

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Taslima Nasrin**

**- poems -**

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## Taslima Nasrin (25 August 1962 -)

Taslima Nasrin (Bengali: তাসলিমা নাসরিন, Arabic: تاسليما ناسرين, Hindi: तसलिमा नसरिन, Toslima Nasrin) is a Bangladeshi author and former physician who has been living in exile since 1994. From a modest literary profile in the late 1980s, she rose to global fame by the end of the 20th century owing to her feminist views and her criticism of Islam in particular and of religion in general.

Since fleeing Bangladesh in 1994 she has lived in many countries, and currently (June 2011) lives in New Delhi. She works to build support for secular humanism, freedom of thought, equality for women, and human rights by publishing, lecturing, and campaigning. Her name, Taslima Nasrin, is also spelled Taslīma Nasreen.

### Early Career

She was born to Rajab Ali and Idul Ara in the town of Mymensingh in 1962. Her father was a physician, and she followed in his footsteps. Her mother was a devout Muslim. After high school in 1976 (SSC) and higher secondary studies in college (HSC) in 1978, she studied medicine at the Mymensingh Medical College an affiliated medical college of the University of Dhaka and graduated in 1984 with an MBBS degree;[5] in college, she showed a propensity for poetry by writing as well as editing a poetry journal. After graduation, she practiced gynaecology at a family planning clinic in Mymensingh, "where she routinely examined young girls who had been raped," and heard women in the delivery room cry out in despair if their baby was a girl. She was reassigned in 1990 to work in Dhaka. Born into a Muslim family she became an atheist over time. In course of writing she took a feminist approach.

In 1982 she fell in love with poet Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah and fled home to marry him; they divorced in 1986. Later she married journalist and editor Nayeemul Islam Khan; they divorced in 1991. In 1991 she married Minar Mahmood, editor of the now defunct weekly Bichinta, they divorced in 1992.

### Literary Career Until 'Lajja'

Early in her literary career, she wrote mainly poetry, and published half a dozen collections of poetry between 1982 and 1993, often with female oppression as a theme, and often containing very graphic language. She started publishing prose in the early 1990s, and produced three collections of essays and four novels before the publication of her 1993 novel Lajja (Bengali: লজ্জা Lôjja), or Shame, in which a Hindu family is persecuted

by Muslims. This publication changed her life and career dramatically.

Following the publication of *Lajja*, Nasrin suffered a number of physical and other attacks. She had written against Islamic philosophy, angering many Muslims of Bangladesh, who called for a ban on her novel. In October 1993, an Islamic fundamentalist group called the Council of Islamic Soldiers offered a bounty for her death. In May 1994 she was interviewed by the Kolkata edition of *The Statesman*, which quoted her as calling for a revision of the Quran; she claims she only called for revision of the Sharia, the Islamic religious law. In August 1994 she was brought up on "charges of making inflammatory statements," and faced death threats from Islamic fundamentalists and religious Muslims. A major religious organization claims her to be a "paid agent" of anti-Islamists. A hundred thousand demonstrators called her "an apostate appointed by imperial forces to vilify Islam"; a "militant faction threatened to set loose thousands of poisonous snakes in the capital unless she was executed." After spending two months in hiding, at the end of 1994 she escaped to Sweden, consequently ceasing her medicine practice and becoming a full-time writer and activist.

#### Life in Exile

After fleeing Bangladesh in 1994, Nasrin spent the next ten years in exile in the West. She returned to the east and relocated to Kolkata, India, in 2004, where she lived until 2007. After renewed unrest broke out, and after spending several months in hiding, Nasrin left for the West again in 2008.

#### Exile in the West (1994-2004)

Leaving Bangladesh towards the end of 1994, Nasrin lived in exile in Western Europe and North America for ten years. Her Bangladeshi passport had been revoked; she was granted citizenship by the Swedish government and took refuge in Germany. She even had to wait for six years (1994–1999) to get a visa to visit India, and never got a Bangladeshi passport to return to the country when her mother, and later her father, were on their death beds.

In March 2000, she visited Mumbai to promote a translation of her novel *Shodh* (translated by Marathi author Ashok Shahane, the book was called *Phitam Phat*). Secular groups seized upon the occasion to celebrate freedom of expression, while "Muslim fundamentalist groups...threatened to burn her alive."

#### Life in Kolkata (2004-2007)

In 2004, she was granted a renewable temporary residential permit by India and moved to Kolkata in the state of West Bengal, which shares a common heritage and language with Bangladesh; in an interview in 2007, after she had been forced to flee, she called Kolkata her home. The government of India extended her visa to stay in the country on a periodic basis, though it refused to grant her Indian citizenship. While living in Kolkata, Nasrin regularly contributed to Indian newspapers and magazines, including *Anandabazar Patrika* and *Desh*, and, for some time, wrote a weekly column in the Bengali version of *The Statesman*. Again her anti-Islam comments met with opposition from religious fundamentalists: in 2006, Syed Noorur Rehaman Barkati, the imam of Kolkata's Tipu Sultan Mosque, admitted offering money to anyone who "blackened [that is, publicly humiliated] Ms Nasreen's face." Even abroad she caused controversy: in 2005, she tried to read an anti-war poem titled "America" to a large Bengali crowd at the North American Bengali Conference at Madison Square Garden in New York City, and was booed off the stage. Back in India, the "All India Muslim Personal Board (Jadeed)" offered 500,000 rupees for her beheading in March 2007. The group's president, Tauqir Raza Khan, said the only way the bounty would be lifted was if Nasrin "apologises, burns her books and leaves."

#### Expulsion from Kolkata

On August 9, 2007, Nasrin was in Hyderabad to present the Telugu translation of one of her novels, *Shodh*, when she was attacked by a mob of

violent intruders, led by legislators from the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, a Muslim political party. A week later, on August 17, Muslim leaders in Kolkata revived an old fatwa against her, urging her to leave the country and offering an unlimited amount of money to anybody who would kill her. On November 21, Kolkata witnessed a violent protest against Nasrin by Muslims. A protest organized by the militant Islamist "All India Minority Forum" caused chaos in the city and forced the army's deployment to restore order. After the riots, Nasrin was forced to move from Kolkata, her "adopted city," to Jaipur, and to New Delhi the following day.

#### House Arrest in New Delhi

The government of India kept Nasrin in an undisclosed location in New Delhi, effectively under house arrest, for more than seven months. In January 2008, she was selected for the Simone de Beauvoir award in recognition of her writing on women's rights, but declined to go to Paris to receive the award, fearing that she would not be allowed to re-enter India. She explained that "I don't want to leave India at this stage and would rather fight for my freedom here," but she had to be hospitalized for three days with several complaints. The house arrest quickly acquired an international dimension: in a letter to London-based human rights organisation Amnesty International, India's former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey urged the organization to pressure the Indian government so Nasrin could safely return to Kolkata.

From New Delhi, Nasrin commented: "I'm writing a lot, but not about Islam, It's not my subject now. This is about politics. In the last three months I have been put under severe pressure to leave [West] Bengal by the police." In an email interview from the undisclosed safehouse, Nasrin talked about the stress caused by "this unendurable loneliness, this uncertainty and this deathly silence." She canceled the publication of the sixth part of her autobiography *Nei Kichu Nei* ("No Entity"), and—under pressure—deleted some passages from *Dwikhondito*, the controversial book that was the boost for the riots in Kolkata. She was forced to leave India on March 19, 2008.

#### Current Situation (2011)

Nasrin moved to Sweden in 2008 and later worked as a research scholar at New York University. Since, as she claims, "her soul lived in India," she also pledged her body to that country, by awarding it for posthumous medical use to Gana Darpan, a Kolkata-based NGO, in 2005. She eventually returned to India, but was forced to stay in New Delhi as the West Bengal government refused to permit her entry. Recently she got into another controversy throwing comments to Salman Rushdie on a social networking site.

#### Literary Works

Nasrin started writing poetry when she was thirteen. While still at college in Mymensingh, she published and edited a literary magazine, *SeNjuti* ("Light in the dark"), from 1978 to 1983. She published her first collection of poems in 1986. Her second collection, *Nirbashito Bahire Ontore* ("Banished within and without", 1989) was a big success.[citation needed] She succeeded in attracting a wider readership when she started writing columns in late 1980s, and, in the early 1990s, she began writing novels, for which she has won significant acclaim. In all, she has written more than thirty books of poetry, essays, novels, short stories, and memoirs, and her books have been translated into 20 different languages.

Her own experience of sexual abuse during adolescence and her work as a gynaecologist influenced her a great deal in writing about the treatment of women in Islam and against religion in general.. Her writing is characterized by two connected elements: her struggle with the Islam of her native culture, and her feminist philosophy. She cites Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir as influences, and, when pushed to think of one closer to home, Begum Rokeya, who lived during the time of undivided Bengal. Her later poetry also evidences a connection to place, to Bangladesh and India.

## Columns and Essays

In 1989 Nasrin began to contribute to the weekly political magazine *Khaborer Kagoj*, edited by her second husband, Nayeemul Islam Khan, and published from Dhaka. Her feminist views and anti-religion remarks articles succeeded in drawing broad attention, and she shocked the religious and conservative society of Bangladesh by her radical comments and suggestions. Later she collected these columns in a volume titled *Nirbachita Column*, which in 1992 won her first Ananda Purashkar award, a prestigious award for Bengali writers. During her life in Kolkata, she contributed a weekly essay to the Bengali version of *The Statesman*, called *Dainik Statesman*.

## Novels

In 1992 Nasrin produced two novellas which failed to draw attention.

Her breakthrough novel *Lajja* (Shame) was published in 1993, and attracted wide attention because of its controversial subject matter. It contained the graphic description of a rape of a Hindu woman by a Muslim man. Initially written as a thin documentary, *Lajja* grew into a full-length novel as the author later revised it substantially. In six months' time, it sold 50,000 copies in Bangladesh before being banned by the government that same year.

Her other famous novel is "*French Lover*", published in 2002.

## Autobiography

Her memoirs are renowned for their candidness, which has led to a number of them being banned in Bangladesh and India. *Amar Meyebela* (My Girlhood, 2002), the first volume of her memoir, was banned by the Bangladeshi government in 1999 for "reckless comments" against Islam and the prophet Mohammad. *Utal Hawa* (Wild Wind), the second part of her memoir, was banned by the Bangladesh government in 2002. *Ka* (Speak up), the third part of her memoir, was banned by the Bangladeshi High Court in 2003. Under pressure from Indian Muslim activists, the book, which was published in West Bengal as *Dwikhandita*, was banned there also; some 3,000 copies were seized immediately. The decision to ban the book was criticized by "a host of authors" in West Bengal, but the ban wasn't lifted until 2005. *Sei Sob Ondhokar Din guli* (Those Dark Days), the fourth part of her memoir, was banned by the Bangladesh government in 2004.

She received her second Ananda Purashkar award in 2000, for her memoir *Amar Meyebela* (My Girlhood, published in English in 2002).

## Charitable Activities

Nasrin created the *Edulwara* scholarship in her mother's name to give scholarship (50,000-100,000 taka) to twenty female students of 7th to 10th grade from economically poor families in Mymensingh, Bangladesh.

She started an organisation called *Dharmamukta Manab-bai mancha* ("Humanist organisation free from religion") in Kolkata. The organisation's aim was to enlighten and spread secular education, and to fight for women's rights and a uniform and equal civil code.

## Awards

Taslima has received a number of international awards in recognition of her uncompromising demand for freedom of expression. Awards and Honours given to her include the following:

Ananda literary Award, India, 1992  
Natyasava Award, Bangladesh, 1992  
Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thoughts from the European Parliament, 1994  
Human Rights Award from the Government of France, 1994

Edict of Nantes Prize from France, 1994  
 Kurt Tucholsky Prize, Swedish PEN, Sweden, 1994  
 Hellman-Hammett Grant from Human Rights Watch, USA, 1994  
 Humanist Award from Human-Etisk Forbund, Norway, 1994  
 Feminist of the Year from Feminist Majority Foundation, USA, 1994  
 Honorary Doctorate from Ghent University, Belgium, 1995  
 Scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service, Germany, 1995  
 Monismanien Prize from Uppsala University, Sweden, 1995  
 Distinguished Humanist Award from International Humanist and Ethical Union, Great Britain, 1996  
 Humanist Laureate from International Academy for Humanism, USA, 1996  
 Ananda literary Award, India, 2000  
 Global Leader for Tomorrow, World Economic Forum, 2000  
 Erwin Fischer Award, International League of non-religious and atheists (IBKA), Germany, 2002  
 Freethought Heroine Award, Freedom From Religion Foundation,[67] USA, 2002  
 Fellowship at Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA, 2003  
 UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence, 2004  
 Honorary Doctorate from American University of Paris, 2005  
 Grand Prix International Condorcet-Aron, 2005  
 Sharatchandra literary award, West Bengal, India, 2006  
 Honorary citizenship of Paris, France, 2008  
 Simone de Beauvoir Prize, 2008  
 Fellowship at New York University, USA, 2009  
 Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, USA, 2009  
 Feminist Press award, USA, 2009

#### Works:

##### Poetry

Shikore Bipul Khudha (Hunger in the Roots), 1982  
 Nirbashito Bahire Ontore (Banished Without and Within), 1989  
 Amar Kichu Jay Ashe Ne (I Couldn't Care Less), 1990  
 Atole Ontorin (Captive In the Abyss), 1991  
 Balikar Gollachut (Game of the Girls), 1992  
 Behula Eka Bhashiyechilo Bhela (Behula Floated the Raft Alone), 1993  
 Ay Kosto Jhepe, Jibon Debo Mepe (Pain Come Roaring Down, I'll Measure Out My Life for You), 1994  
 Nirbashito Narir Kobita (Poems From Exile), 1996  
 Jolpodyo (Waterlilies), 2000  
 Khali Khali Lage (Feeling Empty), 2004  
 Kicchukhan Thako (Stay For A While), 2005  
 Bhalobaso? Cchai baso (It's your love! or a heap of trash!), 2007  
 Bondini (Prisoner), 2008

##### Essay Collections

Nirbachito Column (Selected Columns), 1990  
 Jabo na keno? jabo (I will go; why won't I?), 1991  
 Noshto meyer noshto goddo (Fallen prose of a fallen girl), 1992  
 ChoTo choTo dukkho kotha (Tale of trivial sorrows), 1994  
 Narir Kono Desh Nei (Women have no country), 2007

##### Novels

Oporpokkho (The Opponent), 1992.  
 Shodh, 1992. ISBN 978-8188575053. Trans. in English as Getting Even.  
 Nimontron (Invitation), 1993.  
 Phera (Return), 1993.  
 Lajja, 1993. ISBN 978-0140240511. Trans. in English as Shame.  
 Bhromor Koio Gia (Tell Him The Secret), 1994.  
 Forashi Premik (French Lover), 2002.  
 Shorom (Shame Again), 2009.

### Short Stories

Dukkhoboty meye (Sad girls), 1994  
Minu, 2007

### Autobiography

Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood), 1999  
Utal Hawa (Wild Wind), 2002  
Ka (Speak Up), 2003; published in West Bengal as Dwikhondito (Split-up in Two), 2003  
Sei Sob Andhokar (Those Dark Days), 2004  
Ami Bhalo Nei, Tumi Bhalo Theko Priyo Desh ("I am not okay, but you stay well my beloved homeland"), 2006.  
Nei, Kichu Nei ( Nothing is there), 2010  
Nirbasan ( Exile),

## A Letter To My Mother

How are you  
Many days, many thousand of days I don't see you ma,  
Many thousand of days I don't hear your voice,  
Many thousand of days I don't feel your touch.

You were here, but never knew you were hear.,  
As if you were made to be here for as long as I am  
You filled my needs like a magician  
When I got hungry., when I was thirsty,  
When I wanted to play, when my heart opened, when my heart closed,  
You knew before I knew.

You brought forth all my wishes  
You remained behind in the shadows.  
I took all the pleasures for myself by having u out of my sight, out of my mind  
No one gave you anything, no one loved you, not even me.

I never considered you as human  
Were you, were u a human being?  
You were a slave for my happiness  
Like a magician you gave anything and everything whatever I wanted  
Near my hands, near my feet, near my mouth,

You gave even before I wanted  
You never received any single smile.  
You were behind, u were out of the party,  
You were under a tree, alone in the dark.

Were you at all a human being?

You were nothing but a pawn.  
Not a human being.  
You were the cleaner, the cook, the one behind the smoke  
You alone bore all your pain,  
You cried alone with your misery  
No one was there for u, no one was there to hold you, not even me.

You cured other's diseases like a magician,  
No one cured you, not even me.

I killed you before you knew that I was killing you..  
You are not here,  
Suddenly I feel through my spine inside my veins, that you are not here.  
You are not anymore.  
When you were here, I did not know that you were here  
When you were here, I never wanted to know how you were.

My pride is barred under the stone of your intolerable absence  
I want to bear the same pain as u once bored  
I cant, I could not,  
How is it possible?



I am not a kind like you, I am not a human like you.

Taslima Nasrin

## **A Query**

When I die, leave my corpse there.  
There where they vivisect dead bodies,  
In the mortuary of the Medical College.  
For I've vowed to donate my mortal frame there.  
So leave me after death at Kolkata.  
The city has willed to disown me in life,  
Will she accept me after death?

[Translated by Sujal Bhattacharya]

Taslima Nasrin

## Acquaintance

As much as I had thought of him to be a male,  
That much he is not;  
Half-neutered he is,  
Half a male.

A life goes by,  
And you may sit and lie with a man,  
    but how much can you come to know a real man?  
He whom I so long thought  
I knew -  
He whom I know is nothing like that,  
In fact, he's the one I most don't know.

As much as I had thought him to be man,  
That much he is not:  
Half-beast he is,  
Half a man.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Aggression**

Human nature is such  
That if you sit, they'll say, 'No, don't sit.'  
If you stand, 'What's the matter? Walk!  
And if you walk, 'Shame on you, sit down.!

If you so much as lie down, they'll order, 'Get up.'  
If you don't lie down, no respite, ' Lie down.'

I'm wasting my days getting up and sitting down.  
If I'm dying right now, they speak up, 'Live.'  
If they see me living, who knows when  
they'll say, 'Shame on you. Die!'

In fear, I secretly go on living.

Taslima Nasrin

**Amar Shomoy**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Another Life**

Women spend the afternoon squatting on the porch,  
picking lice from each other's hair.  
They spend the evening feeding the little ones,  
lulling them to sleep in the glow of the bottle lamp.  
The rest of the night  
they offer their back to be slapped and kicked by the men of the house  
or sprawl half-naked on the hard wooden cot.  
Crows and women greet the dawn together,  
the women blowing into the oven to start the fire,  
tapping on the back of the winnowing tray with five fingers  
and, with two, picking out the stones.  
Half their lives women pick stones from the rice.  
All their lives stones pile up in their hearts,  
no one there to touch them even with two fingers.

Taslima Nasrin

## At The Back Of Progress

The fellow who sits in the air-conditioned office  
is the one who in his youth raped  
a dozen or so young girls,  
and, at cocktail parties, is secretly stricken with lust,  
fastening his eyes on lovelies' bellybuttons.

In five-star hotels,  
he tries out his different sexual tastes  
with a variety of women,  
then returns home and beats his wife  
because of an over-ironed handkerchief or shirt collar.

In his office Mr. Big puffs on a cigarette,  
shuffles through files,  
rings for his employee  
shouts,  
demands tea,  
drinks,  
and returns to writing people's character references.

His employee speaks in such a low voice  
that no one would ever suspect  
how, at home, he also raises his voice,  
is vile to his family  
but with his buddies on the porch or at a movie  
indulges in loud harangues on politics,  
art, literature, and how some female -  
his mother, grandmother, or great-grandmother -  
committed suicide.

Bidding goodbye to his buddies,  
he returns home,  
beats his wife  
over a bar of soap  
or the baby's pneumonia.

Next day, at work, he pleasantly brings the tea,  
keeps the lighter in his pocket,  
receives a tip of a couple of taka,  
and tells no one that he divorced his first wife for her sterility,  
his second for giving birth to a daughter,  
his third for not bringing a sufficient dowry.  
Now, with wife number four, he again has someone:  
To beat over a green chili or a handful of rice.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Bhul Preme Kete Gelo Tirish Boshonto**

Taslima Nasrin



## Border

I'm going to move ahead.  
Behind me my whole family is calling,  
My child is pulling my sari-end,  
My husband stands blocking the door,  
    But I will go.  
There's nothing ahead but a river.  
    I will cross.  
I know how to swim,  
    but they won't let me swim, won't let me cross.

There's nothing on the other side of the river  
    but a vast expanse of fields,  
But I'll touch this emptiness once  
    and run against the wind, whose whooshing sound  
    makes me want to dance.  
I'll dance someday  
    and then return.

I've not played keep-away for years  
    as I did in childhood.  
I'll raise a great commotion playing keep-away someday  
    and then return.

For years I haven't cried with my head  
    in the lap of solitude.  
I'll cry to my heart's content someday  
    and then return.

There's nothing ahead but a river,  
    and I know how to swim.  
Why shouldn't I go?

I'll go.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Boro Voye Gopone Gopone Bachi**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Byastota**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Can't I Have A Homeland To Call My Own?**

Am I so dangerous a criminal, so vicious an enemy of humanity,  
Such a traitor to my country that I can't have a homeland to call my own?  
So that my land will snatch away from the rest of my life my homeland?  
Blindly from the northern to the southern hemisphere,  
Through mountains and oceans and rows and rows of trees,  
Blindly in the heavens, in the moon, in the mists and in sunshine,  
Blindly groping through grass and creepers and shrubs, earth and mankind, I have  
gone  
Searching for my homeland.  
Once I had exhausted the world, I touched the shores  
Of my homeland to exhaust my span of life,  
Only to have the sense of security of an utterly exhausted thirsty soul  
Brutally uprooted, and you throw away the little water cupped in my hand,  
And sentence me to death, what name can I have for you, land?  
You stand on my chest like an enormous mountain,  
You stamp on my throat with your legs in boots,  
You have gouged out my eyes,  
You have drawn my tongue out and snapped it into pieces,  
You have lashed and bloodied my body, broken both my legs,  
You have pulverized my toes, prized open my skull to squash my brain,  
You have arrested me, so that I die,  
Yet I call you my homeland, call you with infinite love.  
I've uttered a few home truths, hence I am a traitor to my homeland.  
I'm a traitor because you've chosen to walk shoulder to shoulder with liars in  
procession.  
You've warned me with raised fingers to give a damn to humanity,  
And whatever else I may have or not, I can't have a homeland to call my own.  
My land, you dug into my heart and hacked out of my life my own homeland.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandapadahya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## **CCU To CCU (Coronary Care Unit To Calcutta)**

Away from home,  
Away from my dear cat, my books and papers, my friends,  
Away from my life,  
With my face and head covered in a quilt stinking of uncertainty,  
Lying for days on end  
Lying one knows not where,  
With the heart gnawed and clawed viciously.  
Then when the heart stops, the inevitable CCU,  
To draw life somehow back from the edge,  
Back to throbbing, the heart would like to return, the sick body seeks home,  
To return to the cat, to friends, to the cherished touch.  
The mind journeys from CCU to CCU...!  
Who cares to listen to the heart!  
Picked up from the CCU, she is told,  
In a voice severely sombre, that shakes you to the core,  
Go to some other country, leave this land.  
Where can I go? I've no other place to go,  
When I die, bury me in this soil,  
You can then tear up the soil to find my roots.  
Who cares to look into anything?  
Who cares to be miserable at a human being washed away in her own tears screaming  
for help?  
From the CCU into exile,  
They flung me once again like dirt into darkness,  
They had washed their hands clean, the distinguished authorities,  
I stood before them, with bowed head, and folded hands.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandapadahya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## Character

You're a girl

and you'd better not forget  
that when you cross the threshold of your house  
men will look askance at you.

When you keep on walking down the lane  
men will follow you and whistle.

When you cross the lane and step onto the main road  
men will revile you, call you a loose woman.

If you've no character  
you'll turn back,  
and if you have  
you'll keep on going  
as you're going now.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Dikhondito**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Dukhoboti Ma**

Taslima Nasrin



## **Eve, Oh Eve**

Why wouldn't Eve have eaten of the fruit?  
Didn't she have a hand to reach out with,  
Fingers with which to make a fist?  
Didn't Eve have a stomach for feeling hunger,  
A tongue for feeling thirst,  
A heart with which to love?

Well, then, why wouldn't Eve have eaten of the fruit?  
Why would she merely have suppressed her wishes,  
Regulated her steps,  
Subdued her thirst?  
Why would she have been so compelled  
To keep Adam moving around in the Garden of Eden all their lives?

Because Eve did eat of the fruit,  
There is sky and earth.  
Because she has eaten,

There are moon, sun, rivers, seas,

Because she has eaten, trees, plans and vines.

because Eve has eaten of the fruit

there is joy, because she has eaten there is joy.

joy, joy-

Eating of the fruit, Eve made a heaven of the earth.

Eve, if you get hold of the fruit

don't ever refrain from eating.

Taslina Nasrin

## **For Some Years Now**

For some years now, I have been standing quite close to death, almost face to face,  
Standing dumb before my mother, my father, some dear people,  
For some years now.  
For some years now I do not know exactly whether I'm dead or alive,  
For some years now the distinction between living and death  
Has gone on reducing till it's a thread now  
Waving in emptiness.  
For some years now the being that inhabits me within and without  
Has been a horrible, dumb creature,  
The last leaf long gone from its tree,  
Spring gone forever from its life.  
If I die tonight, don't speak a word,  
Only bury an epitaph under a shiuli tree somewhere,  
An epitaph I've written over some years now,  
An epitaph neatly written in white on a white sheet.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandopadhyaya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## Freedom

Let all of you together find a fault with me,  
at least a fault you all jointly work out,  
or else, a harm shall befall you.

Let you all combine speak out why you've sent me in exile.

Say: Taslima, you're at the root of a pestilence, infant deaths  
or you've committed as atrocious a crime as rape or genocide;

Say something like this, at least two or three of the stigmas to substantiate my  
banishment.

Until you detect a suitable blemish in me,  
until you make me stand in the witness box,  
to raise your accusing fingers in spiteful wrath at your black sheep,  
how can you pardon yourselves?

Had you been able to say where I'm wrong,  
the pangs of banishment wouldn't have engulfed me so harrowingly.

I'm eager to see you detect my wrong,  
so that I can embrace you as my well-wishers.

Name my fault that made you ostracize me,  
specify at least a loophole in my character.

By apportioning a blame on me,  
you ensure your own acquittal.

Why should you let the history frown at you?

Why have you eclipsed the light of civilization,  
by rooming with the darkness of medievalism?

Establish a cause for your action,  
and if you can't,  
then set me free,  
not to save me,  
but for your own survival.

[Translated by Sujal Bhattacharya]

Taslima Nasrin

## **Garment Girls**

The garment girls, walking together,  
look like hundreds of birds flying in Bangladesh's sky.

Garments girls, returning to their slums at midnight,  
are met by street-vagabonds who grab a few takas from the girls,  
pushing their bodies into the girls bodies,  
stealing the night's spoils.

Despite sleepless night, before dawn the girls again walk together,  
men's mouths getting watery when they pass and spit,  
the girls avoiding as many as they can,  
eating nobody's food, wearing nobody's clothes, walking, walking on.

Like blind bullocks, they trudge ahead,  
have-nots dependent upon the haves,  
forbidden to enjoy the sky's rainbows,  
fated to be thrown around, fingered, raped in darkness and fear  
instead of bathing joyfully in the moonlit night.

Like hundreds of Bangladesh flying in the world's sky,  
the garment girls walk on, walk on.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Girl From Switzerland**

At the dinner party everyone  
Held a glass of champagne or  
White wine in their hand.

All in a row, the big guys came up  
To shake my hand and greet me.  
Some came to hear about my experiences,  
How I came out alive  
From the troglodyte's den.  
Some came to get my autograph,  
Some to look at me with wide-eyes admiration,  
Some to kiss, some to offer flowers.

In the midst of all this  
A girl with golden hair came up.  
Not extending her hand.  
Not wanting to hear my sad stories,  
She said she had come  
Just to weep with me for awhile.  
And I felt that the entire Bramhaputra  
Was rising in my eyes, eroding  
The embankment of my heart.

I. from the east,  
and she, from the west,  
had pains that were equally deep.  
I was dark, she a rosy white,  
But our sorrows were equally blue.  
Before we wept we did not have to  
Hear about each others experiences.  
We knew them too well.

Taslina Nasrin

## **Granary**

You are my love's granary,  
I pour out my water-steeped fertility  
unstintingly, to stop does not occur to me.

Suddenly I see you've slipped away,  
I search for you, my heart-usurping boy, then  
find you've fled, there was a ladder in back to step down.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Hand**

Taslima Nasrin

## Happy Marriage

My life, like a sandbar,  
has been taken over by a monster of a man  
who wants my body under his control  
so that, if he wishes,  
he can spit in my face,  
slap me on the cheek,  
pinch my rear;  
so that, if he wishes,  
he can rob me of the clothes,  
take my naked beauty in his grip;  
so that, if he wishes,  
he can chain my feet,  
with no qualms whatsoever whip me,  
chop off my hands, my fingers,  
sprinkle salt in the open wound,  
throw ground-up black pepper in my eyes,  
with a dagger can slash my thigh,  
can string me up and hang me.

His goal: to control my heart  
so that I would love him;  
in my lonely house at night  
sleepless, full of anxiety,  
clutching at the window grille,  
I would wait for him and sob;  
tears rolling down, I would bake homemade bread,  
would drink, as if they were ambrosia,  
the filthy liquids of his polygynous body  
so that, loving him, I would melt like wax,  
not turning my eyes toward any other man.  
I would give proof of my chastity all my life.

So that, loving him,  
on some moonlit night  
I would commit suicide  
in a fit of ecstasy.

Taslima Nasrin



## India

(to Sumit Chakrabarty)

India is not just India, even from before I was born,  
India has been my history.

My history, carved into two by daggers of animosity and hatred, running breathlessly  
towards uncertain possibilities,  
with the terrible crack at the core,

History bloodstained, history turned death.

It is this India that has given me language,

Has enriched me with culture

And powerful dreams.

This India can, if it so desires, snatch

My history away from my life,

My homeland from my dream.

But why should I let it drain me dry only because it so desires?

Hasn't India brought forth those noble souls,

Who place their hands today on my tired shoulders,

On the abandoned shoulders of this helpless, orphaned soul?

These hands, longer than the land, stretched beyond space and time,

Gives me warmly cherished security against all worldly cruelties.

Madanjeet Singh, Mahasweta Devi, Muchukund Dube—they are my homeland today,

Their hearts my true country.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandopadhyaya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## Interned

Think of me, if you're ever interned,  
If your legs are ever chained.  
If ever someone goes away  
Having locked the room in which you are  
From outside, not within, think of me.  
There's nobody anywhere around can hear you,  
Your mouth stuck, your lips stitched tight,  
You want to speak, you can't.  
Or you're speaking, but nobody can hear you,  
Or hearing, but only dismissively,  
Think of me.  
Just as you'd desire so madly that someone opened the door,  
Free you from all your chains and stitches,  
So has I desired too.  
A month passed by, nobody came this way.  
They'd thought who knows what might happen if the door was opened.  
Think of me.  
When it hurts you hard, think that's how I felt too.  
Even if one moves with caution at every step,  
One can still get interned just like that, anyone, even you,  
Then you and I are all the same, with not he least difference,  
Then you are like me, waiting too for a man,  
The darkness closes in, no man comes.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandapadahya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## **Israfiler Jor Hoyese**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Jodi Manush Na Hoy Pari, Pakhi Hoyeo Firbo Ekdin**

Taslima Nasrin

## Live

If you tell the truth, people get angry,  
don't tell the truth anymore, Taslima  
This time is not the time of Gallelio.  
This is twenty first century,  
but society would outcast you if you tell the truth,  
Nations would force you to leave their land,  
The State would put you in prison,  
Torture you,  
Don't tell the truth,.  
Instead, lie.

Say the sun is revolving around the earth,  
Say the moon has its own light, like the sun.  
Say the mountains are nailed to the earth, so that the earth  
does not fall off the empty space.  
Claim the women are made out of the ribs of men,  
Insist one neck-bone of women is crooked,  
Vouch all men and women would suddenly wake up from their graves  
and rise from the ashes in their youthful splendor,  
And that from here, they would go to heaven or hell for eternity

Just lie Taslima.

Say stars, planets and satellites, universe and  
Gravity are thunderous lies. Also say, men never landed on moon. Simply lie.  
If you lie, you would no more be in exile.  
You would have a country of your own, you would get friends.  
Will be free from your chains, you will see light and the sky.  
Nobody will throw you inside the dark, inhuman, dungeon of death,  
So never tell the truth, Taslima,

Live.

Taslina Nasrin

## **Masturbation**

(A woman without man is like a fish without a bicycle.)

A woman can't live without a man?  
Ha, what logic, the logic of a ghost! Bah bah!  
Throw the ball,  
Don't let orchids embrace you at all,  
Don't go to poisonous ant bushes.  
Push yourself into sensuousness.  
You have the bow, you have the arrow.  
Do it girl, masturbate.

Taslina Nasrin

## **Mosque, Temple**

Let the pavilions of religion  
    be ground to bits,  
let the bricks of temples, mosques, guruduaras, churches  
    be burned in blind fire,  
and upon those heaps of destruction  
let lovely flower gardens grow, spreading their fragrance.  
let children's schools and study halls grow.

For the welfare of humanity, now let prayer halls  
be turned into hospitals, orphanages, universities,  
Now let prayer halls become academies of art, fine art centers,  
    scientific research institutes.  
Now let prayer halls be turned to golden rice fields  
    in the radiant dawn,  
Open fields, rivers, restless seas.

From now on, let religion's other name be humanity.

Taslima Nasrin

## Mother's Story

1

My mother's eyes became yellowish, egg-yoke like.  
Her belly swelled out rapidly like an overly full water tank  
ready to burst at any moment.

No longer able to stand up, or sit down, or even move her fingers, she just lay there.  
At the end of her days, she did not look like Mother any more.

Relatives appeared each morning, every evening,  
telling Mother to be prepared,  
telling her to be ready to die on the holy day, Friday,  
uttering la ilaha illallah, Allah Is One!

They warned her not to disappoint the two angels--

Munkar and Nakir.

The relatives wanted to make certain that the room  
and yard would be clean  
that the perfume surma and the blue eye shadow atar  
would be present when Death would finally arrive.

The disease had nearly devoured her entire body;  
it had stolen her last remaining strength;  
it had made her eyes bulge from their sockets,  
it had dried her tongue,  
it had sucked the air from her lungs.

As she struggled to breathe,  
her forehead and eyebrows wretched with pain.

The whole house demanded-- shouting--  
that she should send her greatest respects and reverence  
to the Prophet.

Not one doubted that she would go to Jannatul Ferdous,  
the highest level of heaven.

Not one doubted that she would soon walk hand-in-hand  
with Muhammed, on a lovely afternoon,  
in the Garden of Paradise...

No one doubted that the two would lunch together  
on pheasant and wine.

Mother thus dreamed her lifelong dream:



She would walk with Muhammed

in the Garden of Paradise.

But now, at the very time that she was about to depart from this Earth, what a surprise!

She hesitated.

Instead of stepping outside, and entering that Garden,  
she wished to stay and boil Birui rice for me.  
She wished to cook fish curry and to fry a whole hilsa.  
She wished to make me a spicy sauce with red potatoes.

She wished to pick a young coconut for me  
from the south corner of her garden.  
She wished to fan me with a silken hand-fan,  
and to remove a few straggly hairs from my forehead.

She wished to put a new bed sheet upon my bed,  
and to sew a frock with colorful embroidery--

just for me.

Yes, she wished to walk barefoot in the courtyard,  
and to prop up a young guava plant with a bamboo stick.

She wished to sing sitting in the garden of hasnuhena,

'Never before, had such a bright moon shone down,  
never before, was night so beautiful.. .'

My mother wanted so desperately to live.

2

There is, I know, no reincarnation,  
no last judgment day:

Heaven, pheasant, wine, pink virgins --  
these are nothing but traps

set by true believers.

There is no heaven for mother to go.  
She will not walk in any garden with anybody whatsoever.

Cunning foxes will instead enter her grave;

they will eat her flesh;  
her white bones will be spread by the winds...

Nevertheless, I do want to believe in Heaven  
over the seventh sky, or somewhere--  
a fabulous, magnificent heaven--  
somewhere where my mother would reach

after crossing the bridge,

the Pulsirat-- which seems so impossible to cross.

And there, once she has passed that bridge

with the greatest ease,

a very handsome man, the Prophet Muhammed,  
will welcome her, embrace her.

He will feel her melt upon his broad chest.

She will wish to take a shower in the fountain;  
she will wish to dance, to jump with joy;  
she will be able to do all the things

that she has never done before.

A pheasant will arrive on a golden tray.  
My mother will eat to her heart's content.  
Allah Himself will come by foot into the garden to meet her;  
he will put a red flower into her hair,

kiss her passionately.

She will sleep on a soft feather bed;  
she will be fanned by seven hundred Hur, the virgins  
and be served cool water in silver pitcher

by beautiful gelban, the young angels.

She will laugh,

her whole body will stir with enormous happiness.

She will forget her miserable life on Earth...

An atheist,

How good I feel  
just to imagine  
somewhere there is a heaven

Taslina Nasrin

## **My Bengal**

My Bengal has ceased to exist,  
My Bengal has now eroded,  
Her body has rusted away.  
The east and the west are mixed up.  
Today she's a confounded mess.

The fanatics brandish their sceptre,  
While cowards walk out with bowed heads.  
Surely this age belongs to headless demons,  
Courage and honesty being banished.  
Bengal is in the clutch of intriguing rulers,  
My Bengal abounds with flatterers;  
The rest of the populace comprise:  
The self-centered, inert and rubbish.

I weep over my Bengal to exhaust my tears.  
May one day her soil be fertile,  
May true humans sprout on her soil,  
May the ill-fated Bengal habitable for humans.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Sujal Bhattacharya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## No Man's Land

If your homeland does not give you home,  
Then tell me what land in the world will give you home.  
After all, all the lands are more or less the same kind,  
The rulers have the same appearance, the same character.  
When they seek to persecute you, they do it the same way.  
They pierce you with needles with the same glee.  
They sit stony-faced before your crying, dancing all the while within.  
They may have different names, but even in the dark you'll know them,  
Their loudness, their whispers, their footsteps will betray them,  
When they rush in the direction the wind takes,  
The wind will tell you who they are.  
Rulers are rulers after all.  
The harder you try to persuade yourself that no homeland belongs to people, to those  
who love it,  
The more you persuade someone that it's yours,  
That you have cast it in your heart,  
That you have mapped it with the brush of your labour and dreams,  
Where will you go when the rulers drive you out?  
What land opens its doors to shelter one who's been driven out?  
How can you think of any land offering you home?

You are nobody now,  
Maybe not even human.  
Whatever else is there for you to lose?  
Drag the world into the open and tell it,  
Let it give you a spot there to stand, to give you a home there,  
From now on let the bit of unwanted piece of earth be yours  
That remains as no one's once the borders of a land close.

Taslima Nasrin

## Noorjahan

They have made Noorjahan stand in a hole in the courtyard.  
There she stands submerged to her waist, her head hanging.  
They're throwing stones at Noorjahan,  
stones that are striking my body.  
I feel them on my head, forehead, chest, back,  
and I hear laughing, shouts of abuse.

Noorjahan's fractured forehead pours out blood, mine also.  
Noorjahan's eyes have burst, mine also.  
Noorjahan's nose has been smashed, mine also.  
Noorjahan's torn breast and heart have been pierced, mine also.

Are these stones not striking you?

They're laughing aloud, laughing and stroking their beards.  
Even their caps, stuck to their heads, are shaking with laughter.  
They're laughing and swinging their walking sticks.  
From the quiver of their cruel eyes,  
Arrows speed to pierce her body,  
My body also.

Are these arrows not piercing your body?

Taslima Nasrin

## Not My City

This isn't the kind of city,  
Once I called my own.  
The city belongs to foxy politicians,  
Unscrupulous traders, flesh racketeers, pimps, loompens, rapists,  
But this cannot be my city.

The city belongs to mute witnesses,  
To rape and murder but not to me,  
The city belongs to hypocrites,  
Feigning nonchalance to the sight of destitute,  
At slums and beggars dying on the avenues of the rich.  
This is the city of the escapists,  
Who at the slightest premonition of a peril,  
Make the hastiest retreat.  
This is the city of the spooks  
They stoically sit on the piles of injustice;  
Here they go into rhapsodies,  
Over the question of life after death.  
This is the city of the soothsayers,  
Agents of self-aggrandizement, opportunists.  
I can never call it my own city, never.  
Liars, cheats, religious bigots abound in here;  
In this city, we're a handful of men and women  
Armed with logic, liberal thoughts,  
Voice against injustice,  
Live in beating hearts.  
Not my City.

[Translated by Sujal Bhattacharya]

Taslima Nasrin

## **Oviman**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Prem Korecho Koro**

Taslima Nasrin



## **Protyasha**

Taslima Nasrin

## **Run! Run!**

A pack of dogs is after you.  
Remember, rabies.

A pack of men is after you.  
Remember, syphilis.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Sans People**

Will you let me have a glimpse of people?  
People on the streets? People sauntering by, people smiling.  
People intending to take a right turn,  
Suddenly changed the mind and took to the left.  
People across the meadows,  
Past the shops, cinemas, theatres, Opera houses,  
People racing down, people in the cars, bus, tram, train.  
How I wish to have a glimpse of them, the procession of people!  
Will you let me have a glimpse of them-  
Men, women and children in the houses?

Am I to live only with the fluky glimpse of a strip of cloud  
Or the streak of sun, penetrating through the chinks of my window?  
People, they said are barred out,  
I've to live the rest of my life sans people.

Taslima Nasrin

## Self-Portrait

I don't believe in God,  
I look upon nature with wondering eyes.  
However much I move forward grasping the hand of progress  
    society's hindrances take hold of my sleeve  
    and gradually pull me backwards.  
I wish I could walk all through the city  
    in the middle of the night,  
    sitting down anywhere alone to cry.

I don't believe in God.  
From house to house the religion mongers  
    secretly divide us into castes,  
    segregate the women from the human race.  
I too am divided,  
    defrauded of my human rights.  
The crafty politician  
    gets loud applause when he rails about class exploitation,  
But he cleverly suppresses all the terminology  
    of women's exploitation.  
All those people of supposed good character, I know them.

Throughout the world, religion has extended its eighteen talons.  
In my lone brandishing, how many of its bones can I shatter?  
How much can I rip discrimination's far-spreading net?

Taslima Nasrin

## **So Let Them Rule The World!**

Just let them be free to do as they please...

Let all the doors of the world's arsenals swing open for them...  
Let them wield their swords and hang rifles from their waists...  
Let them clutch grenades in their fists...

And with the grand inspiration of Dar-ul-Islam in their minds  
Let them go out onto the streets and behead the infidel...

Let them torture women until death,  
after wrapping their obedient heads with veils,  
and confining them to their rooms...

Let the rapists go berserk door to door  
to copulate in their erect hysteria,  
so that they can beget male babies to overcrowd the world.

Let all the men become Talibans overnight...  
Let them seize the entire planet  
from Argentina to Iceland, from Maldives to Morocco,  
from the Bahamas to Bangladesh...

May the whole universe become their citadel...

Let the leaders of the world bow down  
upon the sacred land of Islam...  
And let them crown the heads of these terrorists, one by one.

Yes, let the world's leaders apologize with folded hands  
for their own cruel misdeeds...  
Let them together imbibe the holy water—  
the filthy liquids of these true believers—  
so as to be blessed by their grace.

Taslima Nasrin

## Some Tit-Bits Of My Life In Captivity

### Bathing

Day after day I don't take a bath.  
Months roll by, pungent smell wafting out of my body.  
Yet, I feel no urge for a bath.  
Why should I? What's the use of a bath?  
An inexplicable apathy for a bath engulfs me.

### Swallowing

A man comes,  
Thrice a day,  
To offer me food.  
It matters little,  
If I enjoy it or not,  
But I must swallow it.  
Were I able to live without eating!  
Then I could have said to them:  
Give me whatever you intend,  
Except the stuff called food.

### Sleeping

Before I lull myself to sleep,  
I suffer from a constant phobia:  
If something devilish befalls me.....  
If I fail to wake up again!  
If I fall asleep  
Startled, I wake up, repeatedly,  
As though one suffering from sleep apnea.  
I look around to ponder:  
Is it my own bed-room?  
No this isn't the room I own.

Banishment is merely a nightmare,  
It cannot be the part of the verisimilitude.  
As long as I'm awake during the daytime  
Banishment dwells on me like a nightmare.  
Sleep! I take a fright at you,  
Lest you should vaporize my dubious reverie.

### Movement

The room I inhabit is rectangular  
Captivated within its four walls,  
I just stalk from one corner to another.  
If I'm so zealous to stalk at all;  
The order from the top, I must oblige.  
The room lies detached from me like a frigid partner,  
I, on the other corner, lie prostrated,  
By the order from the top.  
In stark silence, I wonder:  
Is it the same good, old earth,  
I knew so vast and generous once?  
Since when has it become so parsimonious?

Meeting

Even in the prisons,  
They honour some rules,  
The permission to meet visitors,  
Being one of the impositions.  
I'm a prisoner  
Compelled to be a non-conformist.  
Without friends or relatives.  
I send petitions daily  
To be favoured like a prisoner,  
The Government of India is reticent.

Taslima Nasrin

## **Talaknama**

Taslima Nasrin



## Terror

Soldiers, rifles in hand, stalk about, all around.  
I stand in their midst, unarmed.  
The soldiers don't know me, they stare at the unarmed woman from time to time, with a strange look.  
Nobody knows why I'm suddenly here.  
A dirty body, grimy clothes, depressed unkempt hair,  
I don't have shackles on me, but they are somewhere still,  
They can sense it, they can feel it, I won't be able to take a step in any direction if I so desired.  
In their eyeballs I can see a dreadful cognizance.  
The rifles, they know, are meant to strike terror  
The bayonets, the boots, are meant to strike terror.  
They'd be hurt awfully, if they can't strike terror.  
I do not have the legal right to hurt anyone.  
They could inform their superiors that this one refuses to be terrorized,  
And tries to snap her chains relentlessly.  
The superiors would certainly order me to be hanged.  
Once the day and time for the hanging is fixed,  
They'd feed me on fish curry, hilsa and shrimps.  
Then if I say, I won't eat!  
If I don't let out a sigh on the gallows!  
If I have the guts not to be terrorized even when they've put the noose on!

Taslima Nasrin

## **The Female**

### **BIRTH**

In the instinct of no-creature-of-Nature  
the birth of a female is considered undesirable.  
Only humans consider it strange.

### **CHILDHOOD**

Since she has been born,  
let her stay in an obscure corner of her home  
and learn to survive.

### **ADOLESCENCE**

Keep your hair in a tight knot.  
Don't let your eyes wander here and there.  
Hide carefully your swelling breasts.  
Women, we know, need to be kept in chains.  
At best they can be allowed  
to move about in the precincts of the home, that's all.

### **YOUTH**

Men look for fresh virgins  
so they can maul and tear them,  
some on the plea of love,  
some of marriage.

### **OLD AGE**

The tight smooth skin is full of wrinkles.  
The menstruation pain is gone forever.  
The thread of the tale told again has snapped.

### **DEATH**

We are well rid of nuisance.  
In the instinct of no-creature-of-Nature  
is the death of a female so desirable.

Taslima Nasrin

## The Game In Reverse

The other day in Ramna park I saw a boy buying a girl.

I'd really like to buy a boy for five or ten taka,  
a clean-shaven boy, with a fresh shirt, combed and parted hair,  
a boy on the park bench, or standing on the main road  
In a curvaceous pose.

I'd like to grab the boy by his collar  
and pull him up into a rickshaw -  
tickling his neck and belly, I'd make him giggle;  
bringing him home, I'd give him a sound thrashing  
with high-heeled shoes, then throw him out -  
'Get lost, bastard!'

Sticking bandages on his forehead,  
he would doze on the sidewalks at dawn,  
scratching scabies.  
Mangy dogs would lick at the yellow pus  
oozing out of the ulcers in his groin.  
Seeing them, the girls would laugh with their tingling sound  
of glass bangles breaking.

I really want to buy me a boy,  
a fresh, nubile boy with a hairy chest -  
I'll buy a boy and rough him up all over.  
Kicking him hard on his shriveled balls,  
I'll shout, 'Get lost, bastard!'

Taslima Nasrin

## **The Room in Which I am Forced . . .**

The room in which I now live has a closed window,  
A window that I cannot open at will.  
The window's covered with a heavy curtain that I cannot move at will.  
I live in a room now,  
Where I cannot open the door at will, cannot cross the threshold.  
I live in a room, where the only other living inhabitants are  
Two sickly lizards on the wall. No man or any creature resembling a man is allowed  
here.  
I live in a room where I find it a great strain to breathe.  
There's no sound around, but for banging your head against the wall.  
Nobody else in the world watches, expect the couple of lizards.  
They watch with eyes wide open, who knows if they feel the pain—Maybe they feel it.  
Do they too cry, when I cry?  
I live in a room where I don't want to live,  
A room where I am forced to live,  
A room where democracy forces me to live for days unending,  
In a room in the dark, in incertitude, with a threat hanging,  
In pain, breathing with difficulty, democracy forces me to live,  
In a room where secularism drains me away of life, dropp by drop.  
In a room my dear India forces me . . .  
I do not know if all those over busy men or creatures that look like men will have a  
couple of seconds to spare to turn to  
The lifeless lump that comes out of the room some day,  
A rotten, greasy lump, a lump of bones.  
Will death be release? It's death perhaps that sets one free,  
Free at last to cross the threshold.  
The lizards will stare away the whole day,  
Maybe they too will feel sad.  
Someone will bury me, maybe a government man,  
Wrapped in the flag of democracy, in the soil of my dear India .  
I'll find a home there at last, with no threshold to cross,  
I'll find a home there where breathing will be easy.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandapadahya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## **The Safe House**

I'm compelled to live in such a house  
Where I'm forbidden to say 'I like it not'  
Though I feel aghast to live in here.

Such a safe house I live in  
Where I'm destined to live and suffer  
But cannot weep.  
I must avoid eye contact with others  
Lest I should expose my pains inconclusive.  
In this house everyday at dawn  
My longings are slaying and before evening descends  
The pallid corpses are buried on its courtyard.

My deep sighs break the silence of the safe house  
All other sounds are inconspicuous within and without the house.  
Every night I go to bed trepidation,  
And with the same feelings I wake up,  
While awake, I subject my own shadow to a monologue.

I'm caught unawares by the invasion of a venomous snake,  
Hurling wrath and loathing, squirms all over my body  
And hiss: Be off transcending boundaries  
Hush-hush escape to a far off quaint land  
Towards the impassable mountains.  
While creeping around the shadow, the serpent demands:  
Get lost forever.

Friends, do pray for me  
For my safe exit, from the safe house,  
Pray for my lucky sojourn,  
Once in safety in an unsafe house.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Sujal Bhattacharya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## **The Unrung Ring**

So many things ring,  
the cells of the body,  
the ankle bells as they dance,  
the silver wrist bangles.  
As the monsoon rains fall on the window  
the glass panes musically ring.  
As clouds clash with clouds  
lightning rings out.  
Dreams ring, keeping time to their beats,  
and, making a havoc internally,  
loneliness rings.  
Only an intimate bell on my door does not ring.

Taslima Nasrin

## The Woman Breaking Bricks

The woman, breaking bricks and sitting on a sidewalk,  
wears a red sari as she breaks the bricks, under the burning sun, breaks the bricks,  
the bronze coloured woman breaks the bricks.  
Twenty-one? But she has seven children back home, looks forty up,  
and all day for ten taka, not enough to buy food for one, let alone seven,  
she breaks the brick. every day, breaks the bricks.

Seated beside her, resting under an umbrella, a man is breaking bricks,  
all day long breaking bricks,  
a shaded man who earns twenty a day breaking the bricks.  
Of what does he dream, the man breaking the bricks,  
the man sitting under an umbrella, breaking the bricks?

And of what does she dream, the woman breaking the bricks?  
She has a dream, a dream of having an umbrella,  
of breaking the bricks veiled from the sun,  
of becoming a man one fine morning,  
earning double for breaking the bricks.

Her dream is her dream,  
but in the morning she is still a woman breaking the bricks,  
no umbrella, not even a torn one, breaking the bricks under the burning sun.

New roads and tall towers are built with the bricks she broke,  
but the roof on her house was blown away in last year's storm,  
the water drips through her tent, and she has a dream about buying a tin roof.

Her dream is her dream,  
but in the morning her tent is soaked with water.  
So she shouts out to her neighbors, to the world,  
I have a dream, I have a dream. But still no umbrella, still no tin roof.

Look, neighbors spit on her and say, her seven children are hungry,  
she needs oil for her hair, powder for her face!  
Her skin colour darkens daily,  
her fingers harden, harden like the bricks they are breaking.

So with her hammer she continues, continues breaking the bricks,  
becoming herself a brick, a brick that cannot be broken  
by the sun's heat, an underfed stomach, a dreaming heart.

Taslima Nasrin

## Things Cheaply Had

In the market nothing can be had as cheaply as women.

If they get a small bottle of colour for their feet,  
they spend their nights sleepless for sheer joy;

If they get a few bars of soap to scrub their skin  
and some scented oil for their hair,  
they become so submissive  
that they scoop out chunks of their flesh  
to be sold in the flea market twice a week.

If they get a jewel for their nose,  
they lick feet for seventy days or so,  
a full three and a half months  
if it's a single striped sari.

Even a mangy cur of the house barks now and then,  
but over the mouths of women cheaply had  
there's a lock,  
a golden lock.

Taslima Nasrin



## Time

I'm no longer annoyed when I wake up at three in the night,  
If you don't have a good night's sleep, the day doesn't go well, people say.  
How does it matter if the day doesn't go well!  
Night and day, they're all the same for me.  
Day, like day, sits at a distance, night acts like night.  
When it's time to sleep, it's lying awake, curled up, face pressed in.  
All this night and day, all this time, I've nothing to do with them.  
When life and death become the same, there's nothing to do about it anyway.  
Now, with all my pleading, I can't separate life from death,  
For the time being, I cannot lift death from life casually and put it away somewhere.

[This poem was written while Taslima was forced to live in confinement in an undisclosed location in Delhi from 22 November 2007 to 19 March 2008. Samik Bandapadahya translated this poem from her book PRISONERS POEMS]

Taslima Nasrin

## **Venomous**

A two-faced man is more venomous  
Than the snake with two fangs.

Bitten by a snake.  
One can withdraw the venom.  
Bitten by a man,  
That's the end.

Taslima Nasrin

## **We!**

Last night a lizard sprang up from nowhere and landed upon me. It squirmed along my arm and then climbed upon my shoulder before inching toward my head and hiding itself into the disheveled bush of my hair. Resting upon the back of my aching head, it kept gawking for a couple of hours at a second lizard. Then at the stroke of dawn, it slid next to my ear, deciding to squat upon my spine.

The second lizard lay frozen upon my right leg, around two inches below my knee. Neither budged from their positions the entire evening. Having failed to remove them, I did what I normally do. I kept lying with my eyes firmly closed. Silently—and even if there's really no rationale whatsoever for counting in reverse— I counted from one hundred to one, repeatedly.

My bed is a confused mess of dirty clothes, used trays and cracked bowls with leftover meals; notebooks for scribbling, old newspapers that have turned brown because of tea stains; one or two combs with pieces of hair sticking to them; one or two stray puffed rice crackers that have lost their crispness; scattered strips of pills and phials of potions; inkless pens etc., etc., etc.

For a number of days, more than two hundred black ants have occupied my bed. They have girded up their loins to construct their new colony upon my bed. Millimeter by millimeter, they have begun to take full control over me. They're very tiny creatures. Shriveled in fear, for days on end, I myself have become as tiny as these ants.

I'm utterly stunned at their demeanour. They've been performing ballet programmes in classical styles upon the surface of my body— but not once have I been bitten, even by mistake. I believe they've taken it for granted that I belong to them. And I've also begun to consider that I, perhaps, just perhaps, am actually safer in their company than that of humans...

Taslima Nasrin

## What A Country!

For more than an era,  
my Country relished the pains I suffer,  
watching my banishment in alien lands.  
When the vision is blurred by distance,  
they spy me through the hole of a binocular,  
and roar in peels of laughter;  
one forty million of them relish my own holocaust.

Never had my country been like this before,  
She had something called Heart,  
teeming with humanity.  
Now she ceases to be the country I knew.  
Now she is all some decrepit rivers only,  
some hamlets and towns,  
here and there some vegetations;  
Some houses, markets and on the grey meadows,  
some people who just resemble humans.

Once my country throbbed with life,  
My countrymen recited poems.  
Now none thinks twice before banishing a poet,  
Now at dead of night, the whole country feel free to send a poet to the gallows;  
one hundred and fifty million of them,  
derive a lucretian pleasure  
out of a poet's execution.  
Once the country knew how to love.  
Now She has learnt violence and frowning.  
Sharp swords at her disposal, deadly weapons  
tucked into her waist, fatal explosives in hand,  
no longer can She sing a song.  
Over an age, in search of a country,  
I've been ransacking the globe;  
Without a wink of sleep, decade after decade,  
In my maddening pursuit of a country.

Reaching on the edge of my own country,  
I wait with arms outstretched for her.  
Alack! I've heard them say:  
If my country ever gets me in her grip,  
She'll build my sepulchre there.

[Translated by Sujal Bhattacharya]

Taslima Nasrin

## **Women And Poems**

With as much pain as a human being becomes a woman,  
That much pain makes a woman a poet.  
A word takes a long year to be made,  
a poem an entire life.

When woman becomes a poet, she is totally a woman.  
Then she is mature enough to give birth from her suffering heart,  
Then she knows how to care for a word.

You have to be a woman first if you want to give birth to a poem.  
A word without any pain is fragile, breaks when touched.  
Who knows more than a woman all the lanes and alleys of pain!

Taslima Nasrin

## **You Go Girl !**

They said—take it easy...  
Said—calm down...  
Said—stop talkin'...  
Said—shut up...  
They said—sit down...  
Said—bow your head...  
Said—keep on cryin', let the tears roll...

What should you do in response?

You should stand up now  
Should stand right up  
Hold your back straight  
Hold your head high...  
You should speak  
Speak your mind  
Speak it loudly  
Scream!

You should scream so loud that they must run for cover.  
They will say—'You are shameless!'  
When you hear that, just laugh...

They will say— 'You have a loose character!'  
When you hear that, just laugh louder...

They will say—'You are rotten!'  
So just laugh, laugh even louder...

Hearing you laugh, they will shout,  
'You are a whore!'

When they say that,  
just put your hands on your hips,  
stand firm and say,  
'Yes, yes, I am a whore!'

They will be shocked.  
They will stare in disbelief.  
They will wait for you to say more, much more...

The men amongst them will turn red and sweat.  
The women amongst them will dream to be a whore like you.

Taslina Nasrin