Chapter-6

WOMEN NOVELISTS
CHAPTER - VI

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Women must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn’t allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast-moving events. The solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into the home nor escape from it.¹

— Mrs Indira Gandhi

INTRODUCTION:

The history of the pre-independence Indian writing in English is also about women’s cultivation of literature, particularly in English. Many women writers have enriched the concept of Indian writing in English. However, Muslim women writers may not be many and may not be as impressive as the Hindu women writers like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and others, they have their own share. Muslim women novelists like Attia Hosain
and Iqbalunnisa Hussain stand apart as pioneers of pre-independence Indian women's writings. Here an understanding of them with a Muslim point of view is beneficial.

As we know Indian men Muslim English writers like Ahmed Ali, K. A. Abbas, Aamir Ali and others wrote about several contemporary burning issues such as freedom struggle, Hindu-Muslim riot, imperialism and partition. Whereas, Muslim women novelists like Attia Husain and Iqbalunnisa Hussain did not deal with as varied themes as their men counterparts. They depicted rather the conditions of Muslim woman in family and society, portraying her as a bird of cage. Women's domestic problems, their relationship with men, purdah and polygamy find a place of pride in their works.

In a traditional Muslim community, women were rarely seen in the public. As we know even the outsiders except husbands rarely saw them. Muslim women were kept within the four walls of family as if slaves. They were harshly treated too. Still many more things were there to upset them. These two novelists Attia Husain and Iqbalunnisa Hussain revolted against the above-mentioned practices. They attacked the system of purdah, polygamy and ill-treatment meted out to women. They raised their voice mainly in defense of their sex. As male characters play an important role in the novels of men writers, female characters dominate Hosain and Hussain's novels. That is to say their
novels are more about heroines. In fact, these women novelists complete the picture of pre-independence Muslim fiction.

**ATTIA HOSAIN:**

As to speak of her personal life, Attia Hosain hailed from a conservative family of Uttar Pradesh. She was born in 1913. Attia Hosain's family was of landlords. She completed her primary education in Urdu and higher education in English. Attia Husain, like Iqbalunnisa Hussain, understands different problems of society. Their writings represent the ethos of Indian Muslim community and the plight of women. Attia Hosain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is a masterpiece.

Mulk Raj Anand, in one of his interviews with Attia Hosain says,

There was an echo at the back of my head of suffragettes who had gone to jail in the course of women's freedom. Emmeline Pankhurst came from a middle class family, Beatrice Webb was an heiress and Bertrand Russell's first wife was a well-off American woman, Miss. Percival Smith. There would have to be in India some women from the big houses, who owned large estates. They had built up a kind of code of feudal honour, which they broke with impunity by patronizing countenance in
Lucknow, while keeping their daughter in Purdah or Semi-Purdah.2

In other words, the condition of women in the west was undergoing a great change, but Indian women were unaware of it.

Interestingly Mulk Raj Anand was a friend, philosopher and guide to the woman writer Attia Hosain. He was the first man to identify her literary abilities. He asked her to keep a diary of contemporary happenings. Attia Hosain even maintained it and she sent her writings to him for appreciation. Exactly at one point, Mulk Raj Anand suggested her certain things, in order to reach a proposed goal. He observes,

I suggested her to adopt T.S. Eliot's manner and to gather 'the remnants shored against the ruin.' I felt if she could write her autobiography, not necessarily for publication, but to fix certain things, she might see that, beneath all the painful memories, she had developed a new kind of personal identity, contained in the family cost, but imaginatively free. I asked her to read Iqbal. Then the soul would appear like an emanation from the body, 'like a reed torn from the native brook'; capable of writing out the various selves because there was a self to recover.3
When liberal English education was prohibited to Muslim girls, Attia Hosain took her education in English medium and she read many English writers, especially, "The women English writers, the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen and George Eliot; also Ibsen and Bernard Shaw."

Mulk Raj Anand says,

I also suggested her to read the contemporaries like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. She was more impressed by the last. And she understood, very perceptively, that there was no beginning, middle and end in fiction any more. No plot, only pattern and forms fascinated her because, having read Urdu poetry, she was aware of the romantic agony. Gaalib's phrase, 'Oh my innocent heart, what has happened to you!' evoked from her an agonized look always, when it was recited to her.4

Attia Hosain was a student of Lucknow University, Lucknow. In 1933 while she was studying for graduation, she achieved intimate relations with modernists like D. P. Mukharji, Prof. Sresht Hussain, Sajjad Zaheer, Mohammud Uzaffar, Rashid Jehan and Abdul Aleem. Attia Hosain read Rashid Jehan's stories and got an inspiration for writing. Apart from this, the death of her father when she was a little
girl and her discontinuation of English education compelled her to become a writer.

The year 1933 was important in Attia Hosain's life, as there emerged a great progressive movement in India. Not to speak of after completing her graduation at Lucknow, she joined nationalist movement and Progressive Writers' movement. She worked as a journalist, broadcaster, short-story writer, director, organizer, playwrite and novelist.

The event of India's partition in 1947 disheartened Attia Hosain as she had never anticipated such a harsh calamity. She had loved the integrated India of Hindus and Muslims. Mulk Raj Anand has given an authentic picture of Indians' psychological condition during the partition. In his words,

She had an instinctive dread, or nervous anticipation, of the penalties which freedom might bring. Her family had been torn up by choosing the side that wanted partition of the sub-continent. She herself still believed, from the bent of her Catholic temperament, that confrontation might be avoided. But on the night of the transfer of power the past bitterness emerged in the present and a bloody history was enacted in the north and east, when over half a million brothers murdered each other and
their neighbouring sisters, and some other millions became refugees away from the land of their birth. Most of us were benumbed.5

But when partition took place, Attia Hosain with her husband and two children migrated to England and became an employee in the British Broadcasting Corporation. She worked on different cultural issues there.

Most of Attia Hosain’s writings, whether novels, short stories, articles, or radio talks deal with the cultural differences that have emerged out of partition.

Attia Hosain has written only one novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. This is considered as both political and autobiographical.

Like many other writers and thinkers, Attia Hosain was a great lover of Gandhian philosophy. This is explicit in her novel. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a sincere appeal to the populace to eschew hatred and violence. She tells Indians to follow Gandhian philosophy of love, truth and non-violence. Attia Hosain believes that it is only through co-operation and co-existence mankind can survive. The novel presents her concern for the Muslims. It is observed,

She, in spite of her being a Muslim does not hesitate to say that it is the ‘Muslim League’ and its parochial
communal and power-hungry leaders who introduce religion in politics; and ironically enough this cause the Partition even within the Muslims, the Nationalist Muslims and the League Muslims, a Partition within Partition.6

Attia Hosain’s novel Sunlight on a Broken Column is an interesting study of partition and the position of Muslim women in Indian society. Anita Desai says,

Attia Hosain’s novel and collections of short stories are the monuments of the past. To read them is as if one has parted a curtain or opened a door and strayed into the past. To read them is like wrapping oneself up in one’s mother’s wedding sari, lifting the family jewels out of a faded box and admiring their glitter, inhaling the musky perfume of old silks in a camphor chest.7

Sunlight on a Broken Column probes into different aspects of Muslim community and feminine psychology. Simultaneously it is a study of Indian communalism and politics. The story centers around the feudal Muslim society of Lucknow. Feudalism was a result of aristocracy and class system in medieval India. Though progressive movements were in swing, the emancipation of women was a forlorn dream. Fifteen-year-old orphan girl called Laila is the central character of the novel. She represents the rational generation of the 1940s and
1950s. She lost her parents when she was young and her aunt Abida brought her up. The girl questions the outdated traditions and customs of her community. Jaya Baliga says,

> In the course of development we not only get glimpses of Muslim social world in which Laila grows, but also a picture of the political development that takes place, not from the point of view of political scientists but from the point of view of ordinary human beings - both Muslims and Hindus - who took part in the freedom struggle and who saw the dismemberment of the country.8

The novel presents her in four stages or parts of the thirteen chapters, its total time span being twenty years from 1932 to 1952.

When great socio-political upheavals take place outside, the heroine is kept within the walls of 'Ashiana' of an orthodox Muslim family. However she is intelligent and candid, she is not respected. She is a passive observer of the happenings. She is a witnessing agent. Laila's personal feelings and individuality are suppressed. Laila has an interest for reading books, as the habit opens her a world of knowledge. She is saved from the embarrassment when Abida insists her to complete graduation. Laila's other cousins taunt her that she reads books and talks like them. Not to speak of she is an enlightened and compassionate woman. Laila's family has close relations with Hindus.
Ranjit is one who is a close friend of Laila’s grandfather Babajan. Even Laila’s ancestors had good rapport with Englishmen. For instance, an Englishman Mr. Free Mantle requested that he should be buried near the tomb of his friend Sayed Mohammed Husan.

Laila’s aunt Abida stands for orthodox traditions of Muslim life styles. She represents an older generation, whereas Laila stands for the generation of transitional period. Whenever Laila questions her aunt, the latter says, “My child, there are certain rules of conduct that must be observed in this world without questions. You have a great responsibility. You must never forget the traditions of your family, no matter to what outside influence you must be exposed.” Abida, of course, pleads for Laila’s higher education opposing an early proposal of marriage. Abida is Laila’s guardian, friend and philosopher. Critics say Laila is Laila only because of Abida’s support. Laila, though she is born and brought up in a conservative family, criticizes government’s anti-social moves. It must be noted that she took an active role in students’ organizations when she was a postgraduate student of Aligad Muslim University.

Laila’s life is a manyfold struggle -- first in herself and then in the family. When she was a student of Aligarh University, she fell in love with Ameer, a History lecturer. Still she could not marry him as there existed class difference. She belonged to an upper class, while he
belonged to a middle one. So Ameer expressed his grief: “I have nothing to offer you, nothing but my love. What more do I want? I am poor; I am nobody, nothing. Your people would never approve of me.”

Laila’s kith and kins ask her to honour the tradition. Still Laila, a progressive girl opined that elders should adjust to the changing needs. However, Laila is not anti-Islamic. She believes in the Quran, thinking that it is a holy book. Laila believes religion is to the soul what medicine is to the body.

The pre-independence Indian English Muslim novelists have portrayed many good woman characters. But Attia Hosain’s Laila is more independent, intelligent and candid a character. She has her own ideas on love, family, society, politics and religion. She does not follow others blindly. She thinks and acts according to her code of conduct. She is a multi-faceted and complex character. She is a rebellious woman. D. R. More observes,

The narrator-heroine Laila serves as a mouthpiece to the novelist. She is shown as an unprejudiced and objective person throughout the novel. She is portrayed as more of an inquisitive observer than an active participant in the partition politics. She observes everything from a third person point of view with a remarkable detachment. She watches the quarrels between father and son across the
dining table, sees her ‘Ashiana’ disintegrated, surveys her deserted house, remembers her early days, becomes nostalgic and faces the changes brought about by the political event. She also sees the scenes of abduction, rape, arson, mass violence, mutilation and several other atrocities that take place during the hectic days of partition. And it is after this observation that she criticizes Muslim leaders for their act of causing hatred and anger among Indians and then running away to Pakistan by betraying their millions of Muslim brothers.11

Hamid is another progressive character in the novel. He is a foreign-retumed and he is advanced in his outlook. He arranges Zahra’s marriage with a senior civil officer and gives full liberty to Laila to think freely.

The second and third parts of the novel contain various discussions about the ideologies of different political parties. The main story of the novel is about a sophisticated joint family living in a house, called ‘Ashiana.’ Sarros Cowasjee points out that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is “The story of the division of the national movement into the secular nationalists under the Congress banner and the communal nationalists under the Muslim League banner.”12 The difference of opinions widens when the secular Muslim nationalists remain in
Congress, while the communal Muslims oppose it thinking that it is a Hindu organization. For instance, the differences between the father Hamid and son Saleem cause a rift. Saleem who represents younger generation Muslims observes, "I believe the Congress has a strong anti-Muslim element in it, against which the Muslims must organize."\(^{13}\) As a student, he has studied Indian History. He is scared of Hindus' feelings of revenge as Muslims ruled them for hundreds of years. It is said, "He feels that they can democratically take revenge."\(^{14}\) Thus Congress politics is discussed in the drawing room of a sophisticated family.

The drama of partition creates a situation in Laila's family, as it offers an opportunity for Indian Muslims to migrate to a new land, where they can rule themselves. Several boys and girls like Saleem represent modern Indian Muslim generation. They like to migrate to Pakistan. But Kemal intends to stay back. The couple Saleem and Nadira who have already decided to leave for Pakistan, think, "Muslims who will not migrate will have to face suspicion, prejudice and even hatred."\(^{15}\)

The novel gives a comprehensive picture of communal relations between Hindus and Muslims. Attia Hosain presents the picture of communal activities before and after independence. She observes, "What was however true was that the communalists among both the Muslims and Hindus had got an upper hand over the secularists."\(^{16}\)
The novel presents identity-crisis. There are two characters in search of their identity. For instance, Laila, the heroine fights for her existence as she feels that she has lost her identity in the Muslim orthodoxy. She wants to live her own life, setting herself a model for the new generation. Likewise Saleem, who supports the concept of Pakistan, is in search of an answer for his problems. He thinks Pakistan stands for Muslims. Ameer, Laila's lover is a rationalist and intellectual. Still he is not able to identify himself with India as his motherland.

The theme of identity-crisis and rootlessness surfaces often. The post-colonial thinkers compare this novel with V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas. In fact, both works were published in the same year 1961. The question of identity, search for social order and cultural issues are some of the things that are common between the two. The protagonists of both the novels face social unrest and cultural conflict. Novy Kapadia observes,

The main character Laila and her cousins Asad and Saleem, like the Indians of Trinidad in Naipaul's novels, are alienated, in a rapidly changing world. They are in quest of a new identity, a new social role amidst the tensions and violence of the times. The novel chronicles the stages in Laila's life from adolescence to maturity in the midst of political upheavals. Similarly Mohan Biswas and
his family shift from country to town, from Hindi to English and from a sprawling joint family system to a nuclear family and independence. Hence, both the novels deal not just with the history of Mr. Mohan Biswas or Laila but the movement of cultures. The search for order, identity amidst social change is what both Attia Hosain and V.S. Naipaul set out to explore.  

Sunlight on a Broken Column is known as an autobiographical novel. A.V. Krishna Rao thinks that it is an autobiographical novel, because Attia Hosain's characterization of Laila reflects Attia Hosain's own life. The reader cannot imagine the existence of a character like Laila without the novelist providing details about the contemporary Muslim women. But Mulk Raj Anand who has read the novel does not agree with A.V. Krishna Rao.

Sunlight on a Broken Column is one of the major novels by a minor woman novelist of the period. It is a saga about two generations depicting the typical nature of Indian Muslims, which after all, conveys the message of unity and co-existence opposing feudalism and colonialism. It is more than a domestic story of Laila. The home 'Ashiana' represents the whole India. The rift in the home is a symbolic treatment given to the division of the country as India and Pakistan. So
the novel is a social document as well as a domestic saga. Amina Amin points out,

Attia Hosain is preoccupied with the forces that lead to the disintegration of a typical Taluqdar family. I will go one step further from Meenakshi Mukerjee and say that Attia Hosain is not merely giving us a picture of men and manners in a particular period of Indian history, but also observing how these men and manners have affected the edifice of Babajan's family and brought its solid structure crumbling down. Moreover, it is not as if it is merely the outside forces that have led to this disintegration. Forces within the family have also been instrumental in breaking it up finally.

Attia Hosain has undoubtedly given a faithful picture of Indian Muslim society of the pre- and post-independence period. Critics are of the opinion that the artistic and cultural value of Hosain's novel can be better understood in comparison with such 'period' novels as Cornelia Sorabji's *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* (1944), Humayun Kabir's *Men and Rivers* (1945), Zeenath Futehally's *Zohra* (1951), Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) and Anees Jung's *Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey* (1987). But Mulk Raj Anand interprets it
entirely in a different way. According to him, the style she has employed in the novel is definitely influenced by the 20th century novel of the west. He says, “I do not think Attia Hosain had any particular English or American novel before her as a model. But unconsciously her novel parallels such a narrative as Elizabeth Bowen’s *Bowen’s Court*.”

Some critics who have read Attia Hosain’s novel as a novel of nostalgia have compared it with Virginia Woolf’s *To The Light House*. Evaluating the worth of the novel, Sarla Palkar observes,

> Attia Hosain’s novel is a case in point which not only heralds the spirit of the women’s movement but also anticipates some of the issues and problems that were to figure prominently in the discourses of the later day feminists.

**IQBALUNNISA HUSSAIN:**

The pre-independence Indian English Muslim writer Iqbalunnisa Hussain is like Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh. Like the Bangladesh writer Iqbalunnisa Hussain revolted against the evil traditions of Indian Muslim community. *Purdah and Polygamy* is her most important novel, in which she has strongly criticized the evil traditions of purdah and polygamy. She thinks these practices are inhuman. Iqbalunnisa Hussain
was the only south Indian Muslim woman of the pre-Independence period who wrote in English.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain hailed from Karnataka. She was born on 21st January 1900 in Chikkaballapur near Bangalore. She had a good family background, belonging to the Sunni cult of Islam. Her father, Gulam Mohinuddin Khan was an educated gentleman. He served as a superintendent of police. Naturally his daughter felt secured because of his service as a police officer. Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s father was an admirer of western style of life. He was a European in outlook. Iqbalunnisa Hussain inherited a sense of liberty from her maternal side. Her mother Zaibunnisa was a descendant of Tippu Sultan who fought for India’s independence.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s parents were patriots. They encouraged their daughter for learning many languages. When she was a young girl, she took an interest in English language. Even her parents appointed a lady teacher to teach her English literature.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain got married to Sayed Ahmed Hussain in 1914. Then she was just fourteen years old. Sayed Ahmed Hussain was also young. He was an engineering student in Bombay. Of course, his wife lived in Bangalore. This encouraged Iqbalunnisa Hussain in her intellectual activities. Iqbalunnisa Hussain passed her Intermediate Examination in 1922. Interestingly along with her elder
Bashiruzaman, she got admitted at Maharani College, Mysore for doing B.A. Both the son and mother passed their graduation with gold medals. What more she was eager to do some higher education in England. So her husband sent her along with his eldest son to Leads University, England in 1933. She was the first Indian Muslim woman from Karnataka who graduated from Leads University.

These experiments and achievements brought Iqbalunnisa Hussain a special insight for her further plans of uplifting the female sex in Muslim community. She dedicated herself to the cause of social service and fought for the social recognition of widows and divorcees. She believed in women's education and canvassed for the cause, requesting parents to send their girls to schools. But the rigid Muslims did not respond properly. Their reaction was a mixed one. Most people felt that Iqbalunnisa Hussain was degenerating their community.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain, after her education at Leeds, worked as an assistant teacher in Vani Vilas High School, Bangalore. Later she became a Head Mistress of a city Urdu school. Along with Kamalamma and Nanjamma, the social activists of Mahila Seva Samaj of Bangalore, she travelled across the country, supporting the schemes for women's education and welfare. Even she dressed like a Hindu woman and visited Hindu pilgrim centres like Banaras and Haridwar.
1931 was an eventful year in Iqbalunnisa Hussain's life as she stopped wearing purdah. It was a heroic venture. The entire Muslim community opposed Iqbalunnisa Hussain's dare-devilry. People wrote articles against her, cried foul of her name and thought of burning her alive. But she did not budge. Her husband defended her, guiding her as a friend and philosopher. He shared her views. Both were happy and they believed in intellectual pleasure.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain is remembered as a social reformer and creative writer. She had a lot of intellectual friends. She was a founder of handicraft school for widows and orphans in 1931 and she sent her first daughter Malika Hussain to this school in order to keep her away from evil-minded people. Iqbalunnisa Hussain maintained a good rapport with Sir Mirza Ismail, the then Divan of Mysore. She had a correspondence with great contemporary writers and thinkers like Pearl S. Buck, Yusuf Ali, Aamir Ali, Humayun Kabir, R. K. Narayan and others.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy: Life In An Indian Muslim Household* (1914) is a document of evil social practices in Muslim community. Though, like Attia Hossian, Iqbalunnisa Hussain has written only one novel, her work has its own weight and validity in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction of the 1940s and 50s. Iqbalunnisa Hussain is candid and straightforward in her approach to
contemporary Muslim society. She questions fundamentalism, fanaticism and unhygienic practices.

As we know the practices of purdah and polygamy represent the conservatism of Muslim community. A conservative society is characterized by the tendency of retention and such societies will not accept any change. There is no scope for welcoming changes in tradition, customs and religious practices, which further human progress. Usually religious communities are divided into two schools, as liberal and conservative. Islam comes under the second category. The animal-like-treatment meted out to woman does not allow her to stand against purdah and polygamy. It acts like an octopus. Indian women writers Attia Hosain and Iqbalunnisa Hussain had revolutionary ideas; and they wanted to revolt against patriarchy. This is indirectly a revolution against Islam. The work *Purdah and Polygamy* is around such events, its heroine having plenty of radical ideas. That way it bears a close resemblance with Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja*.

When Iqbalunnisa Hussain published *Purdah and Polygamy* in 1944, the Muslim community had not prepared to tolerate such a work. So her community treated her malevolently as though it would excommunicate her. Of course, not many followed her social ideals and practices. That is why it is observed, "Iqbalunnisa Hussain is our last serious social novelist." She is the first Muslim feminist as well. Her
Purdah and Polygamy is the first critical Muslim social novel. Purdah and Polygamy is a mirror held to the Muslim religious, domestic, socio-cultural observations.

As we know women are not given a due position and respect in Indian Muslim community. She is treated as an object of pleasure. A young Indian Muslim researcher observes,

The Quran grants liberty and equality to woman, but the clergy curtails them. Clergy exists in every religion. Then, how could the Hindu woman be liberal? It is not only the clergy but the entire society is responsible in making woman, what she is today. Having said all this, a mute question still remains to be answered. How long the Muslim woman should wait for her liberation? The question is rather absurd. Why should Muslim woman wait for a Messiah to come from somewhere to liberate her? Ahalya waited for Rama's touch to regain her human form or legendary flower Nargis waited for a man with an eye to appreciate its beauty. However, no miracle of this kind can happen in the case of Muslim woman. She must have to start the movement of her liberation by herself. That is what the Bhagavad Geeta says, 'One must uplift
oneself.' She should have to venture herself to get liberated from the essential other tag that she has borne so far.22

As a result, woman is ill-treated in every department of life, like marriage, divorce, right to property, right to education, purdah, polygamy and so on. The evils purdah and polygamy are wrongly thought of as essential institutions of Islam. On the contrary, Quran says,

*Fa wahidatan* (then marry only one) that is you cannot treat your wives equitably, then marry only one. The Quran permits polygamy under extraordinary circumstances, but does not enjoin it. In ordinary course, it is not a matter of right for a Muslim male to marry four wives.23

Purdah is practised in many religious communities and countries in the world. In fact, many people have misunderstood it and its practitioners do not know why. They just say purdah must be observed. According to research,

Purdah is a Persian word which connotes, guarding one against others' evil eyes or it is a sign of respect shown to elderly persons. However, Purdah cannot be used as an instrument of segregation. Other Islamic countries have started using Purdah as a dress item. In a landmark judgment on 15th July 1999, the Supreme Court of Egypt
ruled that the women going to colleges and universities should not be compelled to wear Burqah, because any type of segregation of woman from the rest of the society is un-Islamic.  

Similarly Taslima Nasreen observes,

The disease of religious fundamentalism is not restricted to Bangladesh alone and it must be fought at every turn. For myself, I am not afraid of any challenge or threat to my life. I will continue to write and protest persecution and discrimination. I am convinced that the only way the fundamental forces can be stopped is if all of us who are secular and humanistic join together and fight their malignant influence. I, for one, will not be silenced.

Taslima Nasreen’s *Lajja* deals with the universal problem of fanaticism and fundamentalism. The problem, indeed, requires an immediate solution.

The founders of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam were very considerate and respectful towards woman. They could not think of keeping her away from the main stream of society. That is why they considered woman as equal to man. But misinterpretations took place during the process of socialization, and law-givers misinterpreted everything for their selfish purposes.
So especially during the freedom movement when the whole Indian society was undergoing a sea change, writers like Iqbalunnisa Hussain felt the necessity of changing the outlook of women in Muslim society. Iqbalunnisa Hussain's work *Purdah and Polygamy* fulfils this desire of the time. Compared to the contemporary novelists, Hussain's ideas are a sincere and genuine presentation of the reality. Moreover Iqbalunnisa Hussain felt that non-Muslim novelists could not present what has actually happened in the case of Muslim women. In other words, Hindu writers' depiction of purdah and polygamy is not authentic.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy* is a story of three Muslim generations of a business family. Not to speak of the family is fully orthodoxical and traditional located in one of the Indian cities. The hero of the novel, Umar is rich and orthodox. He is commercial too. He has rented six rooms of his big house. Four families reside in such a congested area. They do not have enough light and ventilation. However, one day Umar dies of cancer. Kabir, his son succeeds as the master of the family. But Kabir is uneducated and clumsy. The family grows bigger as well. Now it makes use of all the eight rooms. Kabir marries a girl from a rich family, of course without consulting his mother. He has a great belief in his wife, as she is sincere. But his mother dislikes the newlywed, because she was not of her selection.
When the lady is to deliver, Kabir appoints a doctor which measure, however, is not liked by his mother. Still the delivery takes place and the doctor advises her full rest. But Kabir’s mother tortures his wife, advising her son to marry once again.

This establishes the fact that Muslim society is not fair when it deals with woman. That is to say woman is unarmed there. She has no weapons against gender problems. So Kabir’s wife becomes a victim and a passive observer of all the forthcoming developments in his life.

Thereafter, Kabir’s mother arranges his marriage with a girl of her own choice. Later his first wife falls ill and she leaves for Kashmir in order to recover her health.

What is more interesting is when his first wife goes to Kashmir and his second wife goes to her mother’s house, Kabir marries for the third time. His third wife is beautiful, educated and straightforward. Her parents back her case. Here some superstition is brought into play. The third wife is the third daughter of her parents and Muslims believe that the third child is unlucky. So the girl married Kabir out of force.

One day Kabir’s first wife returns home. She is shocked to find her husband’s third wife. Moreover, the newcomer is haughty. She is a poet contributing her poems to magazines. She loves books more than her husband. Good or ill Kabir is also a poet. Naturally he encourages
her writing. But Kabir's mother considers it a meaningless activity, degenerating the family.

Iqbalunnisa Hussian goes on narrating the story. As the time lapses Kabir gets old. Now the eldest son of his first wife has grown up. No wonder he is also a chip of the old block. He is licentious having an affair with a widow. Amazing enough, Kabir marries once again. But his three wives refuse to recognize his new wife.

The woman in Muslim society is looked down upon. The inhuman and unfair practice of polygamy leads to the death of thousands of young Muslim girls. Though Kabir's third wife is a rational writer with certain guts she fails to face the problem. Iqbalunnisa Hussian depicts her failure vividly.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain is an optimist. She criticizes the evil practices of society with a hope that it will improve. Gobind Prasad Sarma in his work, *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction* writes,

...attack on the society, so that a better, happier society may evolve. The author however has not neglected the art of her work. Though the story is structured with a specific purpose in view, and though it is long, winding and complex, it is never boring or dull. The main characters have also been vividly drawn so that they come alive. The novel is thus successful both in the execution of its theme
and as a work of art...It is an analysis which is intellectually convincing as well as emotionally stirring.²⁶ Compared to Attia Hosain’s fiction, Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s writing is clearer in its commitment to feminism. Of course, *Purdah and Polygamy* is not as varied as *Sunlight on a Broken Column* thematically. Still there are certain similarities between the two. For instance, both works are about Muslim culture, the novelists aiming at social reformation. Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is the story of two generations in four parts, whereas Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s *Purdah and Polygamy* is the story of four women and two men. Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s novel is about two generations where the writer revolts against patriarchal practices.

As is mentioned above, Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s novel bears a close resemblance with Taslima Nasreen’s *Lajja*. The work *Lajja* is a great attack on fanaticism and fundamentalism. S. P. Swain writes,

*Lajja* is a moving story of protest, passion, principle and persecution. It is the story of humanity’s struggle to assert its innate and inherent rights in a society torn asunder by the forces of religious fundamentalism and blind fanaticism. Taslima Nasreen raises her voice against the draconian rulers of Bangladesh who are ideologically allied with Pakistan in treating the Hindus in their country
as a slave race. Under the rubric of Islamic fundamentalism
the mullahs and the deranged lumpens of Bangladesh have
been meting out all sorts of physical and mental torture to
the Hindus.27

Indeed, as a humanist writer Taslima Nasreen observes,

I detest fundamentalism and communalism. This
was the reason I wrote Lajja soon after the demolition of the
Babri Masjid in Ayodya on 6th December 1992...It is
disgraceful that the Hindus in my country were hunted by
the Muslims after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. All of
us who love Bangladesh should feel ashamed that such a
terrible thing could happen in our beautiful county...Lajja
is a document of our collective defeat.28

Iqbalunnisa Hussain exposes double standards in life. She says
men praise woman as goddess though they ill-treat her in reality. Her
novel develops the motif beautifully. The author is of the opinion that
Muslim fundamentalists exploit women in the name of Quran.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain adopts a nice narrative method for depicting
her themes. Sometimes, she makes use of the device of dialogue to bring
out the ethos implicit in the story. This is to heighten the ideological
effect. She avoids the dissolution of characters into congeries of
impressions. She is able to accept everything as part of a total complex, so the whole panorama of change becomes symbolic and significant. Finally one of the important characteristics, which distinguishes her novel, is the effortless ease with which Iqbalunnisa Hussain has developed an excellent Indian English style.

The number of women novelists in English is very negligible in India. There were only two Muslim women novelists in English in the pre-independence period. Their contribution is also negligible. But as for their stuff and strength, their novels are significant contributions to the field of Indian writing in English. These writers are not fake novelists anyway. Actually without these two women novelists, the very study of Indian Muslim writers of pre-independence period is incomplete.

To sum up, Indian English Muslim women novelists have depicted woman in relation to society, contemporary politics, traditions and customs. Finally, the writers express the reality that Muslim society is extremely patriarchal, treating their women badly. Their purpose is not only to depict the existing condition of society through their writing, but also to solve social problems. They try to uplift the position of Muslim women. In view of this many critics opined that Purdah and Polygamy and Sunlight on a Broken Column are not just novels but weapons used against male dictatorship.
REFERENCES:


