In the previous chapter, the liberal and conservative Muslim women characters, created by non-Muslim fiction writers, were studied. In the same way, the liberal and conservative Muslim Women characters, created by Muslim fiction writers, will be studied in this chapter.

The liberal woman character, as has been seen earlier, is mostly guided by her rationality and new ideas. She is free from inhibitions in speech and action, and is also free from unreasonable thoughts and prejudices against an individual or society. She is bountiful, generous and open-minded personality. Therefore, an interaction with such characters is always constructive and meaningful. Their philosophy of life may not be every man’s cup of tea, and their sincerity and conviction are exemplary to others.

Anita Desai, in her foreword to Attia Hosain’s novel, Sunlight On a Broken Column, not only appreciates the writer’s art of fiction writing but she also praises Laila, the narrator of the story and heroin of the novel,

“Attia Hosain’s novels and collection 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”.

This is, indeed, a high praise bestowed by a writer who herself writes authoritatively on the ills of contemporary society and more particularly on different aspects of feminine psychology. The novel depicts the feudal Muslim society of Lucknow, which is still in the clutches of aristocracy and class-consciousness.

Attia Hosain's present novel is a narrative of a girl, growing up in an upper-middle class Muslim family of Lucknow, before and after independence. What is significant to observe in this novel is the wonderful tact of the novelist, in balancing the political upheaval in the country on the one hand and the great drama of human sentiments, enacted against this backdrop, on the other. Selfish and myopic leaders, managed to split the freedom movement, which ultimately led to the partition of India.

Laila, the main female character and the narrator of the story, experiences the impact of the political division in her own house, when her two cousins, Saleem and Kamal join opposite camps. They too struggle for their political ideologies and suffer for them. Laila was not an active member of either the Congress or the Muslim League. Nevertheless, she cannot remain an idle observer also. When the whole country is in ferment and politics enters even the dining hall of this Orthodox Muslim family, it would be un-realistic to expect a sensitive girl like Laila to remain indoor.

Even after the partition of the country, the emotional and physical ordeals of Muslims are far from over. After some years of her marriage, Laila visits her old house and sees a complete change in the atmosphere there. The house, where she was brought up and which used to provide her with a sense of being safe and warm, occupied by strangers.

“There were strangers in the room once so private and guarded, strangers, who were only names in government files, balancing Saleem’s name against theirs” ²

It is not just the frustration arising out of usurpation of her ancestral house by the refugees, but a feeling of shame as the strangers had violated the guarded privacy of her chamber. Nevertheless, the nostalgic outburst that follows Laila’s visit to her old house, is neither a value addition to her character nor adds strength to the main thread of the story. She repents secretly that if this was the fruit of our political freedom, then she thinks she has wasted her prime time in protesting against the British rule in India. Laila would have been more and more engulfed in remorse, self-pity and frustration, but her cousin Asad’s letters brings her back to normalcy. His letters teach Laila to

2. (Ibid) P.272
cultivate faith in living. They also take her away from the feeling of self-pity, through negation of despair, into recognition of struggle and positive thinking.

Besides this little stint with politics, Laila excels in two more qualities, which strengthen her claim as a liberal character. She openly revolts against the old customs and traditions in the family, because Laila thinks that these traditions are discriminatory and oppressive to the female members of the family. Secondly, she shows remarkable courage in marrying the boy she loves. That, Laila is a social rebel and yet an amenable person, is the main consideration that helps us to accept her as a liberal character.

Laila, an educated and intelligent girl, who boldly questions the out-dated customs and traditions of her family, occupies the central stage in the novel. She is fifteen and is brought up by aunt Abida, after her parents’ untimely death. Whenever Laila behaves in an irrational manner, Abida warns her,

“My child, there are certain rules of conduct that must be observed in this world without question. You have a great responsibility. You must never forget the tradition of your family no matter to what outside influence, you must be exposed”.3

Though Abida was Laila’s friend and philosopher, her “must nots” and “should nots” do not make much impact on the latter. It is Abida who stoutly opposes the proposal of Laila’s early marriage and pleads in favour of her higher education. But the image of the family is so strong in Abida’s mind and the domestic relations are so sacred to her heart that individual hopes and aspirations can easily be sacrificed to preserve them.

According to Laila, the institution of family should be like a playground for fair play for all its members. The voice of one individual should not be throttled, under the pretext of family customs and traditions. She argues that when certain customs and traditions prevent certain younger member of the family from acting according to the diktats of his or her mind, then the elder members of the family should also be governed by the same rules. When Babajan, the grand father of Laila and the patriarch of the family, can flout (Ibid) P.38
the traditions, then youngsters should also be allowed to act in their own way, at least in the matters of their marriages. Mohsin Chacha and others paired off her younger cousin Zahara, without seeking her consent. This "taken for granted" attitude of the elders in the family towards the younger generation, Laila resents most.

Mrs Hosain tells the story of Laila, the orphaned daughter in a Talukdar's family in the United Provinces. Their women still live in Zanana and marry without a word about the groom selected by the elders. Laila revolted against this saying that she would not be "Paired off like an animal".

Western education has given her the courage to assert her individuality.

There is another instance in the novel, when Laila was pushed to the wall and she rebounces with double the force. Uncle Hamid asks Laila to desist from active participation in politics. This threat irritates Laila. She promptly hits back when her Uncle asks for her explanations.

"What do you think about it?" Hamid asked
"I consider the question irrelevant", Laila
"Have you no freedom of thought", Hamid with sarcasm
"I have no freedom of action", retorts Laila
"I will not allow any action of which I disapprove", Hamid in raised voice.
"I am well aware of my position, Hamid Chacha, I am well trained," concluded Laila.

Laila is rebellious from the beginning but this is her first open salvo, fired against male dominance in her family.

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4. (Ibid) P.29
5. (Ibid) P.160
Aunt Abida is worried about the unbridled tongue of Laila. That is why the lady remains stunned at the poignant replies of her ward. Soon after this quarrel with Uncle Hamid, Laila meets Abida separately. The Aunt tries to prevail upon the young rebel, saying that all the elders in the family are her well-wishers and all of them really love her. Laila replies bitterly that there is so much in the family that must be addressed first by these elders. Instead of that they waste their time in petty things. In that event, how can one respect them? Abida admonishes her saying that certain things in life do not change and the younger generation must accommodate and mould themselves according to the will of their elders.

Besides being a rebel, Laila is also a girl of free will. She wants to do all that she likes. When she is a postgraduate student at Aligarh Muslim University, she comes in contact with Ameer, a young history lecturer. They fall in love with each other, but Ameer is afraid that Laila’s status conscious uncle would not agree to their marriage. No one in the family is in favour of this match, except two of Laila’s cousins, Asad and Kamal, who are also anti-establishment.

There is a constant fear in the mind of Ameer that Laila would not be his, because he has nothing to give her except his love. He says,

“But Laila, I have nothing to offer you, nothing but my love”

“What more do I want?”

“I am poor, I am nobody, I am nothing, your people would never approve of me”.

“Please do not say that. I have told you, it does not matter. I am not a child. I am twenty”.6

There is very stiff opposition to this marriage, but ultimately Laila’s will prevails. She does not bother about the criticism of her kith and kin, but she is upset by the disapproval of Abida. The elderly lady repeats her old philosophy that the elders in the family should be respected. Laila also insists that elders should change according to the changing times. Conservative Muslim society cannot stomach Laila’s logic.

6. (Ibid) P.223
It should not be construed that rebellious and highly educated Laila does not believe in religion or in The Quran. She is religious but not obscurantist or fanatic. The Quran contains knowledge about all the aspects of life, but also it makes an allowance to travel even up to China to get more knowledge. In Laila's opinion, The Quran certainly considers that there is knowledge outside. Therefore, it is not correct to say, according to Laila, that Muslims should learn only The Quran and no other books. There is an instance in the novel to prove this point. When Jumman, the washer-man, tells Laila that Nandi's mother, his wife, is not well and requests Laila to bring The Quran to blow its wind on his wife’s body, she does so and also gives Jumman money to take his wife to the nearest hospital. According to Laila, religion is to purify our souls and medicine our bodies. Both are different yet very essential in our lives.

About the technique of the novel, much needs to be said. It is a fact that nostalgia, flashback, stream of consciousness and the like are often used by the writers as narrative techniques, but nostalgia exclusively used as a mode of narration, in post Independence Indian English fiction, is something to which many critics would not subscribe. For instance, David Mccutchion in his review of Sunlight On a Broken Column writes that Attia Hosain's first novel is "a minor contribution to the Indo-Anglian literature of nostalgia". As if nostalgic literature is a different kind of literature like "Black Literature" by Leroy, Jones, Elder Olson, James Baldwin and others or the "Dalit Literature" by Namdev Dhasal, Narayan Surve and many others. "Nostalgic Literature" cannot be a brand name of any particular type of literature. And, the view that nostalgic literature was profusely produced in India, after independence, is difficult to substantiate.

After Babajan's death, the novel ranges more widely to include college life, receptions and garden parties, a cross section of upper class society, reflecting the tension of the Hindu-Muslim clash, the fight between the traditionalists and modernists and also the quarrel between the nationalists and the supporters of the British Raj. Attia Hosain writes about all these issues with ease, but she does not add anything significantly to these oft-tried themes of India's freedom struggle and partition.
The novel is rather slight to develop any personality or situation deeply. It is a fact that the canvas is too crowded and some of the characters like Mrs. Martin, Babajan and Mustaribai appear to be mere caricatures. The only character, which surfaces throughout is that of Laila, but she sheds too much tears and too often becomes sad. Attia Hosain has not tried to convert this nostalgia into artistic grace. Readers guess, in the beginning itself that Laila with her "troubled, enquiring, large eyes" who long before her marriage "remembered the past and was sad", is not meant for happiness in this world. If the Indian novel in English is to attain maturity and gain universal recognition, it must abandon all these idle tears and add a little irony and intellect to the art of fiction writing.

Humayun Kabir was a prolific fiction writer between the thirties and fifties of the twentieth century. In spite of his busy political career, he devoted a great deal of time to literary pursuits. As a result, he published some important books like *Men and Rivers* (1945), *Three Stories* (1947) and *Of Cabbages and Kings* (1948).

*Men and Rivers* is an interesting novel by Kabir, wherein the author has invested the simple story with a deep significance of human values. It is a story based on the ancient legend of East Bengal, where river Padma is looked on as a merciful mother as well as mother Kali, the destroyer. Men and women living on the bank of Padma have suffered untold miseries for long. The endurance and fortitude of these children of the soil have heroic proportions. They remain steadfast in the midst of calamities and evoke our admiration. The Padma’s fury totally destroys their lives, but they never say a word against her. The river is the lifeline of the poor rustic people living on the bank. The human life, existing there, looks so fragile against the dominant presence of the Padma that she looks like a presiding deity of Rahimpur, governing the destiny of the people there. What interests more is the fact that, against all odds, the human life of love and hate goes on ceaselessly. There appear to be different gradations of human suffering due to different types of cruelty. The volatile nature and the wrath of the Padma on the one hand and mutual distrust, enmity of two friends due to a woman on the other, make the novel acquire a tight knitting of plot. The futile love between the two young people is the last stroke of misfortune.
The novel deals with good and bad times of the farmers on the banks of the Padma. They stake their lives in reclaiming land on the banks of the river for cultivation. The characterisation is superb and the characters like Nazumiya, Asghar, Ayesha are short but beautifully drawn.

Ayesha, the mother of Nazumiya, the village chief, is an outstanding character because of her exemplary courage and frankness. She is religious to the extent that any Muslim woman would be, but not a bigot. She has the rare capacity of facing life bravely and squarely. The only vulnerable point in Ayesha is her undue hurry for her grandson Malek's marriage, who is not even ten. Whenever Nazumiya opposes his mother's idea of marrying her grandson, she hurls the same reply.

"How old was your father when he married me? Do you want Malek grow into old man of eighty before you will think a bride for him?" 7

Nazumiya wants that Malek should marry after some years, but he does not dare his mother over this issue. It is an old woman's desire to fondle the bride of her grandson before she dies. Hence there is less rationality and more sentimentality in Ayesha's insistence on Malek's marriage. Except this point, there is nothing in the novel that goes against Ayesha being a liberal character.

In the matters of courage and forbearance, Ayesha outshines even the male characters in the novel. Nazumiya is the Panchayat, the village chief, of Rahimpur. He is short tempered and rash in his behaviour. He often clashes with his one time bosom friend and now a bitter enemy, Asgharmiya. Once Nazumiya and Asghar quarrel in the haat, the market place. The news reaches Ayesha. She seeks more details of the quarrel from Ramzan, the farmhand. He tells a lie to the old lady as his master has threatened him not to break the news to his mother. Ayesha flares up,

"You dare to disobey me, you tall idiot? Answer immediately or you shall have ashes instead of rice for your food"

"Please forgive me Ammajan. The Panchayat told me to keep silent"

7. Kabir Humayun, Men and Rivers, (Delhi, 1946) P.40
'You dare disobey me? Your Panchayat still remembers the flogging I gave him. And you a mere minion of his, hesitate to carry out my order?'' Ayesha stormed him.8

Being the Panchayat, Nazumiya controls his village but Ayesha controls the Panchayat. When Nazumiya returns home that evening, Ayesha bursts out whether he is not ashamed to hide things from his mother. She further warns him that his unruly tempers have already done enough damage to his life and property and concludes that he must guard himself against these weaknesses. This shows Ayesha’s courage of conviction and genuine concern of a mother to protect her son from impending dangers.

The second trait of Ayesha’s character is her fine sense of distinction between religion and pretensions about religion. A faqir comes to Dhuldi, a hamlet near Rahimpur. Ayesha feels if that holy man sets his foot in their village, people will be benefited by his religious discourses and she would also get his opinion about Malek’s marriage. She asks her son to bring that holy man to Rahimpur. But Nazumiya has some grudge against the faqir because, at his first meeting with the holy man, the Panchayat was not given a special treatment. So Nazumiya calls the faqir a holy fraud. Ayesha snaps,

'Can’t you show proper respect where it is due? You may not have regard for the faqir but I have. You should have at least respect for your mother?9

Nazumiya has to obey her because Ayesha has brought him up in such a tradition where saying 'no' to elders is viewed as an unpardonable disrespect.

When the faqir comes to the house of Nazumiya, Ayesha comes forward to pay her respects with the sari corner pulled over her head. The faqir tells Ayesha that he is like her son; hence she need not observe Purdah in his presence. The holy man advises the old lady not to hurry in the matter of her grandson’s marriage because,

'In the early days of Islam, early marriage was unknown.'10

8 (Ibid) P-36
9. (Ibid) P-38
10. (Ibid) P-49

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The third good quality that endorses her being a liberal character is her skill in managing the household. She has perfect knowledge of seasons, rains and floods, market and mosque. Besides all this, she is a good cook as well. Every year new pieces of land show up on the bank of the Padma, because of her changing of course. Farmers, who occupy them first, become masters of those lands. This year Ayesha does not permit Nazumiya to cross the river. When Nazumiya wins his mother to his side, she concedes his demand to ferry across the Padma to claim new lands. One day prior to his departure, Nazumiya has an occasion to partake the delicious food prepared by his mother.

'She cooked him a hilsa curry and fried him hilsa eggs. She made a dish of chicken in which the meat melted like butter in the mouth. Curds were there and thickened milk and semai cooked with home-made treacle. Nazumiya praised her cooking. He had eaten in many homes but in all that locality, nobody could cook like his mother.'11

Unfortunately, this is his last supper!

The character of Ayesha lives through one third of the novel, but the impact it makes on the lives of other characters is tremendous. Nazumiya is drowned in the river and after some days, Ayesha also meets her death in a similar fashion. While she lives, her courage, her frankness, her religiousness and everything of her has a special meaning. In fact, the Panchayat seems to derive strength from his mother. Ayesha encourages her son when he is right and condemns him in unambiguous terms when he is wrong. Her words are meaningful but her silence is more meaningful than her words. After the death of Nazumiya, Asghar, his bitter enemy, comes to see her. Ayesha, for a moment, looks straight into his eyes and then goes inside without a word. She does not give Asghar a chance to shed crocodile tears, otherwise he will become a spiteless good samaritan in Rahimpur. Humayun Kabir has created Ayesha's character with a combination of feminine gentleness and masculine courage.

11. (Ibid) P-40
A conservative character, as has been seen in the previous chapter, is characterised by the tendency to "retain" and not to accept any change. Conservatism does not accept any change in moral and religious principles, which have been associated with a religion. They consider it as an act of sacrilege to brook changes in the religious customs and traditions. Some religions allow changes, according to the changing times, but some religions do not accept any change. Islam comes under the second category.

In the present chapter, an attempt is made to study the conservative Muslim women characters created by Muslim fiction writers. In Inqilab, written by K.A.Abbas, almost all Muslim women characters are conservative. In spite of their Western education these characters tend to be meek and submissive. An in-depth study of Salmah Saleem in Inqilab helps us to know what goes into the making of such characters.

Inqilab, started in May 1949 at Bombay was completed in May 1949 at Cape-Comorin. This novel vividly brings forth, before our mind's eyes, many momentous incidents that have been engulfed by history. The novel starts with the Khilafat Movement, which is one of the movements, which brought Independence to India.

This novel chronicles India's struggle for freedom. The story starts in 1933, describing a middle class Muslim home in Delhi. Anwar, the hero of the novel, is a young boy then. The description of Anwar's household is quite realistic, for instance Phoopi Amma worrying about Anwar's health or Gulabo, the maid, telling stories of the houries to lull the boy to sleep and so on.

In that quiet house, the heat of politics increases, along with the growing up of Anwar.

Anwar has an occasion to go to Lahore, in connection with the business that his father and uncle Rameshwar Dayal are doing in partnership. There also we find the vivid and graphic picture of the Jalianwala Bag massacre.
'The rifles kept barking, the bullets came flying in an uninterrupted steam, men and women and children full everywhere, there were screams and moans exits, people laid left behind their shoes and turbans and even their dhotis, those who lay on the ground were trampled on by those who were running and once Anwar’s leg was almost fractured as a heavy boot landed on it.'

The second picture that attracts our attention is of a meeting between Anwar and Mahatma Gandhi at the house of Doctor Ansari. Noticing Anwar’s Khaddar trouser and sherwani, the old man was pleased and he speaks about Khadi, its role in the freedom struggle and how Khadi has become a symbol of patriotism and national pride. Anwar is slightly disappointed with the praise of Khadi, because he is preoccupied with the growing tension between the Hindus and Muslims. He wants to tell Gandhiji how the poison of communalism is slowly spreading through society and further seek remedy from him. Words fail him and his voice chokes. He feels helpless and miserable. He bursts into tears.

The third picture, which is the focal point of this novel and which will be taken separately for an indepth study, describes Anwar joining Aligarh Muslim University and falling in love with Salmah. Anwar and his friends meet the young and dynamic Jawaharlal in a train at Aligarh railway station. Jawaharlal gives them the message "live dangerously".

Ratan is an anarchist friend of Anwar. The latter gives shelter to Ratan in his room in the hostel for which he is debarred from University. Angered by this incident, Anwar manages to get a pass to enter the Assembly Chamber at Delhi. Bhagatsing makes use of that pass and throws bomb in the Assembly. He is arrested immediately. Then comes the Lahore Congress and the brilliant speech of its president, Jawaharlal Nehru, spewing fire against the British rule, runs as follows,

"We have now an open conspiracy to free this country from foreign rule, and you comrades, our countrymen and country women are invited to join it. But the rewards that are in store for you are suffering, imprisonment and may even be death." 

2. (I bid) P.238
Back home in Delhi, Anwar's father supports Muslim League and Anwar follows the Congress. The political atmosphere in the country is full of dissension and distrust. His uncle Taya Amjad Ali, accompanied by his brother Akbar Ali, addresses a public gathering in which he stirs the communal feelings of a particular community. Anwar also speaks refuting what his uncle spoke.

When all of them go home, Taya Amjad Ali declares in anger that Anwar is the son of Rameshwar, by a prostitute named Chammia Bai, which is why he betrayed the trust of a Muslim, Akbar Ali. Anwar rushes to the house of that woman, but he is tongue-tied to say anything to her. She notices Anwar's modesty and says 'Go home, son'. These words sound so sweet to Anwar that he gathers much respect for her. Others also call him 'my son' affectionately.

"But the words have never sounded so sweet, so tender, so full of life's most elemental emotion, as it was uttered by this degraded woman, this agent of Satan, this daughter sin, and this mother of his." 3

Then he goes back to Akbar Ali and rushes into the waiting arms of his fathers.

Against this backdrop of terrible political upheavals and breaking of bones and cracking of human relations, the love story of Anwar and Salmah emerges beautifully to provide some relief to the readers. Though this love story acts as a counter-balancing feat to the high-tension political drama that is being enacted in the novel, it also adds to the frustration and disbelief of Anwar. Amongst quite a few novels, written against the background of our country's freedom struggle and its subsequent partition, this novel is unique. In the novels "Train to Pakistan" (1956); "Azadi" (1975), "A Bend in the Ganges" (1964), "The Dark Dancer" (1958), two things are common, partition of the country and frustration in love. But Anwar's story is different. He is made to go through all sorts of agonies, physical, mental, domestic and national. In Inqilab not only countries are partitioned but human hearts are also being partitioned. For this reason, the novel is unique.

3. (Ibid) P.248
Miss Salmah Saleem, the convent educated daughter of professor Saleem, the foreign returned Head of the Department of political science, at the University of Aligarh, falls in love with Anwar. We can study Salmah's character in two ways: the physical environment in which she has been brought up and the psychological world into which she often escapes.

In the first instance, Anwar the hero of the novel finds her in a train as,

"It was a girl in white, hardly fifteen or sixteen with a halo of curly back hair, framing a beautiful oval-face. He had the impression of a pair of big, dark, innocent eyes seeking some body".4

Salmah has had a lonely and unhappy childhood. Her mother wanted her to learn The Quran, but her father likes to hear his daughter sing 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' at his parties. If the father wants Salmah wear plain frocks, like the European children, her mother loads her with glittering brocades and silks. Between the two, Salmah feels helpless and frustrated, getting no chance to do what she likes.

There is a wide gulf between Professor Saleem and his conservative wife. With all his wisdom and knowledge of the world, the learned Professor fails to bridge the gap between them. His wife dies in an epidemic.

In this way Salmah is brought up in a home charged with hostility, bitterness and dissension. As a result, she acquired a lot of dubious knowledge, which is neither natural nor helpful for a child. In order to escape from this tension and cruel loneliness, the girl cultivates the habit of living within herself. Professor Saleem sends her to a convent school at Nainital, but the girl does not forget anything she learnt from her mother, in her early years. The internal conflict continues in the school also,

"Because of her mother, her roots were planted deep in the soil of that loneliness, which her father wanted to destroy by sending her to a convent school. Though she learnt English accent and had a taste for English literature, she was not reconciled to the Anglo-Indian way of life".5

4. (Ibid) P.150
That is why Salmah is considered a conservative character of a middle class family.

Though there are two contrary pulls, simultaneously operating on Salmah's mind, she does not appear to be a split personality. She is never caught in the dilemma of "to do or not to do". Her only aim in life is to get an I.C.S husband and lead a luxurious life. The Professor is a farsighted man who does not want to leave the choice of a husband to the whims and fancies of his daughter. That is why he is after Anwar, who he thinks I.C.S stuff. He ponders,

"Anwar seemed to him as a probable raw material. He was fresh looking, pleasant mannered, intelligent, he had modern views and would not keep his wife in Pardah. He will easily pass his Civil Service exams with little coaching. Salmah would become the wife of a Collector which after all was the highest position to which a girl would reasonably aspire".6

This is the ultimate goal Salmah wants to achieve in life.

Later on Anwar plunges into the 'Quit-India Movement', which shocks the Professor. Deep down in the heart of Anwar, there is a disturbing question about his future. Whether his life should be moulded according to the selfish motives of one particular individual or by the events still in the womb of time and forces as big as history. Anwar decides in favour of the latter. He is sure that the path he has chosen would ultimately take him to jail. Therefore, he asks Salmah to wait till he comes out of jail. She does not agree to this proposal. Then Anwar suggests that they should marry without further loss of time. Salmah is ready for this with a condition that Anwar should give up politics. She tells him that her Papa and Manzoor also want the same. Anwar realises,

"The scales seem to drop from his eyes. So, that was it! He was acceptable as a lover and as a husband so long as he was prospective I.C.S. But by himself, he was not wanted".7

6. (Ibid) P.152
7. (Ibid) P.244
Secondly, Salmah's psychological makeup is equally confused. There are two defects in her nature; her child-like possessive instinct and her indecisiveness about her future. These psychological infirmities often creep into her decision-making procedures, because she was not allowed to do things on her own. Sometimes she looks like her Mama's child and some other times, her Papa's. One interesting example can be taken to know about her possessiveness. Anwar holds Salmah's hand in the theater and later he disengages it to applaud when Jawaharlal appears in the newsreel on the screen. Salmah fumes,

"Why did you take away your hand from me?"

"To join in the applause when Jawaharlal Nehru appeared" Anwar said.

"So, Jawaharlal is more important to you than I am."

The same question she repeats four times in the novel.

"So, that Ramlal of yours is more to you that I am". (P.192)

"To you, your politics and your Gandhi and Jawaharlal mean more than my love". (P.243)

"It just meant that you don't love me". (P.243)

In fact, Salmah does not want Anwar to love any one and anything other than herself; be it Gandhi or even the freedom of our country! Every thing else should come after her love. It is a strong possessive instinct in a human being that does not allow him or her to look at others in proper perspectives.

Secondly, her indecisiveness also makes an interesting point of study. When Professor Saleem comes to know that it is not possible to pull Anwar back from the freedom movement, the shrewd man introduces one Manzoor Hussein, the Superintendent of Police of Aligarh to Salmah. Surprisingly, the girl becomes favourably inclined towards

8. (Ibid) P.183
the police officer immediately. What does she want in life? It is only comforts and more comforts. It does not matter whether those comforts come from a Collector of a Police Officer or even from a Forest Officer! When a better candidate is available, all her promises made to Anwar melt like ice in the sun. If she really loved Anwar, she would have waited for him or would have married him at that very moment, as Anwar suggested. Certainly, Salmah does not want to marry a man, she wants to marry an idea, an idea of being happy, some how!

If she really loves Anwar, she could have protested against her father's decision to introduce Manzoor as Anwar's rival or substitute. In fact, she should have prevailed upon her father to accept Anwar as his son-in-law, along with his political ideology. That does not happen. Salmah lacks the courage of conviction to speak out what she thinks right. That is why her convent education, her love for English poetry, her pride of being the only daughter of a foreign returned Professor, all these disappear in the process and she remains an ordinary conservative Muslim girl.

*Inqilab* is the story of the great revolution that ultimately brought independence to India. It represents a magnificent cross-section of the entire country, during its most critical period.

In these pages, the readers meet the great leaders like Lokamanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Motilal Nehru, the Patel brothers and so on. Another significant point is, each one of them is represented in his own ideological setting.

The following landmarks of the freedom struggle, the Jallianwala Bag, the No-Tax campaign in Gujarat, the Dandi March, the Civil Disobedience Movement, along with mammoth processions and lathi charges, all have been vividly portrayed. That is why; *Inqilab* becomes a living monument to the great fight for India's independence.

In a lucid style and with an unusual warmth, Abbas proceeds with a narrative form, which emerge more than a dozen powerful and unforgettable characters. Akbar Ali,
Rameshwar Dayal, Taya Amjad Ali, Raoof, Salmah, Raaz, Osman, Subhan, Roy and others. These are the souls whose lives are moulded by the great nationalistic force and when the resurgent waves subside, once again they float on the calm ripples, undirected and unguided.

The story is well told, although the author's aim is to link up the struggle of Indian Independence with the life of a nationalist Muslim youth. The style is lucid and the language, inter-spersed with Urdu words, commonly used by other novelists like Mulk Raj Anand and Khushwant Sing, is used for the sake of local tinge.

As this novel is a historical chronicle, many other characters enter and exit and many events take place in quick succession. Therefore, sometimes it becomes difficult to keep count of the events and individuals. However, characters like Anwar and Ratan are drawn realistically. The narrative is spontaneous and powerful, because there are few sub-plots linked.

For 'Plot', the whole struggle of Indian freedom is covered. A kaleidoscopic panorama of fast moving events, each one episodic in nature, and yet properly composed and adjusted, capture our attention from the beginning. *Inqilab*, finally turns out to be a powerful, historical and realistic novel that sways the attention of all types of readers.

Twilight in Delhi is another interesting novel depicting the middle-class Muslim life. It clearly indicates the decaying signs of the Muslim community in and around Delhi with its pigeon flying, kite flying, visiting the houses of mistresses and so on. We also see the dirt, filth, marriages, superstitions and multiplying children. Ahmed Ali has given an exquisite picture of Delhi Muslims with an accurate depiction of their social and cultural activities. The description of birth and death, marriage and separation, wives and co-wives and so on, is authentic. One point, that surprises the reader, is the fact that none of his women characters show any intellectual growth. There seems to be no other purpose in their lives except getting married and begetting children. Begum Nihal and Begum Jamal are found either slicing potatoes or quarreling over non-issues.
Begum Mir Nihal is another conservative character in Twilight in Delhi. 'A woman clinging fast to the institutions of family and marriage' can be the one-line description of Begum Nihal. Her day begins with morning prayers, followed by reading of The Quran and ends with a prayer. She is excessively proud of her pure blood and ancient family. The pride of being unique is the product of her inherent conservatism.

In one way, her conservatism is her strength because she believes that what all happens, happens according to the Will of God. Therefore, she takes all the events, good or bad, in her stride and strives to keep the show going.

Two of her sons are married and are living away because of their jobs. Her eldest daughter, Waheeda, loses her husband at an early age. Her husband, Mir Nihal, fathers a child on her maid and also his visits to Babban Jan, a young courtesan, turn Begum Nihal near mad. She is forced to live in the dark house of uncle Bashir. It is suspected that the Begum is possessed. Talismans are tied, Pirs are consulted and potions of herbal medicines are administered to her. In fact, the Begum is not the victim of any ghost or spirit but of her husband's dishonesty. She is soon overpowered by the sway of enormous powers of the male dominant society. Therefore, she decides to take life as it comes.

Misfortunes never come singly. As she slowly recovers her mental health, her last son, Asghar, raises the banner of revolt. He decides to marry Bilqueece. Begum Nihal is opposed to this marriage because of their high social status. Asghar threatens to commit suicide if he is not allowed to marry Bilqueece. Begum Waheed convinces her mother of the inevitability of this marriage. The Begum, in turn, prevails upon her husband in an intelligent way and gets his permission for Asghar's marriage with Bilqueece.

Soon after marriage, Asghar grows more romantic and talks endlessly about her beauty and grace in order to provoke Bilqueece in love. Having received no matching response, Asghar gets disappointed and asks,
"Why are you so quite?"
"I don't know what to say" 17

Bilqueece's mother, Begum Shahbaz, visits her daughter often and whatever she tutors, the daughter repeats. Asghar becomes disappointed at the parrot like behaviour of his wife. He has always imagined that all the beautiful women around love him very much. At times, he would imagine himself to be a Rajput Knight or Mughal Prince, rescuing a love-lorn lady. But Bilqueece was so un-romantic and insipid that her husband starts keeping himself away from her. After sometime, Asghar takes fancy to Bilqueece's younger sister. Begum Shahbaz, Bilqueece's mother, tries charms, ashes, talismans and so on to bring Asghar back to his wife, but it is of no avail.

One day, Shahbaz Begum deliberately picks up a quarrel with her son-in-law, saying that he doesn't have any love left for his wife. Already frustrated with the daily bickerings with his wife, Asghar loses his cool and shouts that he would commit suicide. The narrator says,

"Bilqueece felt as if she has dropped the looking glass and it was shattered to pieces and her own image was broken into particles of glasses. A storm of self pity rose within her breast and tears began to stream down her face." 18

Her image, breaking into so many pieces, symbolically suggests that she has lived out her time and her death is imminent. Soon after this event, she dies of tuberculosis.

The important question is why has Bilqueece become so frigid. Generally speaking girls are spontaneous, though not overt, in the matters of romance before marriage, but Bilqueece's frigidity is due to the strict supervision of her mother in her childhood.

Till eighteen, she lives in an atmosphere of fear and threat, wherein women are not supposed to cherish desires and passions of their own. She is taught to live with many

18. (Ibid) P.216
‘don’ts’ than ‘dos’. An unmarried girl is not allowed to chew pan or wear flowers in her hair. She should not use fine, expensive dresses and scents. She has to live constantly under the threat of being sent away to a stranger’s house. By her traditional education and hearsay, she is made to believe that passion is the worst kind of sin. That is, probably, the reason why Bilqueece has grown so unromantic.

There could be another reason why Bilqueece has been so dull witted. Her constant fear of being ‘un-wanted’ in her husband’s family must have made her lose interest in life. At the time of her marriage with Asghar, Mir Nihal, Asghar’s father, takes strong objection saying that the girl is of impure blood. In Bilqueece’s family someone, somewhere, had married some maidservant. So, Bilqueece’s family and her blood are impure. The self same Mir Nihal easily forgets that he has also had a child from his maid, Dil Chain, still his family remains prestigious. Such events in the novel throw light on the hypocrisy and hearsay that were pervading the Muslim society of the late nineteenth century.

The second reason is, the Nihals are Sayyids, the descendents of the Prophet’s clan, whereas Bilqueece’s family is Mughal. Somehow, the marriage is materialised but it leaves bitter taste in the mouth of Bilqueece.

The opposition in the beginning, turns into affection towards Bilqueece as days pass. Begum Nihal becomes fond of her daughter-in-law because of her ‘cow’ like quality. Mir Nihal has some reservations in the beginning but after sometime he also softens his stand. One evening he asks,

“Who has cooked this dish today?”

“Asghar’s Dulhan. Why, is it badly cooked?”

“No, not bad. Not bad at all and he smiled”\(^{19}\)

In spite of her loving husband and caring parents-in-law, Bilqueece dies of tuberculosis. The disease is very common among the women in Purdah, as they do not go in the sun nor breathe fresh air.

\(^{19}\) (Ibid) P.190
Mir Nihal was getting enough money from his land and shops to run his household, and what he earns from his own business, is spent on Baban Jan, the courtesan. He does not give anything to his Begum, except some money for sundry household expenses. Begum Nihal bears it calmly and protects her family from slipping into disintegration. She accepts her fate quietly.

There is striking uniformity in the philosophy of life among the conservative middle class Muslim women. Begum Mehtab Jilani in Death of a Hero, by M.R. Anand appealingly speaks out, what it is to be born a woman in a Muslim society. She says,

'I was born a woman. So, it was no use my protesting against fate. I had to accept and acceptance brought contentment.'

Thus, when decay and disintegration creep into a community because of its stagnation and inertia, as is seen in the Muslim community in Ahmed Ali's novel, it is the women like Begum Nihal, who work overtime to stem the rot and save the family from disaster.

The same family, the same atmosphere and the same upbringing; one person becomes rebellious like Laila and the other remains a conservative like Zahra. The latter was a lucky girl because, though less educated, she marries Naseer, a government servant in a high position.

One point, that the readers do not miss while reading the novels written by Muslim writers is, the fact that no sooner does the girl reach her 'teenage', than an unusual hurry starts in the family about her marriage. Whether it is Inquilab or Twilight in Delhi or Sunlight On a Broken Column, one finds the same haste to accomplish marriages of girls in the family.

Zahra is extremely happy when Mohsin uncle brings a proposal for her. She has all the qualities of a would be bride.

20. Anand, Mulk Raj, Death of a Hero. (Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1963) P-80
Zahra said her prayers five times a day, read Quran an hour every morning, sewed and knitted and wrote the accounts.21

Surprisingly, one detail is missing from the above list that Zahra is capable of cooking different varieties of mutton and chicken. Zahra remains tongue-tied while uncle Mohsin is speaking about the boy. Her silence is taken to be her willingness and the proposal was accepted.

Laila doesn’t like this ‘taken for granted’ attitude of men towards women. According to The Quran, unless the consent of the girl is obtained, even through a nod, no proposal from the groom’s side can be accepted, nor marriage can be solemnized. It means that whatever freedom is granted to woman by The Quran, is taken away by man. However, the ritual of seeking the consent of the bride is being practiced in Muslim marriages even today. Laila resents this practice of fixing a marriage without girl’s consent and walks out of the meeting. Later Zahra asks Laila,

'I suppose you think you will never get married'

'I won’t be paired off like an animal. How could you sit there listening to them talking as if you were a bit of furniture to be sold to the highest bidder.'22

These words do not have any impact on Zahra and she taunts Laila whether she finds a husband herself or marries a man whom she loves, as is done by the English women.

Asad and Zahid are two cousins of Zahra. In due course of time, tender feelings develop between Asad and Zahra. However, the girl has different ideas about her marriage. She wants to become the wife of a rich man. Having encouraged Asad in the beginning, Zahra retreats later because her dream of marrying a ‘big’ government officer should not be shattered. Laila does not like Zahra’s selfishness.

22. (Ibid) PP.29-30
Asad is hurt in the riots of Muharrum and is brought home for treatment in a half conscious state. Aunt Majida, Zahra's mother, Laila and Zahra herself rush to attend to Asad. The groping hand of Asad catches Zahra's dupatta and he moans,

‘Zahra, darling, Zahra, don't leave me
don't ever leave me, Zahra, Zahra'\textsuperscript{23}

The cat is out of the basket. Aunt Majida determines to marry her daughter at the earliest.

Zahra marries Naseer and she is very happy in her new house. Once in a year she goes to the European countries to spend the summer holidays. This year she times her visit to Lucknow to coincide with the week of the Vice Regal visit to the city. Aunt Saira and Zahra become busy in organising and attending parties. Zahra's westernised lifestyle and affected etiquettes make her a different person. Laila says,

‘Zahra had changed very much in her appearance, speech and mannerism. I know she has not changed within herself. She was now playing the part of a perfect modern wife as she had once played the part of a dutiful Purdah girl. Just once she had said her prayers five times a day, now she attended social functions morning, afternoon and evening'\textsuperscript{24}

Zahra's change of dress does not make her a changed woman. Her thoughts remain the same and her definition of life also remains the same. Zahra's little education and blind acceptance of age-old customs of her family, make her a typical conservative character. Aunt Saira, Hamid's wife, also comes from a Purdah wearing family, but to maintain the status of the Talukdars of Oudh, Saira smokes, attends parties and bears no good opinion about the freedom movement. Along with Saira, Zahra also joins the 'Love the British Ladies Club'.

While Zahra of Attia Hossain is pleasure hunting and opposed to the freedom movement, the Zohra of Zeenat Futehally is a thorough nationalist woman.

\textsuperscript{23} (Ibid) P-80

\textsuperscript{24} (Ibid) P-140
Zohra, by Zeenath Futehally, also depicts the changing panorama of Muslim social life. Zohra's proud father, the Nawab Saheb, calls his daughter 'a bright star in Heaven'. She is an intelligent, young woman, fired with the zeal of nationalism and service to the poor. As was the vogue in the feudal Muslim society, marriage of a daughter is the first duty of the parents. Zohra's natural instincts for individual freedom and country's freedom are ignored and she is married to an industrialist.

In Zohra, we find the Gandhian ideology coming in conflict with the materialism pursued by Zohra's husband. Zohra stands torn between the old feudal life-style that was dying out and the new wave of nationalism. Contemporary politics and the Gandhian movement are interwoven with the life-story of Zohra.

Zohra and her husband are poles apart in their perspectives on life. The former is a social worker, with a national zeal, while the latter wants fast industrial growth to acquire enough wealth to lead a happy life. The one is far sighted and kind hearted who is ready to help the poor and needy and the other is myopic and always thinks about his luxurious life. Therefore, when Zohra's husband expresses doubt over the Gandhian philosophy of social revolution, Zohra replies,

'Is not Mahatma Gandhi doing that? Only this a new way of revolution. But it will surely lead to the regeneration of India.'  

In this event, Zeenat Futehally shows the glimpses of the Purdah-nasheen Muslim women. She also deals with the problem of polygamy. Zohra's mother is so self sacrificing that when she fails to beget a son, she requests her husband to take another wife. She promises that the young bride would be a,

'younger sister to me, your son then will be my son too'  

25. Futehally, Zeenath, Zohra, (Hind Kitab, Bombay, 1951) P-123
26. (Ibid) P-51
Zohra's mother-in-law also finds out a second wife for her husband. When she comes to know that her husband has married her for getting a son and his real love is his second wife, she turns shrewish and makes his life hell. Zohra herself does not love her husband who is too senior in age and selfish in nature. She is attracted towards her brother-in-law, Hamid, a nationalist young man. She is unhappy in her married life and instead of quarrelling with her husband, she turns to social service.

Zohra's liking for Hamid was buried in her heart because she finds herself too weak to revolt and openly confess her love for Hamid. The animal like treatment given to her also does not make her to stand against it. The Purdah-nasheen family, which acts like an octopus, does not allow her to take any liberty.

Some of the Muslim women characters have revolutionary ideas. They want to revolt against male dominance, which is against the teachings of Islam. They have good ideas but no courage to translate them into action. That is why they are considered conservative characters. Such characters often submit themselves to male chauvinism, due to the fear that their questioning attitude would be construed as an anti-Islamic act and an act that goes against the established family norms.

It is observed in the previous chapter that the Muslim women characters created by non-Muslim writers have well-defined scope and range behind their creation. One thing that strikes even a casual reader is the fact that little effort is made by these fiction writers to penetrate the mind of those characters and unravel their different psychological strands. Most of these non-Muslim novelists consider only what meets their eyes. They sketch a character filling in the gaps with stock ideas or fixed notions they have about Muslim women. Thus, they create stereotypes rather than individual characters. The writers fail to fathom the mind of the Muslim women and also fail to see symbolic meaning behind their activities. That is why, though the Muslim women characters created by non-Muslim writers have sufficient range and scope, they lack in purpose and penetration.

If the same criterion of scope and range is applied to analyse the Muslim women character created by Muslim writers, one finds discouraging results. These characters
lack not only range and scope vis-à-vis their counter parts, created by non-Muslim writers but also lack efforts by the writers to read the mind of their characters. There are, however, one or two exceptions.

Laila, in *Sunlight On a Broken Column* is a female character with a difference. She is educated and hence there is some logic in what she says and does. Her family may not digest her rebellious ideas but her pleading that her marriage is her personal affair and no uncle and aunt can dictate his or her will under the pretext of family traditions, social status, purity of blood and so on. This boldness and her courage of conviction comes to Laila because of her Western education.

It does not mean that Laila does not value the teachings of *The Quran*. A Muslim, who entertains even a little doubt about the teachings of *The Quran*, ceases to be a Muslim, the same moment. Laila firmly believes in *The Quran* that it is the ultimate book of knowledge but *The Quran* itself suggests that there is knowledge outside its domain. That is why the Holy Book strongly recommends every Muslim to go up to China, if need be, to acquire knowledge. *The Quran* does not say, come unto me, I have everything, but says go and search for knowledge anywhere you like. This is what *The Quran* says and this is what a Muslim ought to believe.

In the light of the above, one can interpret Laila's following act. Jumman, the washerman's wife is taken ill. He asks Laila to bring *The Quran* and blow her breath over his ailing wife. Laila does this and immediately gives him some amount to take her to a hospital. The traditional Muslim scholarship might call this act un-Islamic or that true Muslim cannot act the way Laila does. So she is an imperfect Muslim woman. *The Quran* intends to say that it was Duwa (blessings) but Dava (medicine) can be had from wherever it is available. The Prophet himself recommends about thirteen hundred drugs in his book "*Tibbaye Nabi*" (the medicine of the Prophet); which do not find reference in *The Quran*. It indicates that neither *The Quran* nor the Prophet of Islam, prohibit seeking remedies outside. It is only the obscurantist who either hide the facts of *The Quran* or deliberately misinterpret them. Therefore, the novelist ascribes symbolic meaning to the efforts of Laila, who is a crusader to guard woman's liberty.
This symbolic meaning evades the non-Muslim writers. Laila's revolt against class distinction and false social status, are also quite in keeping with the teachings of The Quran. In this way, Laila is a major exception to the other flat Muslim women characters.

To some extent, Ayesha, in Men and Rivers, is also a different character because of her courage, modesty and maternal kindness towards all her subordinates. She conducts herself in such a dignified manner that most men respect her. It appears that only two feminine elements rule Rahimpur; one, the Padma and the second Ayesha herself. However, her only vulnerability is her strong desire to marry her grandson at an early age.

Except these two characters, the other Muslim women characters are mere stereotypes. There is no variety and no effort at providing any rationale behind their activities. Of the four conservative characters, three are flat characters, moving around a set formula - teenage marriage, luxury hunting, Purdah, polygamy and their bad effects. Salmah was possessed with one idea, how to get an ICS husband. Bilqueece gets a good husband but her frigidity makes her suffer. Zohra suffers incompatibility and Mrs Nihal is an appropriate case of conservative character to illustrate how Muslim woman suffers untold miseries because of Purdah and polygamy. Due to narrow range and near absence of an effort to study female psychology, the conservative Muslim woman characters, created by Muslim writers leave much to be desired.

After having studied the liberal and conservative Muslim women characters, created by Muslim fiction writers, it is proper to compare and contrast the women characters created by both Muslim and non-Muslim fiction writers. When one compares these two groups, one is likely to find that the Muslim women characters drawn by Muslim writers suffer both quantitatively and qualitatively, vis-à-vis the Muslim women depicted by non-Muslim fiction writers. The entire process of comparison would be reasoned out in the following manner.

1. Numerically, the Muslim women characters, created by Muslim writers are less than those of the non-Muslim writers. The reason could be, Muslim writers are less in ratio to their population in India. However, this argument does not hold good always. For instance, the population of the Brahmins is less than five percent, but their writings, in any field, are far more than the writings of other groups.
2. Regarding the qualitative assessment of these two groups, it has been already seen that the Muslim women of non-Muslim writers, have range and scope to a considerable extent but as far as the study of female psychology is concerned, these writers remain un-involved. They have not bothered to go near Muslim women for many reasons, hence created stereotypes. The case of Muslim writers is different. Except in few cases, Muslim fiction writers have failed on all fronts like scope, range and purpose.

3. Another point to be considered is the fact that, of the twelve Muslim women characters created by non-Muslim writers, eight are directly or indirectly concerned with India's politics. Either politics is influenced by women like Fakrun-nissa, or politics influences women like Rehana, Rahati, Nur, Nadira and Karima. The Begum Saheba in Heat and Dust is against the racial prejudice of the British, and Zubeda, Fatima, the desert women of Keki Daruwalla, are victims of inhuman tribal laws.

On the other hand, out of six Muslim women characters, created by the Muslim novelists, only two women, Laila and Zohra, have some concern with country's politics. Others are involved with their household chores. The Muslim women of non-Muslim writers are bold and assertive, whereas those of the second group are shy and timid. They lack in drive and don't seem to have the achieving instincts.

Another significant question is, why are there only few liberal Muslim women characters created by Muslim writers? One obvious explanation could be, liberalism, per se, is against the spirit of Islam? That is why there are less liberal women in the fiction of Muslim writers.

The next question is, why is the Muslim woman not liberal? It is because Muslims, most of them, in any part of the world, have not met with the renaissance. It is common knowledge that religions, with 'Divine Books' like Islam, Judaism and Christianity, strictly adhere to their Testaments. They do not allow or even think of any change in their religious principles. That is why they remain conservative. Christianity and Judaism came in contact with the individualistic cultures like the Greek and Roman. As a result, they became progressive. Muslims refused contact with them. Religious arrogance and suspicion caused more than a hundred years of wars between Muslims and Christians.
Thus, at one stage, Muslims were isolated and they remained conservative. Secondly, the ill-founded fear that, if a Muslim woman learns anything, other than The Quran, it is an act of sacrilege. This strange and selfish ideology had kept Muslim women in a dark dungeon perennially. This is an un-Islamic act.

The sword of sacrilege always hangs only on the head of the Muslim woman and not of man. Muslim parents willingly give any type of education to their sons and the same privilege is denied to their daughters. The Quran declares very often that man and woman are equal in the eyes of God. Then, who made this distinction? And why? The myopic Islamic clergy tells that giving western education to Muslim women is a devilish trap of some of the westernised Muslims. This is un-characteristic of Islam. The Quran says that to acquire any kind of knowledge, which would benefit humanity, one can go even to the other side of the globe.

Thirdly, the Purdah system shuts Muslim women from the outside world. They remain cut off from the instinctive social interactions and are backward.

The Quran is certainly not responsible for the present sad plight of the Muslim woman. It is the clergy or the lawmakers like Wajid II, who have rendered woman miserable. That is why it is said that 'woman' is not born but made. Neena Arora quotes from Simen De Beauvoir’s The Second Sex.

‘One is not born woman but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economical fate determines that figure, that the human female present in the society. It is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature.’

It is, by now, common knowledge that the Muslim women depicted by Muslim fiction writers are, by and large, inadequate. They are deficient in range and scope. These women do not seem to conceive and communicate any purpose. Contrary to this class of subdued, lazy and myopic Muslim women, created in Indian English fiction, by Muslim writers, the Muslim women created by the same class of writers in vernacular languages, are more impressive.

27. Neena Arora, A Comparative Study of Mrs Sahagul and Doris Lessing, (Prestige Publications, New Delhi, 1991) P-40
A comparison between these two groups of Muslim women would help readers understand them both in a better way. For this purpose, Sara Abubakkar, a Kannada writer and Vaikom Mohammad Basheer, a Malayalam writer have been chosen.

Sara Abubakkar, one of the most powerful Muslim writers in Kannada, was born in Kasargodu, now in Kerala, in the family of P.Ahmed, an eminent advocate. Sara has the distinction of being the first Muslim girl to have passed S.S.L.C. in that part of Karnataka. She started her literary career by writing poems and short stories. Her Kannada novel, Chandragiriya Teeradalli (On the Banks of Chandragiri), was first serialized in the famous Kannada weekly Lankesh Patrike. Mother of four children, widely travelled, Sara today wields pen to counter the irreligious dogmas, which victimise the Muslim woman.

River Chandragiri takes its birth in the Western ghats and glides Westwards. After some distance, it changes its course and flows in the North-south direction, before it meets the Arabian Sea. A small village, Kiliyuru, is situated to the East and Bagodu to the West of the river. Mohammed Khan, along with his two daughters Nadira and Jameela and wife Fatima, lives in Kiliyuru. He marries his elder daughter Nadira to Rashid, a petty shop owner of Bagodu village. Young Jameela rolls beedis to augment the family income. Nadira and Rashid live very happily.

Mohammad Khan falls short of one thousand rupees for the marriage of Jameela. He asks Rashid for money, the latter refuses. A quarrel ensues and the angry Mohammad Khan declares that he will seek Nadira’s divorce from Rashid. The father tells a lie that his daughter herself is not ready to live with her husband, who has insulted her father. Good sense does not prevail upon both of them and in a fit of anger, Rashid repeats, in the presence of the Moulvi, ‘Talaq’, ‘Talaq’, ‘Talaq’ and a happy marriage is broken.

In the meantime, Rashid’s mother takes her grandson away from Nadira, which turns her almost mad. Mohammad Khan thinks of marrying Nadira to a rich widower, who was of his own age. The girl stoutly refuses it. A novel idea of re-uniting Nadira and Rashid strikes Mohammad Khan, and this is the crux of the problem. He does not know
that such re-marriages, in Islam, are more humiliating than the most ignoble death. When there is a contingency of re-marrying one’s divorced wife, the woman should marry another man, share bed with him at least one night. The next day, that woman should be divorced by her second husband and then only she can re-marry her previous husband. Accordingly, one Ali, a farmhand of fifty, was ready to marry Nadira for new clothes and nice food. The marriage was performed and Nadira, instead of entering her bedroom, enters the deep, cold waters of river Chandragiri.

This novel is written with a social message; though divorce is allowed in Islam under extreme conditions, it cannot be resorted to in a fit of anger and re-marriage with the same spouse is very, very humiliating. So, while uttering ‘Talaq’ thrice, the man should know that he is going to close the door over his wife once and for all. In her brief foreward, Sara quotes extensively from the stanza 230 of the Second Chapter of The Quran, ‘Al Bakr’, to say that when co-existence becomes impossible, man can seek divorce pronouncing the word ‘Talaq’ once in a month, for three consecutive months. During that period, husband and wife should stay together under the same roof. This is the last chance for reconciliation between them. During these days if they share bed, the previous said ‘Talaq’ becomes null and void. However, man twists The Quranic injunctions to his advantage. He utters all the three ‘Talaqs’ in one breath, so that he should be free to marry again soon. Sara Abubakkar has taken very strong objection to this biased interpretation of The Quran.

Secondly, in the event of the divorced woman willing to re-marry the same man. The Quan prescribes a strange remedy but the greedy man twisted it to his benefit again. So, the ‘one-night-marriage’ is man’s trick. The Quran intends to proclaim that after her first divorce, the woman can marry a second man. If the second marriage also breaks down, due to any reason, then she is free to re-marry the first man. In other words, if the second husband is not ready to divorce her or the second marriage does not break down on its own, then she should forget her idea of remarrying her first husband. This being the reality, man arranges for ‘one-night-marriage’ to get his desires fulfilled immediately.
More than the artistic skill of the novelist, what appeals to the readers most in this novel is, the writer’s sincerity of purpose in asking her readers to study The Quran by themselves to know what rights the Holy Book has given to them and why they have been denied. This novel does not provoke women to revolt against men, but it issues an appeal to Muslim men not to impose inhuman and un-Islamic restrictions on women. The anguish of the novelist is expressed by Nadira,

'As these men tell, to spend a night with another man and offer our body to him, are we beasts from the jungle. These men are treating us as if we are animals without heart.'

All the miseries befall women only. At any point of time, for any of his deeds, man need not give any explanation to any one as to why he divorces his wife. As long as he chooses, he lives with his wife, otherwise, he finds an excuse to divorce her. This is against the spirit of Islam. Sara has vehemently attacked this licentiousness.

Such a powerful delineation of Muslim woman character is hard to find in Indian English fiction by Muslim writers. Nadira’s silent suffering, due to the stubborn stand taken by two men, is really heart rending. Her reverie on the banks of the river, her mental agony when her son is taken away from her and her sense of guilt and acute shame for her ‘one-night-marriage’ with Ali, are so progressively depicted by the novelist that at every turn of event, we find a more and more unnerved Nadira.

Vaikkam Muhammad Basheer is another sensible Muslim writer in Malayalam. He has an enviable talent of weaving beautiful stories out of very ordinary events in life. He is a very good story teller. His A Bhaqavadqita and Some Breasts, is an appropriate example of his unusual technique of creating interesting stories out of dry realities.

His novel, Balyakal Sakhi (A Childhood Friend) is a tragic story of two childhood friends: Majid and Suhru. In fact, it is not pure fiction because three fourth of this novel is autobiographical in nature. In the introduction, Basheer writes that like Majid, he left his village and travelled all over India, Arabia and Africa. Therefore, it is easy to discern that what Majid says about life and love, is Basheer’s own philosophy.

Majid and Suhru are childhood friends. During their school days, tender feelings develop between them and one becomes inevitable to the other. Once, Majid fails to do some work given by his father and is severely punished. So, he decides to leave home.

When Majid returns home after seven years, he learns that Suhru has been married to a rich old man, but her husband has driven her out. Majid decides to marry Suhru, if the old man divorces her. Suhru’s miserable condition could not be seen by Majid and his mother. Majid has to earn enough money for the marriage of his sister then only he can think of his marriage with Suhru.

He again leaves home and works day and night to earn more and more money. Unfortunately, he meets with an accident and loses his right leg. He is removed from his paying job and Majid has to depend on odd jobs like cleaning dishes in a hotel, where he earns only five rupees a day. His struggle continues relentlessly but all is in vain. He receives a letter from his mother telling that Suhru died of consumption.

The growth of love between Majid and Suhru is shown through a succession of significant incidents. Suhru thinks of Majid as is told by the narrator.

"There is something that she does not feel for others, which she feels for Majid. When he is before her, all is well. It is when he is not there. From the time Majid goes to school in the morning, until he returns in the evening, she feels a kind of un-easiness. If Majid is not well she cannot sleep. She always wants to be near Majid."

Both of them are separated by cruel fate. The entire story is woven around the unrealised love of Majid and Suhru.

In Sara Abubakkar’s novel, Nadira is powerfully depicted where as in Basheer's novel, Majid has the distinction of a fully grown character. Both these girls suffer silently; Nadira over her forced divorce and Suhru over her forced marriage. She was forced to nod her head when she is asked whether she is ready to marry the man chosen for her.

29. Vaikkam M. Basheer, Balyakal Sakhi. (Thiruananthpur, 1964) P-50
He is an old man in his fifties and Suhru's consent was taken for granted. Basheer, like Sara, has successfully communicated his resentment in taking the woman's will for granted at the time of marriage.

In addition to this social message, Childhood Friend also records the writer's disapproval of certain barbaric Muslim customs. Among them, Basheer resents circumcision, piercing of girl's ears (twenty one holes in all). Nevertheless, it is the sad tale of Suhru's death, that is all the more moving for being told so quietly.

The word 'fiction' besides novel and short story, also includes romance. Uma Parmeswaran sums up the characteristics of romance as,

"They have all the familiar Scott silhouettes, high romance, bare handed struggles, feats of prowess, protestation of life-long love, songs and poems, damsels in distress and knights at arms."

There are stories of love and hatred, intrigues and murders, woven around some historical events.

There are just one or two historical romances, where Muslim women characters figure. Nur-Jehan, Sardar Joginder Singh, is built around the love affair between Jahangir and Mehr-ul-Nissa. Cyril Modak also wrote another romance with the same title. The difference between the two is, while the former writer resorts to poetry and un-briddled romance, the latter toes the line of history faithfully.

It is surprising that not much romance was written, though there is a treasure house of romances like the Arabian Nights available. It is for the good that the Muslim society does not get involved in reading and writing romances, when a true picture of the ailments of the Muslim society and their effective eradication was the need of the hour.