Attia Hosain is an early Muslim novelist and short story writer. The experiences reflected in her novel and short stories express her nostalgia for the past. They also express the sordid realities of women’s marginalization, and feudal exploitations. Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* can be defined as an insider’s view of everyday experiences of elite women. Along with individual experiences of the novelist, national history runs parallel to the narrative that impinges Muslim identity vis-a-vis Muslim women. A contextual reading is imperative in order to assess various aspects of the novel. At the inception of the novel, two institutions viz feudalism and patriarchy have a tenacious hold over society. *Ashiana* (the nest), the family house, is presented as a microcosm of society that contains characters from every strata of contemporary society. Jasbir Jain maintains:

> Ashiana in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* serves as a microcosm of the world at large with not only its womenfolk in purdah but its retinue of servants who represent the community at large. It has a living relationship with the past not merely through the culture it cultivates but also through the house at Hasanpur at the outskirts of the city, which symbolizes continuity and permanence.1

Because of the autobiographical aspect of the novel, there are many convergences between Attia Hosain and her fictional narrator, Laila. Laila’s observation of socio-political events of mid-twentieth century and their ramifications on her own life, her family and her community are extensions of Attia Hosain’s own experiences. The world of Laila is a reflection of Attia Hosain’s contemporary society. Akin to her narrator, Attia Hosain was born
in 1913 in Oudh (United Provinces of colonial India). Her father Shahid Hosain Kidwai was a taluqdar of Gadia (District Barabanki) in United Provinces and like other taluqdar of his age was educated at Cambridge. Her mother Nisar belonged to an elite Kakori family that consisted of intellectuals and “people of learning”\textsuperscript{2}. Her mother’s personality as well as her class made her conscious of high culture of Lucknow. Through the social circle of her father and her English education, she attained true secular values. She was educated at La-Martiniere School and Isabella Thouborne College for Girls. Her father died when she was eleven. After her father’s death her mother had a confined life. Describing the impact of purdah culture in her household, Attia says that she was not allowed by her mother to join the university. However she had the privilege to be the first graduate woman among the taluqdar. Attia Hosain describes the purdah culture in her family:

\begin{quote}
We were not in purdah in the sense that we were wearing burqas when we went out but we had a confined kind of life. People who came to visit us in the house were the sons of friends or relations but that was it because my remarkable mother herself never went anywhere.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

Attia Hosain was fascinated by the nationalist movements of her age. In Attia’s literary and political activities, two streams of thoughts (i.e. leftist and Congress) had great influence. Attia Hosain was highly influenced by Sarojini Naidu and attended the All India Women’s Conference. It is noteworthy that Attia had a close proximity with the prominent Marxists of
her age and attended the Progressive Writers’ Conference held at Lucknow. Mahmuduzzafar, his wife Rashida Jan, Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand the noted communists were among the acquaintance of Attia Hosain. Her nationalist thinking is attributed to her location in Lucknow, as it was the hub of literary, cultural and political activities. Jill Didur points out that publication of *Angare* (translated "coal or embers"), a collection of short stories written by Ahmad Ali, Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzzafar in Lucknow in 1932, impinged Attia’s literary activities.\(^4\) *Angare* was denounced by the Muslim clerics as an onslaught on the morals. The clerics staunchly opposed the book and the authors, consequently the government proscribed the book on the grounds of public outrage. Attia’s radical approach against the pseudo morality and strict gender segregations in the novel seems to be influenced by the Progressive Writers. But she denies the leftist influence on her writings; rather she admits that the leftists influenced her political thinking.

No [I was] totally influenced by the west, I think in a way but completely my own cultural backgrounds and patterns of thought [...] They didn’t influence me at all in my writing. They merely influenced me in my thinking politically.\(^5\)

Though the realistic picture she draws of gender oppression and marginalization on the basis of class, is suggestive of Progressive influences. As far as her political thinking is concerned, she says that religion does not play any role in her political thinking. However she never shuns religion altogether, and espouses humanitarian aspects of religion: “I believed in my
religion but so what? I believed in a religion that to me never said you kill anybody. Never did I believe that religion taught violence.”\textsuperscript{6} Attia’s secular views should be viewed in the context of catastrophic partition as millions of human beings fell prey to the religious bigotry. Attia’s marriage to Ali Bahadur Habibullah, son of Mohammad Habibullah, formerly Vice Chancellor of Lucknow University, was an act of rebellion that left her mother dismayed. Attia Hosain worked for radio programmes at Lucknow Radio Station with Qurratulain Hyder, a noted Urdu writer.\textsuperscript{7} In 1947, just after the partition, she emigrated to England. She started working at BBC, London, Urdu service in 1948. Hosain was in-charge of BBC programmes for women that were highly popular in those days. Hosain’s career as a radio programmer was very brilliant. Upto 1950s, the programmes were not pre-recorded and these were broadcast extemporarily.\textsuperscript{8} Attia Hosain’s reputation among the British can be gauged by the fact that she was considered a wonder for her beauty and the British would say that an Englishman’s/ woman’s visit to India would be incomplete if he/ she did not see the beauty of Taj and Attia. On her death in 1998, Qurratulain Hyder paid tribute to Attia’s beauty in her novel Kar-e-Jahan-Daraz-Hai: Shahrah-i-Hareer\textsuperscript{9}

She also wrote for The Statesman, The Pioneer, and The Free Press Journal. Apart from these literary pieces, her first short story collection Phoenix Fled was published in 1953 by Chatto and Windus. Sunlight on a Broken Column was published in 1961 and it was written at different locations in Rahimyar Khan (Pakistan), Kathmandu, and in London. She also
worked on a second novel that could not be completed. In European countries, her work got acclaim and is in the curriculum of several universities. Her work has been translated into Urdu, and Thai languages. Intizar Husain, a famous writer has translated *Sunlight on a Broken Column* into Urdu with the title *Shakista Satoon Par Dhoop.*

As the novel is assessed as a fictional narrative of Attia’s social, political and familial circumstances, it is noteworthy that novel presents a number of references to *taluqdars.* The *taluqdars* “were zamindars (land owners) with large land holdings, clan leaders who operated as the de facto interface between smaller zamindars and peasants and regional rulers.”

Their status, in terms of power, was not only limited to the collection of revenues, rather they had a privilege of audience with the British king. They had the prerogative of magisterial powers. In the kingdom of Oudh, the *taluqdars* owned their armies. After British occupation, they were stripped of their political and military powers, but the British government, on account of political compulsions restored the lands to the *taluqdars.*

Michael Fisher presents a graphic description of the world of *taluqdars*:

> Each landlord formed a political centre of his own, locally based world. Each held court and employed symbols such as a throne of his own and courtiers who made his court in some ways a microcosm of the Mughal and Awadh courts. [...] Local roots and their strong links to the villages under their control gave these landlords a strong and stable base from which to compete with the provincial and imperial administrations for access to local resources.
Attia’s family was deeply involved in the political arena. Her father Shahid Hosain Kidwai “was involved in his life politically a time (in the 1910s) when it wasn’t the question of confronting the British as happened later when Gandhiji came on the scene.”\textsuperscript{14} The discussion of Attia’s contemporary politics is essential as it played a major role in the formation of Muslim identity. When asked about the emergence of Muslim League, Attia replied that she was never conscious of Muslim League until 1920s and 1930s, as “it was a question of the British and how we are going to be free of them.”\textsuperscript{15} The novel presents a considerable account of nationalist movement and question of Muslim identity. Attia’s political thinking was deeply “influenced by left wing thought and Panditji’s and Gandhiji’s movements.”\textsuperscript{16}

As far as Muslim identity is concerned Attia debunks the notion that religious and cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims, were the raison d’être of the formation of two separate national identities. Rather cultural difference was the false dichotomy that was an outcome of parochial political vision. She argues that there were individual motives “of getting a better life”\textsuperscript{17} that led to the partition of India. Attia’s narrative poses a realistic picture of Hindu- Muslim relations 1930 onwards, as well as Shia-Sunni sectarian strife. In the early twentieth century, both communities shared anti-British sentiments, and there was no question of any divisions of the country on the basis of religion and culture. The communal divide transpired as a result of petty politics. There were some differences between
both communities regarding each other’s beliefs and diets, but both communities maintained tolerant attitudes.

The society presented in the novel, comprising Baba Jan, his friends Mr. Freemantle, Raja of Ameerpur, and Thakur Balbir Singh exemplify the composite and secular culture of Lucknow elites. The beginning of intolerance, promoted by the vested interests of the colonizer is hinted at. Saleem’s remark, “What can you expect from a religion which forbids people to eat and drink together? When even a man’s shadow can defile another? How is real friendship or understanding possible?”(p.197) unfolds an irreconcilable schism between the two communities. With the passage of time, splendour of shared culture is eroded and instead of multi-religious and plural social circle of Baba Jan, “…a new type of person now frequented the house. Fanatic bearded men and young zealots would come to see Saleem.” The evolution was necessitated by the rapid historical changes.

In the conversation of Uncle Hamid and Saleem consisting communal politics and the different roles of Muslim League and Congress, Attia juxtaposes two streams of thoughts of the Muslim community of pre-partition India. Uncle Hamid echoes views of the nationalist Muslims that Muslim League is reactionary and communal. Saleem retorts that “…the Congress has a strong anti-Muslim element in it.”(p.233) Uncle Hamid as a true successor of Baba Jan’s secular ideology espouses peaceful co-existence of both communities: “I always found it was possible for Hindus and
Muslims to work together on a political level and live together in personal friendship.”(p.234)

The novel can be assessed in multiple ways. Since it is narrated through the consciousness of Laila and unfolds her intellectual development, it fulfills the criterion of *bildungsroman*. A *bildungsroman* is a story of an individual’s growth and development within the context of a defined social order. The process of development is defined in terms of the individual’s quest for identity and meaningful existence in the social set up. The process of maturity, and quest of identity is colossal and slow and consists of many clashes between the individual’s aspirations, needs, desires and the value system entailed by the social order in which the individual lives. Finally the protagonist is accommodated in society, displaying the spirit and values of the social order. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of himself and his new place in that society.¹⁸

There is plethora of specific events that accentuates the narrator’s intellectual development from childhood to maturity. Laila, the protagonist, is a member of a highly patriarchal set up. Having lost her parents at an early age, she lives with her paternal grandfather and is cared for by her father’s unmarried sister Abida. As a *bildungsroman*, the novel consists of a number of youthful characters, but it is through the consciousness of Laila that readers enter into the closed inner quarters of ‘Ashiana’. The novel is autobiographical in nature and Laila’s social and political ideas bear the imprints of her creator Attia Hosain. The novel appeared in 1961, but it covers the span from 1932 to 1952, a crucial period
marked by socio-political upheaval in the Indian sub-continent. Jasbir Jain is of the view, “To treat Laila of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as the writer’s alter ego would not be fair.” Jain’s observation is based on Attia Hosain’s own comment in an interview by Omar Khan where she analyzed Cecil Day Lewis’ editorial assessment of the novel as ‘very autobiographical’: “I got very angry and I said, what does he mean by autobiographical? Every first novel or any novel will have to be part of oneself and people one knows, but it is not actually the events but it is at the same time yes.”

Mulk Raj Anand is of the view that the novel is “a jigsaw puzzle of her memories”. In *Margins of Erasure*, several critics assessed the novel as a purdah novel for “purdah motif is all pervasive in the novel.” Amina Amin highlights the image of restriction and freedom in the novel as well as presents “three stages of freedom” passed by the narrator. Jameela Begum views it as a conscious invasion on “‘the closed women’s quarters’ to expose the joy, sorrows, and experiences of the unsung Muslim woman.” Sarla Palkar regards it “not a product of the women’s movements in the USA and other western countries.” Attia’s propinquity with the western discourse on emancipation of women cannot be rejected altogether because of her stay in England.

Laila’s minute observation of the patriarchal functioning of the house makes her distinct from other female members of the family. Unlike them Laila has been given a western education. The novel can also be read as
Laila’s quest for identity. Her awareness of the power politics played by the patriarchy is apparent in her vivid narration. At the outset of the novel the claustrophobic atmosphere of the house is described: “…the sick air, seeping and spreading, through the straggling house, weighed each day more oppressively on those who lived in it.” (p.14)

Laila’s observation of the impending death of Baba Jan, her grandfather, as well as her experiences of the strict patriarchal system in the house unfolds her clairvoyance. Gender segregation, a strict code of behaviour, is evident in the first sentence of the novel: “The day my aunt Abida moved from the zenana into the guest room off the corridor that led to the men’s wing of the house, within call of her father’s room, we knew Baba Jan had not much longer to live.” (p.14)

Laila’s remark about her grandfather “Surely he couldn’t die, this powerful man who lived the lives of so many people for them, reducing them to fearing automatons” (p.31) describes Baba Jan’s patriarchal authority; his presence will prevail even after his death in the form of Uncle Hamid. The description of Baba Jan’s drawing room is metaphoric of patriarchal control. The coloured panes of arched doors symbolize the patriarchal power of Baba Jan whereas light is symbolic of freedom for the women of the house. The light of freedom is stymied by the patriarchal control. Instead of light, only shadows flicker in the vast room.
In this vast room the coloured panes of the arched doors let in not light but shadows that moved in mirrors on the walls and the mantelpiece, that slithered under chairs, tables and divans, hid behind marble statues, lurked in giant porcelain vases and nestled in the carpets. (p.18)

The subservient and claustrophobic condition of the womenfolk is evident in Laila’s assertion: “Zahra and I felt our girlhood a heavy burden.” (p.14) Though Laila and Zahra grow up together, they are entirely different characters. Whereas Laila is progressive in her outlook, Zahra prefers to cocoon herself in the roles approved by the patriarchy. Laila’s father had desired a different upbringing for her by emphasizing that she be educated not only in the Arabic and Persian traditions but also in the western tradition. Baba Jan, despite his staunch espousal of traditions, capitulated to his late son’s wishes. Aunt Majida too, sternly opposes Uncle Mohsin’s criticism of Laila’s “mem-sahib education”.

Attia Hosain beautifully presents a panorama of young Muslim women’s lives. Marriage is a central concern. It is the most important objective of a young girl’s life. Laila, whose vision is moulded by an upper crust Western education combined with the concentrated attention of her aunt, observes other young girls attempting to make sense of their lives. Zahra claims: “I was brought up to do my duty.” (p.147) A third aspect is presented in the form of the promiscuous Zainab. In spite of living in Hasanpur, Zainab is more liberal in certain ways than both Laila and Zahra. Zainab is knowledgeable in matters relating to sex. This shocks the refined Laila and induces a coy reaction in Zahra. Laila’s views on marriage are
radically different from other girls. For Zainab, marriage will bring her opportunity to enjoy luxuries “jewels and nice clothes.” (p.295) Zainab looks forward to a home bound existence: “Now I serve my mother and father and brothers, then I’ll serve my husband, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law.”(p.95) Ironically, she will get jewels and nice clothes as a return for her services. For Zahra, marriage appears to be a freedom from the restrictions imposed by her mother. Romana’s marriage to a profligate ruler is, according to Laila, a “luxurious incarceration”. She is chosen by the “hawk-like” Begum Sahiba and her parents do not have the courage to flout the wishes of their ruler. Matrimonial alliances were according to the wishes of the elders. Laila’s marriage to Ameer, posits the option of marrying the man of her choice, but she has to pay a heavy price and faces the disapproval and disgrace of her family. Nadira marries Saleem because of political and religious conviction. Her volition of marrying Saleem is of a lesser degree than that of Laila. Laila’s choice is purged of any material reason; she is unbiased regarding the pedigree of Ameer and is aware of his lack of wealth. Her marriage to Ameer is analogous to her achievement of selfhood, as she asserts her individual identity by marrying Ameer and flouting the norms of the patriarchal set up. Sita’s approach to marriage is peculiar as she loves Kemal but considers her love as a personal issue whereas her marriage as a public one, because of her different religious background. Her views are in conformity to the patriarchal system of arranged marriage. She admits her incapability to rebel against the patriarchy.

My parents are the best judges of the man with the best qualifications for being the husband. They have a wider
choice; it is only love that narrows it down to a pin point. (p.216)... What has love to do with marriage? It is like mixing oil and water? Love is anti-social, while matrimony preserves the world and its respectability. (p.296)

Abida’s marriage to a widower, Shaikh Ejaz Ali is also a marriage of convenience, arranged by her brother Hamid. Notwithstanding the hostile attitude of the women at her in-laws house, she compromises the situation because of her adherence to duty and takes it as her ‘kismet’ (fate). Laila’s observation of Abida’s plight and her fatalistic attitude highlights Laila’s maturity. She questions silently about the sense of duty entailed upon women: “I suffered more because of Aunt Abida’s acceptance of her life- and her silence. (p.252)… ‘Dutiful to whom?’… ‘To what?’… ‘To what I believe is true? Or those I am asked to obey? I wanted to say.” (p.252)

Laila’s repeated questions about her difference from others also highlight her ‘progress towards individuation’: “Why did you not bring me up like Zahra? Why did you send me among those other girls who are not torn apart? (p.38)... Why was I different from Zahra? What was wrong with me?” (p.161) These questions reflect Laila’s internal conflicts.

In an argument Laila’s friend Nita accuses her of being a stereotypical Muslim woman. Laila’s response evinces her distinctive and mature approach to education: “I believe my education will make me a better human being.”(p.125) Nita’s approach towards education is materialistic. She views it only as a means to earn her living. For Aunt Abida, education means imbibing a sense of duty whereas Aunt Saira perceives women’s education as an embellishment to fit in the
new roles assigned to wives. Uncle Hamid views education as an impetus that liberalizes the individual. However, when it comes to personal matters like Asad’s preferences in education and Laila’s in marriage, he is very conservative. It is imperative to contextualize these views as in Attia’s contemporary society, emphasis was laid on reforms in Muslim community and there existed a widespread proclivity to safeguard Muslim identity from the cultural onslaught of British colonialism. The “responsibilities in this changing world” (pp.109-110) meant women had to keep the family space uncontaminated. There was a dichotomy between female and male arena. ‘Home’ was destined as an arena for women, keeping them out of public realm and social sphere was the deemed space for their male counterparts. The consciousness for female education was only to prepare them as a blend of Eastern values and Western modernity so that women may enhance the social status of their husbands. Baba Jan’s views on education echo various reform movements in the Muslim community of pre-partition era.

At the end of the last century Baba Jan had been influenced by ideas of reform among Muslims and had sent his sons to English universities. He had thought the weapons of foreigners should be used against them to preserve inherited values and culture. To copy their way was abhorrent to him. (p.86)

Though his views regarding female education are not commented upon by the narrator, his attitude is conspicuous in his decision to educate Laila at a girls’ college. He approved only of gender-segregated western education for girls. Western education for women was not the part of Muslim reform agenda, as some
reformists like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan “remained adamantly opposed to women’s education outside religious mode.”

The rebellious streak in Laila’s personality is exposed on her fifteenth birthday as she sees her reflection in the mirror. The experience symbolizes self knowledge. She perceives the conflicting views of Uncle Mohsin and Aunt Abida regarding Zahra’s marriage. Mohsin sternly opposes Zahra’s presence while discussing her marriage prospects: “Is the girl to pass judgments on her elders? Doubt their capabilities to choose? Question their decision? Choose her own husband?” (p.20)

Aunt Abida’s retort vividly portrays the marginalized status of the women in Ashiana: “The walls of this house are high enough, but they do not enclose a cemetery. The girl cannot choose her own husband, she has neither the upbringing nor the opportunity.” (p.21)

Laila’s outburst at Uncle Mohsin’s maltreatment of Nandi predicts her future rebellion. As a child Laila’s demand that the head carpenter make her a bow and arrow foreshadows her revolutionary spirit. The “little carved doll’s cradle” made by the carpenter represents the patriarchal mindset prevalent in the society. Right from childhood, girls are induced to remain subservient to men and even the toys given to them are stereotypical. Laila shuns Zahra’s proposition of marriage as a cure for Nandi’s alleged breach of propriety. She shows her determination to resist the patriarchal system: “I won’t be paired off like an animal.” (p.29) The altercation between Zahra and Laila exposes the prevalent
disapproval of choosing one’s own partner in a strict patriarchal society. Laila’s assertion presents the marginalized status of women in an arranged marriage. Zahra’s retort, “I suppose you’re going to find a husband for yourself? May be you’ll marry someone for love like English women do, who change husbands like slippers.” (p.30) implies that love marriage is associated with the assertion of female sexuality that is a taboo in a patriarchal society. Laila is the sole inmate of Ashiana who commensurates Nandi, in contrast to other women who treat her as a nonentity.

Laila’s maturity is also marked by her consciousness of marginalization on the basis of class. Laila reproaches Zahra for her maltreatment of the sweeperess. Attia presents two contrasting images. The dopattas “dyed in colour crushed from special flowers” (p.45) symbolize the colourful and luxurious life of the feudal class. This is in sharp contrast to the penury of the sweeperess’s children who are “naked, thin-limbed, big-bellied, with dirty noses and large black eyes”. (p.45) “Colour crushed from the special flowers” also presents imagery of oppression. The luxuries of the bourgeois are at the cost of hunger and squalor of proletariat. Zahra’s assertion, “You just raise them an inch off the ground and they’ll be making a foot stool of your head” (p.45) exemplifies her chauvinistic feudal attitude and class consciousness. Similarly in the third part of the novel, the juxtaposition of the pomp and glory of Raja of Bhimnagar and his “coolies in dirty, patched clothes moving like ragged scare crows” (p.181) portrays the insensitivity of feudal lords towards their subjects. Laila’s first encounter with the ruthless face of feudalism transpires on the occasion of Aunt Abida’s dealing with
the affairs of state. The feudal oppression of the tenants is justified in the name of justice and “matter of principle”. (p.62)

Zahra’s and Aunt Abida’s feudal attitude evinces the nexus of patriarchy and feudalism. The women are used as pawns to perpetuate the feudal interests. Attia’s proximity with the Marxist ideology finds expression in the portrayal of bourgeois exploitation. Attia seems to uphold Marxist feminists in her depiction of the oppressed proletariat, “Gender oppression is a product of class oppression, overthrowing capitalism is the means for unending women’s oppression.”27 Aunt Abida and Zahra are used as agents of class oppression. On one more occasion, Laila visits Hasanpur with Kemal and Saleem, where she witnesses “poverty and squalor, disease and the waste of human beings” in sharp contrast to the grandeur and the luxuries of the feudal lords. Zahra’s insistence that Laila should attend the *taluqdars*’ reception or ‘viceregal circus’ suggests that Zahra wants to introduce Laila to the bourgeois society. The reception exposes “the opportunism, patronage and exploitation that inform their relationship to the British and their tenants.”28

The speech of the president of the Association highlights the hypocritical altruism of the *taluqdars* towards their tenants. Attia exposes the hypocrisy of the president with mild humour as he stumbles over his words and confounds the term ‘prosperity’ with ‘property’ in his address to the viceroy: “We are aware that the propert-er-prosperity of our tenants is our proper-prosperity” (p.152) Laila is perplexed with the pompous display of *taluqdars*’ privileged relationship with the British king. R.K.Kaul interprets it as Attia’s disenchantment with the *zamindari* system.29 Regarding the clout of her left wing days in the formation of her
ideology, Attia admits “…during my left wing days, I was ashamed of being born into a Taluqdari family and for eight hundred years having been something a part of the world in that Barabanki area (U.P. area). I am not ashamed now because looking back on it, I think we were not as evil as the people who followed, who were grabbing the whole world.”

Attia shows an important aspect of the Muslim elite of Lucknow through the depiction of Mushtari Bai, the courtesan. The houses of courtesans were frequently visited by young Muslim aristocrats in order to learn “…the manners, etiquette, and refinement of which there is no equivalent in Hindu society.”

Ironically the courtesans were used as preservers of culture, and simultaneously were marginalized for the false notion of morality. The moral turpitude of the elite class males is not condemned. Mushtari Bai is sullenly treated by Hakiman Bua, and Ustani ji. She becomes the victim of pseudo morality in her old age. The money she earned was considered tainted. In order to expiate her sins, she doled out all her wealth to the charities. Similarly the depiction of a dance performance lays bare the morality of the cultured elites, “…young men and old, in silk and brocaded and embroidered achkans and rakish caps”.

The dance performance arouses their sensuality that is expressed through their “naked eyes”

Attia glorifies the artistry of theses singers in terms of “dignity of profession” (P-65), though as a matter of fact, the profession of a singer was subjected to the worst type of exploitation in the form of prostitution. The feudal landlords maintained these courtesans or singers as their mistresses. But in the novel Mushtari Bai and other courtesans present humanitarian aspect and dignity.
Asad’s life was saved by the courtesans and Mushtari Bai maintains her dignity even in her utter penury.

Laila’s maturity regarding the patriarchal hegemony is conspicuous in her observation of the discussion among the ‘progressive women’. Aunt Saira, Mrs. Wadia, an Anglophile Parsee, and Mrs. Waheed, a Muslim League supporter, discuss the preparations for the visit of the governor’s wife to a local park. Their discussion strips their reformist and progressive ideas. Mrs. Wadia proposes to charge an admission fee to keep out the undesirable elements from the park. Saira, posing as a Muslim reformer, opposes Mrs. Wadia’s proposition: “It is a public park. We had to fight very hard to make the Municipal Board wake up to the fact that there had to be a park for women, and we cannot discriminate now.” (p.130) Saira’s proposition is not a part of any reformist or emancipatory project; rather it is suggestive of her apprehensions regarding her husband’s electoral prospects. Begum Waheed also defends the open access of the park for all women and emphasizes the utility of the park for purdah women. The discussion becomes tense when the duo Begum Waheed and Mrs. Wadia lock horns over the issue of the park. Saira pacifies them by changing the topic and presents her views regarding female education: “I believe our daughters will find it easier, having the benefit of education. That is why I believe in education for women—to prepare them for service.” (p.131) Saira’s views echo the reform movements for Muslim women. She espouses the patriarchal education system to prepare the women to fit in the new patriarchal roles. According to the strict patriarchal code of behaviour, a woman must be an emblem of western education and eastern cultural values.
Mrs. Wadia criticizes the Muslim community for purdah culture and discusses the scandal of a Muslim girl, “from a strict purdah family” who eloped with a Hindu boy. All the women deplore the ‘wicked’ and ‘immoral’ girl. The condemnation unfolds the reality of the ‘reformist’ and ‘modernist’ project of these women. When the boy’s money was spent, he acceded to his parents’ wishes and abandoned the girl, and the girl’s parents refused to take her back. Mrs. Wadia says that because of communal feelings her organization could not help the destitute girl, who eventually committed suicide. The hypocrisy and hollowness of their progressive ideas offends Laila so much that she brazenly defends the girl’s action and compares her love with that of heroines in novels, plays and poems. Laila’s blatant assertion outrages Aunt Saira and her peers. They appear to Laila, “like paper figures, as hollow as their words, blown up with air.”(p.133) Laila’s daring assertion to defend the girl enunciates her revolutionary spirit. Her assertion that “there was nothing in them to frighten me” (p.133) shows that now she has realized her own power and also the hollowness of patriarchy. She exposes her revulsion to the hypocrisy of Aunt Saira and her peer group: “Inside me, however, a core of intolerance hardened against the hollowness of the ideas of progress and benevolence preached by my aunt and her companions. Rebellion began to feed upon my thoughts but found no outlet.” (p.138)

Attia lambasts the double standard of morality by presenting the example of the Muslim girl. The girl is condemned for overt exposure of her sexuality in eloping with a Hindu boy. Attia criticizes the notion of izzat/ honour, Sharam/ modesty incurred upon women. In a strict patriarchal construct, the izzat/honour,
sharam/ modesty “…is defined in relation to a woman’s body and a man’s authority.”

Attia’s disgust with the meaningless traditions that asphyxiate women becomes more intense where the narrator glorifies the hapless girl’s attempt to trespass the “…walls of stone and fences of barbed wire, and the even stronger barriers of tradition and fear.” (p.135)

Superstitions and hypocritical gender segregation cut across religious lines in the case of Nandi’s mother. She dies of tetanus that is taken as ‘evil spirit’ and is denied treatment due to the deeply embedded notion of shame and honour: “Go to hospital to have a baby with men standing round looking on? Be shameless and be seen by all those doctors and half doctors? Better to die at home.” (p.136) The same ‘murderous hypocrisy’ is conspicuous in Abida’s treatment for her miscarriage. The male doctor is not allowed to treat Abida despite her serious condition.

The novel is also categorized as a “resistance narrative” 33 against patriarchy, feudalism and colonialism. Attia portrays feudalism and patriarchy as two pillars of contemporary society. As discussed earlier, Laila’s intellectual development is accentuated through the observation of the patriarchal functioning at Ashiana. Laila’s character can be better understood in relation to Zahra. She encounters a totally different world at school. Her predicament can be perceived through Nadira’s remark: “we are paying for being the product of two cultures.” (p.211) Though in contrast to Zahra, she never wears a veil; her life is encumbered by the diktats of patriarchy. Her in-between state is attributed to her education and the atmosphere of the outside world: “I felt I lived in two worlds,
an observer in an outside world and solitary in my own.”(p.124) Unlike Laila, Zahra’s appreciation of traditions assimilates her into the ethos of the society.

Both Zahra and Laila are orphans. Laila, however, is an heiress to her late father’s property. Through the characters of Zahra and Aunt Majida, Attia critiques the rules of inheritance practiced by the Muslim patriarchy. According to Islamic jurisprudence, Aunt Majida and Abida have right of inheritance, but the patriarchy has incurred upon them the responsibilities of preserving family honour and adherence to duty, dispossessing them from their inheritance, a privilege given by Islamic jurisprudence. Hence Aunt Majida’s and Zahra’s status is reduced to the dependants of Baba Jan’s family. In such a condition, Zahra’s highest aspirations are limited to dreaming of a happy and prosperous marriage. She is brought up internalizing the conforming roles of an unmarried girl and a devoted wife. Her education and upbringing is lauded as correct and sensible by Uncle Mohsin. Her education and upbringing prepares her to fulfill the patriarchal niche of a woman: “She has read the Quran, she knows her religious duties; she can sew and cook, and at the Muslim School she learned a little English, which is what young men want now.”(p.24)

In the views of Simon de Beauvoir: “The curse that is upon woman as vassal consists...in the fact that she is not permitted to do anything; so she persists in the vain pursuit of her true being through narcissism, love or religion.”34 However Attia’s approach to religion is not sacrilegious and she is not obviously as radical as de Beauvoir. She respects her religion: “To me religion was that...well drawing everybody together. It was never out of my mind that I was a Muslim.”35 Hence it can be argued that Attia’s critique of the patriarchal

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construction of Muslim society is not directed to Islam, rather she opposes the patriarchy for its interpretation of religion as a tool to perpetuate its domination over women.

Attia’s pungent criticism of the patriarchy is visible in the portrayal of Uncle Mohsin’s character. Mohsin poses to be morally upright but beats up Nandi for her alleged misconduct. Laila subtly describes Mohsin’s character: “Even we, the young ones, knew stories about him and the dancing girls of the city... He lived in the city with friends or relations, had a wide and influential circle of friends, dressed well, composed poetry, was an authority on classical music and dancing, and never did any work. I disliked him.” (p.21)

Zahra’s sense of duty and religiosity is criticized when after her marriage, she sloughs off her religiosity and acts in accordance to her husband’s wishes. Her abandonment of purdah does not bring any change in her circumscribed mentality. She acts as a ‘modern’ wife in compliance to her husband’s wishes but inwardly she adheres to conservative values. Her marriage proves to be a shift from one patriarchal order to another.

Zahra had changed very much in her appearance, speech and mannerisms. I knew she had not changed within herself. She was now playing the part of the perfect modern wife as she had once played the part of a dutiful purdah girl... She was all her husband wished her to be as the wife of an ambitious Indian Civil Service officer. (p.140)

The national patriarchs of the freedom movement decreed that women, upholders of values, would not westernize themselves. The wives of civil servants maintained a discreet modernity by giving up purdah and attending mixed parties along with their husbands. Sometimes the British ladies hosted ‘purdah’ parties
for the more conservative wives of the Rajahs and other noblemen. Aunt Saira has
the same conformist attitude to the patriarchal norms that Zahra displays. She is
an echo of her husband Hamid. Prior to her marriage she hailed from an orthodox
middle class family and lived in strict purdah, while Uncle Hamid was educated in
England. Laila subtly comments upon her shift from a strictly gender segregated
family to another strident patriarchal niche.

Aunt Saira was Uncle Hamid’s echo, tall and handsome, dominated by him, aggressive with others. He had groomed
her by a succession of English ‘lady-companions’. Before she
was married, she had lived strictly in purdah, in an orthodox,
middle class household. Sometimes her smart saris, discreet
make up, waved hair, cigarette-holder and high-heeled shoes
seemed to me like fancy dress. (p.87)

She discards the purdah not as her own conscious choice; rather she comes
out of purdah, only to conform to ‘new’ patriarchal roles. Like Zahra, she is
physically out of purdah, but her intellectual incarceration is evident in her
conformist attitude. She is the stereotypical ‘new’ woman, embodying Eastern and
Western culture. Laila narrates that Saira’s westernization was much to the
dismay of Baba Jan, “Baba Jan had never been able to forgive his son for opting a
Western way of living, bringing his wife out of purdah, neglecting the religious
education of his sons and doing all this openly and proudly.” (p.87) Saira’s
freedom from strict purdah can not be interpreted as an expression of Hamid’s
reformist ideas; instead Hamid merely modified the patriarchal views of Baba Jan
according to the demands of time. Saira’s modernity is a mere simulacrum when it
comes to the issue of Laila’s marriage. First she tries to arrange Laila’s marriage
to a profligate ruler of an estate and later to one of her own sons in order to keep
the property undivided. She is prejudiced about Ameer regarding his pedigree and
sternly opposes Laila’s marriage to him. If she sulkily approves Laila’s marriage it is only to save the family’s reputation. In the last part, after her husband’s death, she gives up ‘modernity’ and returns to the traditional way of life. Her reverting to traditions is also ordained by the patriarchy, as in a strict patriarchal system, a widow must refrain from the pursuit of luxury and pleasure.

Aunt Abida is portrayed as adherent to old values. She embodies the high culture of Lucknow, as she is well versed in Urdu and Persian poetry. The readers are informed that she remains a spinster because of Baba Jan’s emphasis on pedigree. He “...found no one good enough for her; and refused one good proposal after another.” (p.22) At the inception of the novel, her peripheral status is analogous to the status of the family servant Karam Ali, as Baba Jan, despite their strict sense of duty reprimands both of them for their alleged dereliction of duty towards him. After Baba Jan’s death, Hamid hurriedly arranges her marriage to an old widower. Laila observes more strident marginalization of Aunt Abida during her visit to Abida’s in-laws’ house. Notwithstanding the hostile atmosphere and stereotypical jealousies of the women at Abida’s in–laws’ house, Abida sacrifices her individuality for ‘duty’. She exhorts Laila, “You must learn that your ‘self’ is of little importance. It is only through service to others that you can fulfill your duty.” (p.252) Despite her love for Laila, she adamantly refutes Laila’s desire to marry Ameer. She takes it as Laila’s defiance and disobedience: “You have been defiant and disobedient. You have put yourself above your duty to your family.”[...] “You have let your family’s name be bandied about scandal-
mongers and gossips. You have soiled its honour on their vulgar tongues.”
(p.312)

Abida’s ‘way of thinking’ was altogether different from Laila’s, as Abida’s strong sense of duty and compliance to the patriarchal norms sets her apart from Laila. To her dismay, she considers Laila’s love for Ameer merely as the assertion of her sexual instinct. Laila cannot reconcile with Abida, as she has rejected patriarchal hegemony in which Abida participates. Jasbir Jain considers Abida a remarkable woman, with a sense of justice and balance.36 Her virtues are crushed when she acts insensitively towards the tenants, in compliance with the feudal rules. Sita’s character ostensibly appears non-conformist, as she blatantly asserts her femininity in the company of men, throwing all caution to the winds. However, at times, she is also subjected to patriarchal subordination. Though Laila’s freedom is controlled in comparison to Sita, she is also incarcerated by the tradition in spite of her education in England and her western ways of life. She is deeply in love with Kemal, but is not daring enough to transcend religious boundaries in order to marry him. Out of frustration, she yields to the wishes of her parents and gives in to a marriage void of love, sympathy, and understanding. She is on equal footing as Saira and Zahra. Their modernity is only a simulacrum. Inwardly they are subjected to patriarchal hegemony. But she inverts the fetishistic role of ‘Sita’ in Hindu mythology, as she continues to meet Kemal even after her marriage. She considers her love for Kemal as an impetus that gives her strength to fulfill her duty towards her husband.
I had children by my husband though my body revolted against the touch of any man I did not love. But it was bearable if I had a hope of being with Kemal, as if that cleansed me. After he stopped seeing me it did not matter what happened. If my body could accept one man without love it could accept others. One discovers so many reasons for sleeping with a man once love is put out of the way. (p.297)

One can assume that Sita’s ideas are perverse but through them we can easily estimate her frustration caused by her unconsummated love for Kemal.

Nandi’s character exposes the oppression of women on the basis of class. She is the daughter of Jumman, the washerman. Her beautiful face, according to Hakiman Bua “…would be a scourge to her parents because it was not the face of a girl of the lower castes.” (p.27) Nandi is childhood playmate of Laila. Her father, Jumman, beats her for violating the patriarchal rule of modesty by visiting men’s quarters alone. Jumman accuses her saying that she was “…found by the driver with the cleaner in the garage.” (p.27) Nandi explains that she went to give him the shirt that he had forgotten. But Nandi’s visit to men’s quarters is a violation. She trespasses the boundaries of female space, laid down by the patriarchy. Men’s quarters are symbolic of social sphere that is restricted for women. A woman’s access to the male sphere is tantamount to immorality and violation of respectability in a strict patriarchal construct.

Laila is the only female who commensurates the plight of Nandi. Prior to this allegation, Nandi threw a sharp stone at the groom of the English family next door because he peeped over the wall while she bathed. After some days, she bit the post man, saying he tried to molest her. The matter of Nandi’s constant violation of decorum is brought to Aunt Abida who refers it to Uncle Mohsin.
Mohsin scornfully prods Nandi and calls her promiscuous, “…this slut of a girl is a liar, a wanton.” (p.28) Nandi retaliates, “A slut? A wanton? And who are you to say it who would have made me one had I let you?” She lambasts the pseudo morality of feudal class. Nandi is punished for her ‘misconduct’ by being packed off to her uncle’s house where she is condemned and maltreated by her aunt and grandmother. Laila, during her visit to Hasanpur, meets Nandi. She tells Laila about the sexual exploits of the moulvi’s daughter. These were kept hidden in order to preserve the ‘respectability’ of the girl. Zainab scolds Nandi for maligning the respectable people. But Nandi’s fury at the double standards of the feudal patriarchy is immense and she spurns the false notions of bourgeois respectability, “Respectability can be preserved like pickle in gold and silver. If this girl…had been poor would they have been able to bribe the mid wife and get rid of her baby and then buy a husband for her.” (p.97)

Nandi informs Laila about Saliman’s sexual abuse by Ghulam Ali and her subsequent death in childbirth. Ghulam Ali impregnated Saliman and when the matter was divulged, Saliman was dismissed from service whereas Ghulam Ali’s position in the house remained intact. Through Saliman’s colossal suffering, Attia unfolds the double standards of morality. Nandi’s statement, “You don’t know what life can be for us. We are the prey of every man’s desire” (p.168) unearths the extreme form of degradation and exploitation of the underprivileged. Nandi’s retribution of Ghulam Ali for Saliman’s death accentuates her rebellion. She does not take andocentric practices for granted. She tantalizes Ghulam Ali and then accuses him of assaulting her. Ghulam Ali is brutally beaten by the servants and is subsequently dismissed by his master. Through Nandi’s insight into the male
predatory attitude towards women, Attia hits hard at the commodification of women. Though Nandi is uneducated, her strong will to counter the patriarchal oppressions makes her remarkable. But she also becomes the victim of Ghulam Ali’s diabolic onslaught, as he gashes her arm and disfigures her beauty by scarring her face from cheek to chin.

Nandi does not want to be lost in oblivion and desires to have a child. She is disgusted with her old husband who cannot impregnate her: “When I die there will be nothing to remember me by.” (p.253) Laila reminds her that being a Hindu she will be born again. Nandi expresses her desire to create her own identity:

Of course. But what then? Suppose I die today, and tomorrow I come back to you as a sparrow like the silly creature that pecks at itself in your looking glass every day, would you know me? I wouldn’t be Nandi any more, Nandi would be dead? (p.253)

She upturns the patriarchal notion of morality by indulging in an extra-marital relationship and overtly confesses the illegitimacy of her child. In order to make her husband realize his impotency, she leaves him and goes to Laila to look after Laila’s child as an ayah. She shatters all the notions of morality and respectability incurred by the patriarchy:

It’s not my husband’s, of course. How could that old dotard give me one? [...] Or the old fool might have fancied his youth had returned and claimed the child, and I would have been tied to him forever. I could not endure him any longer, and I wanted the child. (p.291)

Jasbir Jain comments: “Nandi’s progress from girlhood to motherhood is an impulsive, natural maturing which takes place without any of the support structures like a protective mother or an elder sister, which a young girl may expect.”
As a “narrative about the emerging Indian nation and about emerging national identities”\textsuperscript{38} and narrative of partition \textit{Sunlight on a Broken Column}, presents a feminine view of nation formation and national identities in contrast to ‘official’ nationalism that is dominated by the male and male narratives of nationalism, where an ‘author claims the authority to speak on behalf of the entire nation and its diverse inhabitants.\textsuperscript{39} The novel exposes a Muslim woman’s point of view in nation formation. Nationalism subjugates women and they have an “indirect relationship”\textsuperscript{40} with nationalism and the nation through men. The dichotomy of the male /female sphere is attributed to nationalism. Social sphere was specified as a male realm in order to counter colonial onslaught. Women were confined to the inner sphere or the family space, as the family space was considered more vulnerable to the cultural onslaught of colonialism. Nationalism puts the onus of cultural preservation on women, relegating them to the inner sphere of society. The image of the mother figure was projected in order to depict the colonized nation. In the freedom struggle, the image of the oppressed female desecrated by the colonizers was depicted in order to awaken the nationalist men to avenge the violation of the mother figure. In this nationalist discourse, the role of the mother was assigned to women to nurture and bring up nationalist sons. The women were assigned the responsibility to instill cultural and nationalistic values in their progeny.

Attia’s narrative counters the British justification of the colonization of India. They claimed that they rescued Indian women from a debauched and
degenerate system. Attia shows that British colonialism aggravated the dismal condition of women. In order to emulate their western counterparts, women were subjected to a new and more strident patriarchal code of conduct in the public space. In contrast to liberal feminists who view that there need not “…be new political, economic, and social categories to end gender oppression”\textsuperscript{41}, Attia seems to uphold radical feminists’ stand that “new political, economic, and social categories needed to be constructed to end the patriarchy’s oppression of women.”\textsuperscript{42} Colonialism and feudalism were the two tenacious institutions of Attia’s contemporary society. In a scathing analogy Attia compares feudalism with that of the tribal systems that ill-treated women. The ramifications of this tribal ideology are discussed elaborately.

In the second part of the novel, the nationalist struggle is discussed at length. Attia delineates the response of Muslim elites to anti-colonial struggle. The narrative presents an account of the tumultuous period of anti-colonial resistance, marked by the conflict with the British. She also exposes the sectarian and communal divide. Laila’s search for identity and her progress of individuation is concomitant to the nationalist struggle. Laila’s growing awareness of her capabilities to undermine the patriarchal set up, is simultaneous to the awakening of the Indian masses to oust the colonizer. The novel presents conflicting ideologies- Gandhian non-cooperation, Marxist ideology of exploitative economic powers, and views of the Muslim League that demanded a separate nation. Congress declined the demand of separate electorate and upheld the abolition of feudal systems. Saleem’s proximity to Muslim League, Zahid’s hatred for the
Shia community as well as Uncle Hamid’s vision of peaceful co-existence and his disapproval of the freedom struggle, present a microcosmic view of Attia’s contemporary society.

Female characters had different opinions regarding national politics. Nita is the only character who opted for nationalist movement. She dies of a skull fracture in a lathicharge (baton charge) by the police on a procession of students. Nadira’s views reflect her parent’s political convictions, and Joan views politics through the lens of her Anglo-Indian origin. Zahra’s views are in consonance with her husband. The novel presents metamorphosis in the social structure. Uncle Hamid’s displeasure at Kemal’s jokes exposes the existentialist fear of *taluqdars*. Public outcry against the feudal system was an emergent trend.

> Our existence is threatened and you think it a joke? Our fathers and forefathers handed us down rights and privileges which it is our duty to preserve. I have no use for ingrates who enjoy privileges without accepting responsibilities. (p.199)

The conversation between Laila and Uncle Hamid juxtaposes two views of the anti-colonial struggle. Laila calls it as a movement, whereas Uncle Hamid condemns it as “a demonstration of irresponsible hooliganism” (p.160) Hamid’s assertion regarding Laila’s freedom of thought and action echoes the British justification of colonization of India.: “You must know that freedom of action must be controlled until the mind reaches maturity and one’s powers of judgment are fully developed. (p.160)
He refuses permission to Asad to study at Jamia and to work for the nationalist cause. With the passage of time, Hamid has to yield to the forces of social and political change and he contests the election of 1937 for a reserved constituency for taluqdars to the Provincial Legislature. Taluqdars’ loyalty to the British government is presented through the depiction of the Viceroy’s visit. The Viceroy’s visit is celebrated with enthusiasm and elation. Asad mocks the celebrations and condemns it as a “viceregal circus”.

Asad calls the year 1937 young and exciting. Saleem finds the taluqdars who participated in the national politics “the instrument by which the historical process” (p.195) is going to destroy the feudal class. Laila mocks the election campaign of Uncle Hamid, and decries it as ostentation to prove his credence of social service. Uncle Hamid acts as a pragmatic politician and unhesitatingly invites Shekh Waliuddin, who incites Shia-Sunni riots and later emerges as the hero who stops it. With some political maneuvering, Hamid wins the election. Saleem as a political analyst, views his father’s victory merely as a ruse: “That we won by a few votes, after a recount, is no indication of our real strength. It merely shows how politically ignorant the masses are, how unprepared for democracy.” (p.177)

Attia commensurates the decaying feudal system and the “gradual crumbling” (p.282) of Uncle Hamid’s dreams and ambitions. Hamid’s predicament is assessed by Laila at political, social as well as emotional levels. “Politically” Laila comments “…he had fought a losing battle against new forces
that were slowly and inexorably destroying the rights and privileges in which he had believed.” (p.282) At the social level, he encountered inevitable transitions that eroded the way of life that “he had cultivated so carefully.” (p.282)

“Emotionally, his family had grown away from him” (p.282) and he ultimately becomes an isolated, solitary figure.

It is noteworthy that Laila’s realization of her inherent capabilities has affinity with the process of social change: “For the first time I became aware that barriers built by the mind had no more substance than the fears that raised them; once they were overcome by action, it was hard to believe they had ever existed.” (p.190)

As a partition narrative, the novel presents the poignancy of partition “with great objectivity and sympathetic understanding”.43 The post-partition and pre-partition events are objectified. Attia’s vision of shared identity and secularism dominates other dissenting voices that espouse a separate nation on the basis of different cultural and religious identity. Attia was directly impinged by the disastrous partition. Regarding her motive of writing a partition narrative, Attia states, “I wanted to write about that agonizing heart break when we were all split up and a brother could not see a brother and a mother could not be with her dying son and families that had been proud to always collect together. When there were weddings or deaths or births or anything, cannot be together.”44

The novel presents Attia’s nostalgia for the pre-partition days. This is the first novel, written by a Muslim that evinces the divisions of Muslims between
Congress and Muslim League. The partition is not directly portrayed, but with its implications on social, cultural, and political life. Baba Jan’s death brings about disintegration to the nucleus family: “After Baba Jan’s death it was as if tight hands had been loosened which had tied together those who had lived under the power of his will and authority.”(p.112)

The elite Muslim culture of North India is defined painstakingly. Laila is presented as a passive observer of the tumultuous period of nationalist movement. The communal relations that led to the division of the country are vividly portrayed along with the sectarian Shia-Sunni strife within the Muslim Community. The confronting views of different political parties are also discussed, but at the same time, Attia hits hard on the hypocritical politicians who fomented communal hatred for their vested interests. Religious emotions were the easiest objects to be exploited by the politicians: “...the Muslim League was gaining strength from its appeal to the political and economic fears of the Muslims as the largest minority in the country, and to their religious emotions and pride.” (p.194)

The hatred prevailed at the community level. It also exacerbated the hostility within the Muslim community. Zahid disparagingly remarks on the religious convictions of Shias and calls them idolatrous and sinful. Asad insightfully remarks on the burgeoning communal hatred and holds the British responsible for fanning the communal emotions: “Something must be done to
prove that the British are here to enforce law and order, and stop us killing each other.” (p.56)

Zahid describes the mourning of Muharram as “sum total of hypocrisy.” (p.69) He is critical of all those people who have divided the community into smaller sections. Laila is perplexed by Zahid’s hatred and asks: “Will your hatred unite us Zahid? It makes no distinction between Muslims and Non-Muslims.” (p.69) The same communal bias can be perceived in the conversation of Laila’s peer group. The conversation of Laila, Joan, Nita and Nadira exposes the communal prejudices beneath the surface of friendship. Joan, the Anglo Indian calls Muslims aliens. Nita agrees and says, “They can go back to where they came from if they think they’re aliens.” (p.126) Nadira responds angrily: “There speaks the Hindu. Scratch deep, and what is hidden under progressive ideas? The same communalism of which you accuse me.” (p.126) Nita and Nadira criticize the British, but at the same time they cast aspersions on each other for their different religious identities. Hosain shows that Indians of different religious convictions were at odds, despite their exalted notion of communal harmony. Saleem’s ‘Hinduphobia’ exemplifies another view of Muslim community that led to the partition of India: “The majority of Hindus have not forgotten or forgiven the Muslims for having ruled over them for hundreds of years. Now they can democratically take revenge.” (p.234)

The much awaited Independence of India transpired in 1947 with destruction, violence and hatred among the citizens. Attia talks about the partition in a melancholic tone: “And in 1947 came the partition of the country, and the people of India and Pakistan celebrated Independence in the midst of bloody
migrations from one to another.” (p.283) Hosain regards them fortunate who died before partition and were spared from witnessing the macabre picture of violence. Uncle Hamid dies before partition: “Death spared him the putrescent culmination, the violent orgasm of hate that followed the independence he had worked for in his own fashion.” (P.283) Attia highlights the shortsightedness of those who demanded a separate nation for Muslims. Saleem and other leaders did not expect the partition to play such havoc. With the partition, the world of feudal class cracked and was destroyed. Things happened as Uncle Hamid and Asad had predicted: “The ugliness is inevitable. When palaces are pulled down and mud huts are exposed to view it is not a pleasant sight. There is rubble and dust in any demolition.” (p.277-278) Attia sympathetically describes the predicament of landowners in the post-partition era: “Faced by prospects of poverty, by the actual loss of privilege, there were many who lost their balance of mind when their world cracked apart. Others retired to anonymity in their villages.” (p.277) Partition came as a blow to Aunt Saira’s dreams. It snatched all the happiness of her life. Saleem migrated to Pakistan after the partition. Kemal’s way of life changed entirely when he married Perin Wadia. He asked his mother to cut down her expenses.

Attia shows that personal ambitions were at the root of partition. In order to fulfill the dreams of a better future, the people wielded religion as a tool. Saleem migrated to Pakistan as he viewed it as a land of his dreams that promised him a better future. Nadira emphasized on the loyalty to her faith: “Pakistan needs us to build it up as a refuge where all Muslims can be safe and free.” (p.288) Conversely, Kemal identified with the country of his birth and not his faith: “A
choice presupposes both sides mean the same to me…This is my country. I belong to it. I love it.” (p.287) However, ironically Kemal and Saira encountered disappointment as Saleem’s property was declared as evacuee property and was taken away by a custodian. Aunt Saira is disgusted with the government and angrily calls it a “robber government”.

The final section of the novel is full of pessimism and nostalgia. Laila visits Ashiana after fourteen years. She witnesses a drastic change in the social and cultural scenario. The grandeur of Ashiana, that once symbolized the grandeur of taluqdari, is turned into the ugliness “like the skin of a once beautiful woman struck by leprosy.” (p.271) Attia’s sense of belonging is exposed in her description of post-partition Lucknow. Laila is inundated by emotions. Attia laments for the decay of Lukhnavi culture through the voice of Ranjit. He considers Saleem as quintessential of rich cultural tradition of Lucknow: “Saleem, you went away and these others replaced you. Fair exchange is no robbery they say—but you took our language and our manners, and we were brought a cacophony that grate the ears and manners that sear the soul.” (p.301) Attia highlights extreme hatred through a refugee who insults Saleem: “They’re all bloody traitors —every bloody Muslim —deep in their bloody hearts.” (p.302) Despite this hatred, sincere friendship cuts across religious lines. Ranjit and Sita rescue Laila and her baby in the midst of horrific communal riots. Laila condemns the supporters of partition: “Do you know who saved all the others who had no Sitas and Ranjits? Where were all their leaders? Safely across the border. The
only people left to save them were those very Hindus against whom they had ranted.” (p.304)

In short, Attia emphasizes the futility of partition. Niaz Zaman maintains:

Hosain, a minority writer, stresses the folly of partition through Laila who suggests that, despite the pain, despite the loss, India is large enough to contain different religious groups. The villain in Hosain are not people from the other religious groups, but those co-religionists who deny that people of different religion can live in India. 45

Attia Hosain’s Phoenix Fled is a collection of short stories. Phoenix Fled and After the Storm delineate the cataclysmic partition. The title story is highly metaphorical and presents the misery of partition and its aftermath. As far as identity of the protagonist, old Granny, is concerned, she is nameless and hence is not identified on the basis of her religious conviction, rather she is identified with the existence of her village. The character sketch of grandmother is lively:

She was so old she had become static in time, could never be older, had surely never been young. Her dry wrinkled skin was loose around the skeleton. It enclosed her eyes in folds, hiding the yellowed cornea surrounding lusterless pupils. Yet there was vision enough to make her unconscious of its loss. (p.9)

Grandmother’s existence is associated to her “changeless circumscribed world” (p.9) of “the walls, the arches, the thatch, the courtyard, the doll’s house, the curtain, the door to the outside world.” (p.10) The outside world of “impatient sound of car horn, and the distant desolate screech of an engine’s whistle” (p.10) is alien to the old lady and in sharp contrast to her peaceful circumscribed world of traditions.
The story presents the historical perspectives of mutiny, of partition, and the subsequent communal frenzy of which the old Granny becomes the victim. In the character of old Granny, a deep consciousness of identity is presented as she refuses to migrate, and sticks to her roots despite the inhuman behavior of the neighbours. The feeble and withering existence of old Granny is suggestive of withering human values. Old Granny roots herself to her motherland. The younger generations are of no significance in the story as they simply fulfill the formality of intruding into the life of the old woman. Jasbir Jain compares the conversation of the great grand children and the old lady to a fairy tale and presents it as a cultural narrative.\textsuperscript{46} Love of the great grand children is spontaneous, contrary to the “grudging, dutiful affection of the elders to a ‘parasitic old woman’”. (p.11)

Old Granny’s passionate love of the dolls’ house symbolizes her love of traditions and culture. The great grand children enjoy playing with the dolls’ house. The old woman, on the insistence of the great grand children narrates the story of the red-faced soldiers, “like monkeys in red coats” (p.13) and presents an account of war, loot, rape and exploitation of the masses by an invading army. As the scenario changes, the red faced soldiers are replaced by black ones. The arrival of black soldiers also implies the communal tension owing to the partition. The concluding part of the story, states the devastation of partition that dislocated the family of the old woman and thus separated her from her near and dear ones. The narrator skillfully presents the miseries of the fleeing people midst high tension.

When the dread moment was upon them naked of their disguising hopes, they remembered only the urgency of their frenzied need to escape. Terror silenced the women’s wails, tore their thoughts from possessions left behind; it smothered the children’s whimpering and drove all words from men’s tongues but Hurry, Hurry. (p.14)
Despite the prevalent communal frenzy, old Granny is hopeful that the fleeing people will return as in the past. During the Mutiny she herself had returned. But now the situation is different altogether. During the Mutiny people had to escape from an alien army, but now the enemy was the neighbour with a different faith. Old Granny’s hopes are shattered as she falls prey to this frenzy and is charred to death in her house that is set on fire.

As far as the title of the story is concerned, old Granny is dead, and hence the culture, tradition and human values that are symbolized by her also die with her. There is no suggestion in the story that old Granny will be resurrected from the ashes, but the author seems hopeful that human values will be resurrected. Old Granny’s death represented the old world and its values. Despite physical weakness, she guarded the old order. With her death, the old system fell apart.

*After the Storm* delineates the implications of the partition. The narrator presents the scarred memory of a little girl who is a lone survivor of the violence of the partition. The girl’s religious identity is kept hidden and she is named as Bibi. She comes to the narrator’s house, as a domestic help, but the narrator adopts her. The story from the beginning presents the imagery of cruelty and inhumanity resulting from communal divide. Words like “scratched mutilation”, “dust” and “hot wind” are used in order to accentuate barbarism and violence. The small necked bottle in which the flowers are crammed, is symbolic of the girl who “triumphantly survived scratched mutilation” of her family. The narrator describes the features of Bibi, “a child small and thin with serious anxious eyes and a smile on her face, a garland in her hand.” (p.79) The description implies that the
catastrophic partition has snatched the childhood of the girl. She has directly stepped into adulthood skipping adolescence altogether. The narrator describes that she keeps her head covered like the older women, with dupattas, and is aware of her duties as a domestic help.

I could not tell her age. Her assured manner made me feel younger than herself. Her eyes had no memories of childhood. Her body was of a child of nine or ten, but its undernourished thinness was deceptive; she could have been eleven or twelve. There was no telling of how many years of childhood life had robbed her. (p.79,80)

Jasbir Jain comments upon the dislocation of Bibi: “She is doubly dislocated - by the riots /civil war into a refugee camp and her childhood into adulthood. It is a separation from both her home and herself.” The narrator’s comment that “She tore me out of the shroud of my thoughts” (p.79) expresses her concern for the damaged psyche of the girl. Hardened by life’s experiences, she has lost touch with humanity. The girl’s love of flowers that “no one else cared to pick” and “garlands no one else cared to thread” (p.80) symbolizes her attempt to forget the violence and bloodshed that she had witnessed directly. The narrator comments upon the horrific experiences of the girl: “But she was now a symbol and around her hovered the ghosts of all one feared.”(p.81) Through the memories of the girl, the narrator presents an account of macabre killings in the communal riots. In the end, the girl is shown putting fresh flowers in the bottle giving an impression that she is trying to overcome the dark memories of the past.

The other stories in the collection, deal with different aspects of human life. The First Party probes the psyche of a woman, introduced to a party
dominated by an alien western culture. The woman is newly wed and attends the party with her husband. The bewilderment and perplexity of the woman at her encounter with an alien culture and way of life at the party is discussed at length. The woman is brought up in a strict gender segregated family and has internalized the Indian concepts of modesty (sharam) and honour (izzat). The people in the party do not value the traditions and cultural norms to which the woman has a strong sense of belonging. She experiences revulsion at the free mingling of opposite sexes and for the women who were drinking and smoking. The closeness of a couple dancing, her husband’s drinking, the girl singing and swaying her hips, the strange dress of the girl that exposed more than hid her body, all fill her with abhorrence. She is uncomfortable at her own attire, as she is dressed in bright rich clothes and heavy jewellery in contrast to other women. Her strong adherence to her cultural norms sets her apart from others and eventually from her husband. She considers the ladies immoral:

She felt angry again. The disgusting, shameless hussies, bold and free with men, their clothes adorning nakedness not hiding it, with their painted false mouths, that short hair that looked like the mad woman’s whose hair was cropped to stop her pulling it out. (p.20)

She is aghast at the closeness of men and women while they dance and regards it as “an assault on the basic precept by which her convictions were shaped, her life was controlled. Not against touch alone, but sound and sight, had barriers been raised against man’s desire.” (p.21)

The story brilliantly states the inner workings of the woman’s mind; the narrator does not disparage the woman’s upbringing and her acceptance of values,
rather the cultural clash of two diverse value systems. The woman’s entry into the new modern world, represented by the party, is manoeuvred by her husband. The husband personifies the patriarchy. Eventually the woman refuses to dance with him and thus refuses to conform to the new patriarchal niche.

The next three stories present necessity of marriage in Indian society and its ramifications on the lives of women. *Time is Unredeemable* reflects the plight of Bano, waiting for her husband coming from England after a long gap of nine years. Bano’s marriage is hastily arranged just one month before her husband’s departure to England. The marriage is regarded as a moral insurance, saving her husband from temptation in England. Bano has eagerly been waiting for her husband who has wasted his time and his father’s money. His mother mourns at his formless future. Bano’s elation and her preparations at the news of her husband’s return are discussed in a subtle manner. She prepares herself for the reunion. She attempts to step into the role of a modern, and English educated wife, in compliance to her husband’s English education. In order to impress her husband she starts to learn English, buys modern saris and gets a coat with the help of Mrs. Ram:

> Every breath and movement and thought now became a preparation of herself for the first moment of meeting Arshad. Above all else she wished to make him realize that she was not an ignorant girl of whom he, with his foreign education, need be ashamed. (p.62)

Jasbir Jain attributes Bano’s efforts as her “bridging the gap between her upbringing and her husband’s life style.” Bano’s endeavours to impress her husband and her expectation to win his love end in fiasco as eventually her
husband refuses to sleep with her in the same room. He, much to Bano’s dismay rejects her coat by saying, “I didn’t want you to wear this old coat anyway. It reminds me of …my landlady…no, of…Mrs. Ram.” (p.77) Bano’s mental trauma is attributed to pseudo-morality as her marriage is arranged to keep her husband morally upright. Her peripheralisation is evident as even after nine years separation from her husband, she has to sit in her room, where he will come to her after meeting everybody else.

*The Street of the Moon*, presents the complex results of an unequal marriage. Kalloo has been working in a feudal household as a cook since time immemorial on a meager salary. Despite his inadequate salary, he is emotionally involved with the family and considers himself as a member. Having lost his wife in the early years, he lives an insatiated sexual life. In order to fulfill his sexual needs, he often visits Street of the Moon to be entertained by the prostitutes and takes opium that arouses in him a feeling of youthfulness. His unfulfilled sexual needs are noticed by Mughlani, the house maid, who arranges his marriage to Hasina, the daughter of Naseera, another servant at the house. Hasina is much younger to Kalloo. His life takes an ugly turn after his marriage to Hasina, as she finds him repulsive and mocks him silently. Kalloo is aware of his status in the eyes of Hasina and perceives ‘cruel mirth’ and ‘cruel mockery’. She, out of her repulsion for Kalloo, turns to Munnay, Kalloo’s son from his first wife and establishes illicit sexual relations with him. Her liaison with Munnay ends as Kalloo catches them red handed. She starts a new affair with Husnoo, another servant at the house and elopes with him. After some time when Husnoo runs out
of money, he abandons her and returns. In the final scene, Kalloo encounters Hasina in a brothel, which he visits one night.

The story does not simply state the theme of love and betrayal in a conventional manner, rather it highlights that marriage is used as a mode of oppression in a patriarchal society, irrespective of social class. Hasina’s marriage and her subsequent sexual exploits with Munnay and Husnoo are attributed to the patriarchal notion of marriage. She drifts into an unequal marriage owing to her low economic and social status. As a young girl she dreamt of a young groom. Her dreams, however were shattered when she was thrown into a loveless marriage.

Hasina wished she could see all the wonderful things she would soon possess. Specially the betel box. Now she could eat betel all day, her own made by herself, and she would eat even tobacco –the tiny silver pellets the Begum ate. She would do as she pleased after she was married –that silly Kalloo, he was so funny, she would laugh at him all day. (p.36)

Hasina’s dreams of marriage are analogous to Zainab’s dreams in Sunlight On a Broken Column, who also believes that marriage will give an opportunity to enjoy the luxuries of life like jewels and nice clothes. Hasina is treated merely as an object, an automaton, at the disposal of patriarchy. Her wishes, emotions and dreams of happy marriage are not taken into account. Moreover, her poor economic status is also responsible for her unequal marriage. In the end she becomes a prostitute on account of economic compulsions. Another thing that is underscored is the inducement of notions of sharam (modesty) and izzat (honour) in the girls. Hasina is induced to docile and womanly behaviour in order to
maintain the sanctity of moral laws. When she defies the rules of moral behaviour, she is ostracized, and considered dead even by her mother, though Husnoo with whom she elopes, is reemployed at the house.

*The Daughter-in-law* exposes the psychological trauma of a child bride. A girl of nine years gets married to the younger son of Nasiban, the ayah at a feudal house. Nasiban is deceived by the girl’s family. The girl is not mature enough to be a wife or mother. After the marriage, the girl remains at her mother’s house till she attains puberty and Nasiban pays five rupees monthly to her mother. But due to the persistent demand from the girl’s mother to increase the money, Nasiban requests her feudal mistress to keep the daughter-in-law with her. The household chores are disrupted when the daughter-in-law is sent for from the village. Things disappear and automatically reappear, when the women servants raise hue and cry. Many things are destroyed, a lace frock is cut into pieces, and the head cloth and silk of the quilt are smeared with red colour. All the maid servants suspect the girl for these misdeeds. Their suspicion proves to be true as the girl’s hands are stained in red colour. She is locked up, persecuted, beaten up and is labeled as ‘possessed’ by the spirits. Ironically, the girl does not have any memory of committing these misdeeds. She is scared, alone and suffers from a huge sense of insecurity. Her miseries are attributed to her dislocation. Her childhood is destroyed by her early marriage. Even her mother treats her as the ‘other’ after her marriage. Her mother-in-law considers her as a burden as she is not mature enough to fulfill the patriarchal niche of a wife. She lives a life void of love and compassion and her status is reduced to a long wait. The girl is haunted by a
memory of a sexual assault in her childhood: “The big black man with a tiger’s face. Sometimes it’s a dog’s face. And he puts his knee on my chest, and then I can’t breathe.” (p.112) Her phobia may also imply her obsession regarding her marital life in the years to come, as after attaining puberty, she will be used as a passive sexual object. Begum Sahib comes as her rescuer. She is the sole character who understands the girl’s mental trauma. It is through Begum Sahib that the readers come to know the name of the girl. Munni attaches herself to Begum Sahib as she swears to mend her ways, but finally she is sent back to her mother. She takes away Begum Sahiba’s photograph. Apart from the trauma of the child, Attia Hosain presents the frequent marginalization of the girl child in lower class families. The patriarchal notion of arranging the marriage of girls as early as possible, puts the girls of lower class families in a mental trauma as they are pushed into unequal marriages as is evident through the plight of Hasina and Munni. Hasina’s attempts to free herself from a loveless, unequal marriage prove futile as she ends up as a prostitute. Munni is too young to revolt against the patriarchal structure and mutely takes her marriage as her fate (kismet). Attia Hosain depicts how people are encumbered by traditions. Notwithstanding her poor status, Nasiban sells off her jewels and spends all her savings on her son’s marriage in order to keep intact her reputation among her neighbours.

*Gossamer Thread* exposes a conflict between emotion and reason. A pragmatic husband is proud of his progressive leanings and possession of progressive literature. The story starts with a social and political unrest. The husband returns home with an anxious mind and responds to his docile wife with
irritation. The husband’s thoughts are dominated by ambition and snobbery. He analyses the bygone days of his life. During his stay abroad, he cherishes a non-conformist attitude towards restrictions and traditions. His marriage is a concession to his mother who arranges it to a girl “decorative enough and submissive enough to increase his self confidence”. (p.150) One evening there is an upheaval due to a strike called by communists. The husband and wife sit together and the wife talks about the party invitations, about dinner, about the unrest and the people being hurt due to the strike, but the husband remains lost in the thoughts of his college days and the struggle of power and its implications on his relationship with his friends. The husband’s bogus ‘progressive’ political ideas are exposed when his communist friend Arun comes to seek refuge for a night as the police were chasing him. The husband rejects his request because he does not want to jeopardize his career. The disappointed Arun returns to the door but the submissive wife now takes a bold step. She realizes the grievousness of the situation and asks Arun to stay. The wife’s approach is based on her intelligence which otherwise was not visible.

*This Was All the Harvest* exposes a sordid face of Indian polity, in which the naïve, and idealistic young generation is duped by the politicians. The young school master’s idealism is dashed when he encounters the real face of the ingratiitous politician. The young man visits the politician for whom he has arduously campaigned during the election, trusting that his political views will build a new world. The young man is so idealistic that he does not visit his elder sister even at her deathbed. The young man takes the election campaign as his
duty to materialize his political views and convictions. He retorts angrily when the chaprassi reproaches him for his absence from his sister’s deathbed: “My duty?” cut in the young man angrily. “To whom? The living or dead? The past or the future? To my family or my faith?” (p.160) But all his idealism and expectations are shattered when the politician for whom he has harboured a delusion, refuses even to remember him: “Yes, yes the name is familiar, very familiar. I think I’ve seen you somewhere…” (p.174)

Meanwhile the young man narrates how he neglected his studies and his career for the sake of his political convictions besides his mother’s persistent dissuasion from the election campaign. The chaprassi also gives the reference of his brother in order to focus on the manipulation by the politicians. He narrates that how a busload of people were refrained from voting when their credibility was doubted by Raja Sahib, the candidate. The young man also narrates the incident of the headman of a village who bargained for his vote out of his greed for land. Eventually the young man faces a blow on his expectations and realizes the futility of his sacrifice when the politician refuses to recognizes him. Attia Hosain’s insight into human psyche is deep as derecognition of sacrifices is a commonplace experience in Indian polity.

*White Leopard* gives a glimpse of the narrator’s household in which Shiv Prasad enjoys protection after abandoning his life as a dreaded criminal. Attia Hosain evinces caste prejudice of Shiv Prasad as well as his sense of honour when his son Shambhu is accused of stealing money by the latter’s employer Mr. Bell, a
Christian convert who was a shoe maker in his early life. Shiv Prasad’s gratitude towards the narrator’s family and his sense of honour is remarkable: “You and your family can abuse me, spit on me; but that man cannot speak to me or my son as he did. My son sells his service, not his honour.” (p.189) Shiv Prasad presents composite Hindu-Muslim culture:

Not only did he observe the rituals of his own religion, but in the month of Moharram he kept a ‘tazia’ in a specially prepared shed. On the tenth day of the month, the elaborate man-high tomb made of bright-coloured paper and tinsel was carried to its burial in procession. The Muslim servants recited dirges in memory of the martyred family of the prophet, while he and his sons followed in barefooted, bareheaded respect. (p.176)

Attia Hosain shows that servants from different faiths, in a Muslim household willingly observe Muslim traditions and rituals. Like Shiv Prasad, Jumman, the washer man in Sunlight on a Broken Column distributes sherbet on the occasion of Moharram.

The Loss also presents the story of an old woman, steeped in a sense of honour. Lifetime savings that she kept in a box are stolen. The police suspect that the thief is none other than her own son. In order to catch the thief, an age old custom is observed. Everyone has to chew a handful of rice and it turns dry powder in the mouth of the thief. But the old woman, in order to save her honour, does not let her son to chew the rice.

A Woman and a Child deals with the desperation of a barren woman to have a baby. She and her husband have visited many shrines and have observed many rituals in the pursuit of a miracle but their hopes are not fulfilled. Then the
woman meets a poor woman and becomes jealous of her as she has given birth to a baby. She pleads with the poor woman and visits her and gifts expensive toys to the baby. The end of the story is very pathetic as the baby is choked to death in a fatal embrace by the barren woman.

*Ramu* presents emotional attachment of a sweeper’s son to Moti, Panditji’s watchdog. The dog is bought for three hundred rupees and is given to Ramu to look after for three rupees monthly. Ramu’s emotional attachment is apparent as he spends sleepless nights when he does not find Moti in its place. On account of his love for the dog, he does not chain it. Tragically Moti is shot dead by the superintendent of the zoo. It is found astray near the zoo and is mistaken as a mad dog. Ramu, out of his desperation accosts the superintendent who admits that Moti was not mad and shot dead by mistake. Ramu is disgruntled at the superintendent’s explanation who tries to give him a rupee as the compensation, without understanding his emotions towards the dog. The insensitivity of the elders is in contrast to Ramu’s deep love for Moti. Neither his master and mother, nor the superintendent can gauge his feelings. His mother mourns the death of the dog on account of monetary loss of three rupees monthly. Another aspect that the story exposes is untouchability and marginalization of the lower classes. Ramu being an untouchable is hired as the dog’s patron for the paltry sum of three rupees a month. He is denied education, as he is destined to sweep the house and do other menial works that are “fit only for untouchables”. (p.198)

In short, *Phoenix Fled* in contrast to *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, is not autobiographical, rather it presents various facets of human life. Except for a few
stories, the narrator is omniscient third person and sheds light on the lives of characters cutting across the lines of religion, class and gender. Attia Hosain minutely probes the human psyche. Anita Desai in her introduction to the 1988 edition of *Phoenix Fled*, views Attia Hosain’s novel and short stories as “monuments to the past: the history of north India before partition”. Aamer Hussein views the stories as “a celebration of and, a lament for the author’s undivided country. She articulates its contradictions—wealth and despair, conservatism and accelerating change, past and independent future. Hope and horror mingle in her vision”. The readers come across a shared culture of Hindu-Muslim communities. One can easily catch a glimpse of feudalism, its diktats, and its traditions. The stories deal with the characters from both urban and rural underprivileged classes. The characters posit their eccentricities. They are fatalistic and hold their fate (kismet) responsible for their predicament. The concept of sharam (modesty) and izzat (honour) is deeply rooted in them.

Attia Hosain’s approach regarding women’s marginalization is much ahead of her time. The feminist experiences of Laila in the novel, are not upshots of any western feminist theory, rather these are the quotidian experiences, as Attia Hosain has witnessed during her stay in India. Attia Hosain’s critique of andocentric practices is directed to the new patriarchal roles entailed on women in the changing world. Women’s liberation and education is a mere façade as beneath the emancipatory project lies the patriarchal manoeuvring to present women as fit companions of men in order to emulate their western counterparts. Characters like Sita, Nadira, and Romana are educated in order to fulfill the new
patriarchal roles. Women still remain markers of patriarchal culture. The transformation of conservative characters into the ‘modern’ ones is also not to exempt them from the conformity to patriarchal system. Their religiosity and modernity are at the disposal of patriarchy. Aunt Saira’s reverting to the traditional role of a widow is also at the behest of patriarchy. Laila and Nandi are the two characters who do not conform to the patriarchy. Laila’s marriage to Ameer and Nandi’s rejection of her old husband and her subsequent illicit sexual union with a young man are to assert their individuality and feminine identity free from the constraints of the patriarchy. Though Nandi has transcended moral code of conduct in order to have a child, her sexual deviance is attributed to the patriarchal oppression as her old husband is not able to impregnate her. Nandi’s sexual deviance is analogous to Hasina’s sexual exploits in *The Street of the Moon*, but Hasina eventually falls prey to the worst type of exploitation in the form of prostitution and is reduced merely to a sexual object.

Attia Hosain hits hard at misogynistic practices, prevalent in society to preserve honour and modesty. The notions of honour and modesty encumber the lives of women and prove to be critical for them as conspicuous in Aunt Abida’s miscarriage and death of Nandi’s mother in child birth.

Attia Hosain indicates that by just pushing women out of domestic boundaries does not provide freedom for women, instead mental incarceration of women should be eradicated in order to ameliorate them. Despite her stay in England, Attia’s roots are indigenous. She rejects the blind imitation of the west
for the sake of women’s emancipation, and shows an association of colonialism, feudalism and patriarchy that suppress women. She does not bind herself in any particular ideology in depicting women’s oppression. Notwithstanding her proximity with the Progressives, she rejects the leftist influence in her writings. Her works meticulously present the experiences of women’s marginalization as well as delineate the socio-political events of early twentieth century. These events displaced the cultural equilibrium of the old feudal society. The social and political elites sought to create cultural harmony through nationalistic discourse. The progressive younger generation assimilated and homogenized themselves into secularization where mutual needs were negotiated.
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