant groups. Shame and fear erode the foundation of "liberalism" and "independence" with fear of identity loss among the minority communities, creating a subaltern space for individuals like Suronjon and Sudhamoy. Moreover, Michael Ropar and John Tosh state, "Masculinity is in constant relation to the 'other', colonizer and colonized, later defined as emasculate and in need of control whereas the former imbues the image of imperial masculinity" (Ropar and Tosh 2021, 1-24).

These recurrent shifts in the bio-metaphors assigned to the male bodies within the national borders create the marginalized "Other." However, this binary impacts the assigned gender roles of men from minority groups, especially Bengali Hindus of Bangladesh. Nasrin implores this contrast with the women of the Datta family, Maya (daughter) and Kironmoyee (mother). The men and women of the Datta family represent the two sides of vulnerable social placement within the communal riots of Bangladesh in 1993. The former, the father-son duo, represents the non-acceptance of subaltern identity within the failed parameters of manhood, whereas, the mother-daughter duo represents the sense of acceptance of defeat and vulnerability. Maya (daughter) serves as the prominent relic that sets a series of events that changes the father-son duo's social placement of being men. The following passage shows Maya's willingness to change her cultural identity and migrate to India: "What will you do with your name, Maya?" he [Sudhamoy] asked, recalling when he had identified himself as Sirajuddin.... "I'll do that, and call myself Firoja Begum," she replied in an unwavering tone..... Maya was prepared to take any step to carry on living" (Nasrin 2014, 18).

In this incident Sudhamoy questions Maya's sense of nationalism. However, in retrospect, he is reminded of his act of choosing the Muslim identity, Sirajuddin, during a street confrontation. This emphasizes the hypocritical ways men and women are judged based on the definitions of nationalist identity. These definitions of identity is particularly linked with the social standing of real manhood. The intertwining nature of embodied masculinity with social metaphors like economic status, nationalist standing, etc. marginalizes both Sudhamoy and Suronjon.

Conundrums about masculinity thus arise from these clashes between "cultural epistemologies" (Haywood et al. 2018, 4) of understanding masculinity in its performative nature. This facet is overlooked in the mainstream discourse of gender-based violence against men within the space of communal violence. Thus, this article contends that masculinity is more than an inherent quality linked only to the biological symbols. However, the meaning to biological metaphors is influenced by cultural fabrication and sustained by social metaphors and peer recognition.

Masculinity Shifts and Social Class Dynamics in Minority Community

Masculinity has undergone several cultural re-productions and institutional metaphors attached to its physiological form. Susan Bordo in her seminal work *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* states: "Images of masculinity that will do double (or triple or quadruple) duty with a variety of consumers, straight and gay, male and female, are not difficult to create in a culture like ours, in which the muscular male body has a long and glorious aesthetic history" (Bordo 1999, 181).

This shift in masculinity unfolded as a religious-inspired criminality within Bangladesh's 1993 riots as portrayed in *Lajja*. This shift further threatens the minority community, as embodied within the colonial lens, and subjugates the male body. Sudhamoy, in *Lajja*, embodies this ghost of masculine metaphors, especially the spirit of nationalism. His commitment to the nation sets him apart from the wider minority community.

In the novel, with escalating tension in Bangladesh, some Hindus sought refuge in India but later returned, an act which Sudhamoy condemned. His frustration and condemnation reflect his understanding of masculinity: "When the war broke out in the country, Sudhamoy would often say while talking to them, "You fled to India like emasculated men. Once the country was liberated you came back like heroes. And now, whenever there is a spot of trouble, you say you'll go away to India. A cowardly bunch, that's what you are" (Nasrin 2014, 27).

His reaction underscores the deep-seated valuation of being a man and its alignment with institutionalized masculine ideals, tied with a sense of nationalism and glorification of violence. However, his lack of resources to challenge the situation leaves him internally struggling, resulting in a perceived failure to achieve masculine respectability. This tension underscores the fragmentation of identity that often arises at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and social class. These intersections are like puzzle pieces representing varied layers of identity. The challenge is, however, to find a cohesive link between these intersections, such as race, ethnicity, social class, and religious background, to create a normative image of masculinity. It is a labyrinth of internal and external struggle to align with the hegemonic narrative of manhood and masculinity within the socio-political strife in Bangladesh.

Socio-Political Dynamics Subjugates Subaltern Masculinity

In one of her recent interviews with Goutam Karmakar, Susan Bordo states, "Images of the body are 'never just pictures' … they carry fantasized solutions to our anxieties and insecurities...the culturally successful image … carries values and qualities that 'hit a nerve' that is already exposed…about how to become what the dominant culture admires—and/or how to escape the pain caused by that culture" (Karmakar 2020, 6-7).

These images of the body form a tapestry to construct an identity intertwined with social metaphors of manhood. Moreover, this identity negotiation is further complicated by social clashes, like the riots of 1993 in Bangladesh. This creates a state of subalternity for men like Sudhamoy and Suranjon who are subjugated based on their socio-economic standing and social class embedded with racial and ethnic backgrounds. This negotiation is further complicated when men are faced with intersectional discrimination or oppression for following their ethnic heritage through sexual harassment.

Sudhamoy's personality shifts drastically after he faces street sexual harassment and forced imprisonment in a Pakistani military camp where he is tortured as he fails to align with the structural markers of dominant masculinity. While returning from his friend's house, he falls into the clutches of the Pakistani army and they ask him, "What is your name?" (Nasrin 2014, 14). He is startled and afraid to give away his Hindu identity and names himself "Sirajuddin Hussain" (Nasrin 2014, 14), which was the straw that breaks his connection with his nation. Then, the troop orders him: "Take off your lungi … and they pulled it off him" (Nasrin 2014, 14). After this incident, Sudhamoy chooses to always wear pajamas (pants-like loose cotton trousers). This signifies the dynamic relation between how the male body and clothing are intertwined with social bio-metaphors which shifts with the change in socio-

political dynamics. Therefore, these socio-political dynamics traps men from minority communities within the restrictive constructs of manhood. This reference highlights how the internal struggle of Sudhamoy to acknowledge his subaltern position by changing his Hindu name forces him to feel psychologically mutilated. It uproots him from his cultural grounding and changes his association with masculinity and the male body.

Mrinalini Sinha, in her *Colonial Masculinity* (1995) highlights the image of effeminacy imposed on Bengali men due to their physicality against the lens of imperial masculinity. This, as discussed earlier, adds to the shifting political dynamics of Bangladesh and the masculine identity struggles of the minority community in Nasrin's *Lajja*. It represents that, even though the biology of gender identity is determined at birth, becoming one's gender is culturally influenced. As bell hooks quotes Connell from In *Gender Politics of Men* (1997) that when men "who oppose patriarchy remains at odds with the world…. They are likely to be met with derision from many other men…" (as cited in hooks 2004, 73). This derision isolates, imprisons, and confines men within the spaces of subalternity. As Sudhamoy observes, this change was with his nationalist views, which were attached to the perception of manhood: "He was quick to join gatherings against Pakistani rulers, getting there before anyone else. He had never felt restrained by home and family. Where had that courage gone!" (Nasrin 2014, 16).

This passage outlines how men from minority communities within a conflict situation are burdened with the sense of protecting their families without realizing their state of vulnerability, often due to age and loss of economic standing. This loss of agency further point out the drifting state of the father-son relations, as they both suffer from gendered emotional mutilation.

Suronjon (son) viewed Sudhamoy (father), as a "guide and teacher of the family. Suronjon thought his father was a Superman-like person" (Nasrin 2014, 93). However, in 1993 Bangladesh did not have liveable condition for liberals like Sudhamoy. Suronjon, who mirrored the youthful passion of his father, stood in grief with his father's lack of nationalist passion and his mother's wish to seek refuge in India. He felt alienated within his own family and among friends, the majority of whom were Muslims, and he moved to nothingness. In the failure to fulfill the duties of being a man, he felt ashamed and insulted. Thus, masculinity pervades several cultural epistemologies and becomes essential for the politics of (un)intelligibility and subjugating subaltern men.

Identity Struggles: Masculinity, Social Class, and Gender Violence Realities

Susan Bordo, in the chapter "Hard and Soft" in *The Male Body* (1999), quotes French feminist Luce Irigaray, "This sex which is not one" (Bordo 1999, 36) to understand the relationship between women's biology and their social placement. However, Bordo follows this argument by analyzing the social placement of the male body and their identity negotiations. Bordo (1999)argues that the cultural significance of potency and genitals weighs down a man's understanding of their manhood, which formulates their identity.

This "cultural equation of penis" (Bordo 1999, 37) is questioned in *Lajja* when the men of minority communities face gendered violence within a conflict situation. Sudhamoy observes this by stating it was "about torturing the weak whenever possible" (Nasrin 2014, 26). This was highlighted by the assault of Sudhamoy's female student, where she asked to remove her sari in the middle of the street, however, the fact that shocked Sudhamoy was, that, this student was Muslim, her weakness was her female identityThere is a consistent correlation between biology and culture which aids in the interpretation of the male body. The symbolic constructs feed into human history, which influences the flesh and body. This is further elevated by the interlinking ideologies of race and ethnicity, which form the struggles of subaltern identity. As the novel progresses Nasrin specifies how the minority men were subjected to sexual violence within Pakistani army camps in 1993: "How many days was it before Sudhamoy returned from the camp? Seven days... Sudhamoy felt that his chest and tongue were bone dry all the time. He would moan for water and the soldiers would laugh horribly" (Nasrin 2014, 94).

The tortures bestowed on Sudhamoy and other prisoners from the minority communities highlight a shift in power dynamics which alters the metaphors of masculinity and pushes the minority towards subaltern masculinity. "Sexual

terrorism" (as cited in Kimmel 2011, 137), as termed by legal theorist Carol Sheffield, is a constant reminder for the minority of their vulnerability. Within the space of politicized religious warfare, *forced imprisonment* is one of the greatest weapons. A similar instance of that can be seen in the era of the Holocaust, where Jews were imprisoned in torturous concentration camps under harsh conditions. In the novel, during their imprisonment, many Hindus were forcefully asked to recite the Kalma and convert to Islam: "One day, after Sudhamoy had steadfastly refused to become a Muslim, they lifted his lungi and said that since he hadn't agreed to become a Muslim, they were going to circumcise him—they sliced off his penis. Then they held up his organ and laughed" (Nasrin 2014, 95).

This permanent physical scar left him with mutilated genitals and impotence while acting as a reminder of his subaltern position. Beyond the physical trauma, this fractured his spirit of nationalism and associated sense of masculinity as he also suffered a loss of agency and identity. The general dissociation of masculinity and victimization happens in both the private and public spheres. Sandesh Sivakumaran (2007) points out, "A man should have been able to prevent himself from being attacked" (255) and be able to cope like a man. Amidst the armed conflict, as portrayed in the novel, and forced imprisonment, these masculine stereotypes are more intensely attached to the self-perception of manhood, which is meant to shatter the centerpiece of the household. Therefore, it alters the structural metaphors of masculinity associated with the "protector" image of men. This image of minority men's loss of identity relates to Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), "where the black boy (protagonist) keeps on claiming that he is Kunta Kinte yet he is being whipped and forced to be the man named Toby" (as cited in Nasrin 2014, 95).

Impact of Gendered Violence on Subaltern Men and Social Class Dynamics

Gendered violence to a man or boy scars his physiology and mental and social welfare. This violence ranges from "bruises, lacerations, stabbings and fractures, genital pain during urination, anal and testicular pain, and sexual dysfunction including impotence" (Solangon and Patel 2012, 421). However, castration is often viewed as mutilation and rape as torture is seen as watered down interpretation of the male-on-male atrocities, which hinders with the identification of male victims of armed conflicts. Gottschall describes this type of violence as a "coherent, coordinated, logical and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare" (Gottschall 2004, 131).

The physical mutilation of men by dominant opposition serves as the greatest biological weapon. It is used to destabilize and emasculate the men from minority communities. The generational gap in response to the conflict in the novel is embodied through Sudhamoy, clinging to the fractured sense of nationalism. Suronjon represents the lost generation: "Suronjon's air of indifference dampened Sudhamoy's enthusiasm" (Nasrin 2014, 90). Suronjon's proclamation of his liberalism bridges his familial responsibilities and cultural conflicts: "He was aware that he was not taking on the responsibilities required of him. He should have taken everyone in the family to hide somewhere but he had not done that. Perhaps he did not feel like doing it" (Nasrin 2014, 19). In some societies where masculinity is associated with being powerful and being head of the family, some men who feel they have failed to live up to this role, such as unemployed men who are unable to provide for their families, may feel that sexual violence, with its connotations of force and power, allows them to regain some control over their masculinity.

Suronjon's inability to protect his family, especially after his sister Maya is kidnapped and abused, makes him feel alienated and enraged, which leads him to question his manhood. bell hooks observes in her work *The Will to Change* that "rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure" (hooks 2004, 73). In an attempt to mask his feelings of failure and regain control, Suronjon assaults Shamina, a Muslim prostitute. He visualizes her as a symbol of the Muslim community whom he blames for his pain: "Suronjon did not look at Shamima as a whore-he saw her as a Muslim woman. He was extremely keen on raping a Muslim woman…. She was a streetwalker and yet she was yelping in pain- this made Suronjon very happy" (Nasrin 2014, 294).

This episode marks a turning point in Suronjon's life, triggering a shift in his psychological space and prompting a redefinition of his identity: "Suronjon was calm. He felt unburdened. He had been able to do something with the de-

sire that had gnawed at him all day" (Nasrin 2014, 295). His sense of unburdening after committing such a heinous crime underlines the struggle and failure to embody the patriarchal role of family protector, which profoundly impacts his connection to his sense of self.

Nasrin's *Lajja*, echoes the plight of Hindu and other minority families while highlighting how sexual abuse on men and women of minority communities is weaponized to emasculate men by dominant masculinity. This abuse creates the category of *othering*, which causes psycho-social implications for men, implications that are often eliminated from the gendered violence discourse.

Chris Dolan, in *Into the Mainstream* (2014), reports on the psycho-social and familial trauma of male victims of sexual abuse through documented cases of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For instance, one of the interviewees/victims of sexual violations reports how his wife left him, asserting that a man who cannot protect himself cannot protect her. This shows how trauma, masculinity, and gendered violence are imbued with social expectations. Carpenter also observes, "But there has been very little specific effort to recognize the trauma of such atrocity for the male relatives of the victims" (Carpenter 2006, 96), calling attention to the neglected emotional toll on male survivors in communal conflict.

The underrepresentation of diverse portrayals of male identities based on varied intersections such as race, ethnicity, and social class in media, literature, and cultural narratives exacerbates the marginalization of male victims. This invisibility perpetuates cultural stereotypes that narrow the spectrum of acceptable masculinities. This void in the narrative sustains systematic oppression and gender hierarchies, which denies visibility and legitimacy to minority masculinities.

The impact of this skewed representation extends beyond mere storytelling; it shapes societal perceptions and moulds the collective consciousness. The emerging narratives often adhere to stereotypical moulds, reinforcing preconceived notions about how individuals at the intersection should embody masculinity. Nasrin's *Lajja* reflects Sudhamoy's struggles and trauma, symbolizing the older generation of men from the minority community. It focuses on the psycho-social trauma that incubates subaltern identity within the familiar socio-economic strata. It captures the systematic socio-economic inequalities creating the space of subaltern masculinity: "Sudhamoy thought to himself that he had not become an associate professor simply because his name was Sudhamoy Datta. If only he had been Muhammad Ali or Salimullah Chowdhury! Even in trade and business, very rarely did a Hindu institution get a license if there was no Muslim partner involved" (Nasrin 2014, 30).

The paper highlights intersectional perspectives of how male bodies of minority communities are violated. This relates to the reconstruction of their identity within their social placement. Even though Masculinity Studies are evolving and addressing intersections they pay negligible attention to the phenomenon of the racialization of masculinities and the pervasiveness of hegemonic whiteness (Wong and Wang 2022). The same can be said about gender-based-violence male survivors in conflict areas as observed through works ofDolan 2014; UNHRC 2017-18, ,which exposes the deep embedding of the definitions of victimhood and masculinity which creates the space of subalter identities for the male survivors of GBV.

Conclusion

The patriarchal ideals of *protector, breadwinner, and provider of the family* exacerbate dominant masculinity to marginalize alternative expressions of masculinity and silence their voices. Failing to stand up to those standards alters the male identity triggering subaltern male identity within social power structures. This paper highlights how socio-political shifts echo through the varied social standards of violations, particularly for male victims whose struggles are often overlooked. Kimmel observes this development of feminism and gender equality: "Four decades of feminism has been accompanied by four decades of increasingly shrill denunciations of feminists…. Gender Equality, we've been told, is really for women … but underneath this is the idea that gender equality is bad for men" (Kimmel 2010, 3).

These social dynamics reveal the tension between evolving gender norms and restrictive narratives of dominant masculinity. This article explores the male characters in *Lajja* who are from the Hindu minority community, Suronjon, and Sudhamoy, depicting their constrained emotional range,dominated by despair, failure, and anxiety whichmanifests as anger as they fail to reclaim individual agency. The paper critiques the homogenized portrayal of masculinity, advocating for diverse narratives that challenge stereotypes and explore varied masculine expressions across race, ethnicity, and social class.

Often in conflict scenarios, sexual violence involving rape and physical mutilation is used as a biological weapon against male members of the marginalized community, which psychologically impacts the victims, highlighting the complexities of gendered subjectivity. This violence is also heightened during socio-political shifts that disrupt power dynamics, deepen male alienation, and reinforces the patriarchal ideal man. These further results in a loss of agency as shown in *Lajja:* "Sudhamoy sat up suddenly as he heard the sounds of the procession. Suronjon clenched his jaws… Should he not be angry too?" (Nasrin 2014, 32).

Religious discrimination in Bangladesh, rooted in colonialism and the Partition, continues to marginalize minorities post-independence. Events like the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition in India incited widespread rioting in Bangladesh, targeting Hindu shops, and businesses, and inflicting gendered violence. Nasrin's *Lajja* vividly portrays these atrocities, emphasizing the intersections of gendered violence and social class. It examines masculinities through the lens of intersecting racial, ethnic, and class identities, shedding light on how these dynamics shape the perpetuation or resistance to gendered violence. Thus, the novel adds to the ongoing discourse of male victimhood in conflict areas, while addressing the intersectional perspectives attached to the South Asian male identities which often create subaltern masculinity.

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