A Study of

*Bhisham Sahni's Tamas*

and

*Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India*
Bhalchandra Rajan’s ‘The Dark Dancer’

This chapter discusses the theme of communal riots in Balchandra Rajan’s The Dark Dancer. It describes the consequences of communal riots and impact of riots on the characters, political aspect of partition and women as victims of communal riots.

Life and Works of Balchandra Rajan:

Balchandra Rajan (March 24, 1920- Jan 23, 2009) was an Indian diplomat and a scholar of poetry and poetics. Focusing particularly on the poetry of John Milton, he was Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Western Ontario.

He was Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge from 1944-1948, but left England to return to his native India, where he served in the Indian Foreign Service until 1961. During that period he served on the Indian Delegation to the United Nations, Working extensively with UNESCO and UNICEF, and chairing an international anti-malaria effort. He served as chairman of the UNICEF Executive Board from 1955 to 1956. Leaving his diplomatic career to return to academic, Rajan taught at the University of Delhi before emigrating to Canada to take up a position at the University of Western Ontario.

Rajan’s scholarly works covered a wide range of English poetry, but returned frequently to Milton and particularly to Milton’s Paradise Lost. His work cannot be easily assigned to any critical methodology; he was a scholar of poetics in many forms and from
many approaches. His 1947 book *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader* is primarily a response to Milton’s apparent interest in Arianism, considered a heresy and argues for a distinction between private and public meaning in Milton’s poetry. The book was influential for Wiliam Empson, particularly Empson’s critique of strictly theological readings of *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s God. Later essays explore what Rajan calls “generic muliteity” in *Paradise Lost*. In addition to his work on Milton, Rajan’s later criticism addresses issue of meaning of intention, and context in a broad array of writers including Spenser, Yeats, Marvell, Keats and Macaulay.

Rajan also wrote two novels. *The Dark Dancer* is a sobering of the conflicts of the partition; ‘Too Long in the West’; on the other hand, is a more light-hearted satire about a girl’s return to her home village after an emancipating education in New York.

**Consequences of Communal Riots:**

In *The Dark Dancer*, Balchandra Rajan chooses a period in the Indian history which provides the background of the crumbling of an Empire and the birth of a nation, a painful process in which the individuals get crushed and paralyzed. At the same time, however, in the context of both social trends and of those waste land *The Dark Dancer* experiences particularly partition, which have been peculiar to India. The basis of Rajan’s philosophical mysticism is to be found in the effects of social phenomena. He divided mind of the ‘England returned’ India, the alienated personality’s attempt to recover
traditional values. The individual’s involvement in his country’s political destiny, and the wounding of moral sensibility resulted from partition violence. In fact, Rajan’s writing is at times most powerful in the chapters describing the communal holocaust. *The Dark Dancer*, the novel’s opening paragraphs are very significant quoting in full:

It was where he was born, but where he was born didn’t matter. There was nothing in the cracked, arid earth to suggest that he belonged to it, or in the river, shrunk away from the banks, that seemed almost to wrench its way through the landscape, startling the brown anger into green. The rail tracks ran forward like an act of will, straining across the flat, baked plain to the first muddle of houses, and then the road forked from it, driving relentlessly through the mantle of dust to an end that might have been reached from any beginning. In the distance, hazing, and under the white blaze of an almost venomous midday, the sheer rock of the temple rose, with the houses clustered around it, carved out of the cliff, seeming to thrust it upward, proclaiming the pride and defiance of the earth. He looked at it and left no tide of emotion at returning. He had been born in its shadow, but he could have been born anywhere else, anywhere in that parched infinity where the roads narrowed and the gutters wormed among the congested houses, or wherever the scream filtered through the laboring rice fields, and the thatch was pierced by the anger of the first cry.

He was coming back, but not to an identity, a sense of being rooted, not even to an enmity like that of sun and earth, a struggle against circumstance, a creative
confronting, which would open his mind to its depths of repossession. He was coming back to an indifferent sky, an anonymous teeming of houses, the road striking forever into a distance which not even the clenched thrust of the temple could make real. (DD, 1-2)

Here social and philosophical themes are introduced and fused. Krishnan feels a lack of emotional connection which is made vibrant in the tension. Rajan arouses between Krishnan’s vacuity and the concrete presence of the landscape. However, Krishnan is looking for a meaning which cannot be found in landscape alone. B. Rajan’s description seems to convey to the reader the physical fact of India, of the ‘struggle against circumstance’, but to Krishnan India cannot be real if he has ‘no sense of being rooted’, no ‘identity’. This estrangement, which is the novel largely about, is for Krishnan the consequence of year in the west but also the means of realising that until he experiences ‘repossession’ at the deepest level of self. He will not experience the temple’s meaning of unity in diversity and will see only, what a western mind has been trained to see, ‘the muddle’.

The protagonist of this novel, V.S. Krishnan, is almost a nowhere man, a near-exile in his own country. This is so because when he leaves for England he is too young to be able to know and understand India, its tradition and culture, and when he returns to it, Cambridge educated, after an absence of ten years, as he finds it rather difficult to adjust himself with the changed and changing situation of his country. He is not all rootless, for he is a south Indian, a Tamil Brahmin, and naturally his conflicting loyalties to the East and the
West are understandable. He is at best a nonconformist, and not really a rebel; in fact, he does not have the grains of a rebel in him, for in spite of prevarications and protests, he submits to his parents pressures on him for a negotiated, arranged marriage with Kamala, an educated South Indian girl, loving and sincere, but strong willed. Krishnan is not directly or actively interested in the political upheavals taking place in India in 1947, though he does participate in one of the political demonstration in which he gets injured. He is also aware of the fact that his country is on the threshold of freedom, that the Indian Subcontinent is going to be split up into the two nation-states of India and Pakistan, and that communal violence has already erupted in various parts of the country. He wants to be a teacher, but once again, under pressure from his parents and other relations, joins the Government Service and gets settled in Delhi with his office at the central secretariat there. He

Ought to rebel, but rebellion seemed inadequate where the forces opposing him were counter balanced by the force within him that conformity claimed. A career arranged, a marriage predetermined. His private and public life inexorably charted. (DD, 14)

His life, the quotidian routine of his life, would have gone on smoothly in the company of his caring and loyal wife but for his chance encounters with Cynthia Bain Bridge, his Cambridge girl friend, at a Delhi Club, which gives a new and sharp twist to the existing situation and alters the whole perspective.
Cynthia is a sociologist, and she is in India for a foundation award in connection with her field work on a book she is writing. This unexpected meeting with her arouses in Krishnan old memories and associations, his suppressed Western moorings and he is instantly drawn towards her irrespective of his marriage and domesticity. Unlike Kamala, a character with conviction and integrity, with courage and her own commitment to fidelity, a character typically Indian and representing perhaps the best of Indian womanhood, Krishnan is a weak character, fluctuating between the East and West and with no credible identity of his own.

He was a new man; he belonged to nothing. (DD, 120)

It is no surprise then that while Kamala is away from Delhi in order to be in a position to look after her ailing mother in South India, he, in a way, allows Cynthia to claim the whole of his being, not merely his body and spirit, his intellect too.

She claimed his intellect too, he told himself. She was the obstinate thirst him for freedom, the blue sky of loneliness…endless, cruel and futile…against tradition with its consolations, the ordained path with its solacing confinements. (DD, 124)

Cynthia and Krishnan conduct themselves virtually as husband and wife in spite of angry protests and messages of indignation from his friends and relations.
It is with reference to the Mahabharata, narrating the story of the fratricidal war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, of which Cynthia is obviously aware, that Krishnan asks her: ‘Which son of Kunti do you suppose I am? (DD, 130) and she replies, ironically and in a tone of sarcasm:

You’re Karna …The man who couldn’t belong. (DD, 130)

This Karna symbol is quite significant, and it does have its own revealing relevance to the theme of the novel. The son of Kunti and the Sun-god, Karna, a terrifyingly chivalrous character, should have fought as the eldest of the Pandavas, but, as we all know, he aligns himself with the Kauravas and fights for their sake in the fratricidal war described in the Mahabharata. He is true to his word, fiercely and single-mindedly committed to the avowed objective of defeating the Pandavas. This single-mindedness, this sense of commitment, this consistency of purpose is missing from Krishnan’s case, Karna was brought up by a charioteer as his son; he did not belong to any recognized “social register”, (DD, 131) but even though spiritually a nowhere man, unlike Karna, Krishnan does belong to a particular social class.

Perhaps the trouble with Karna” Krishnan suggested, “is not that he did not belong but that he insisted on belonging somewhere else. (DD, 132)

Krishnan is still indecisive, still uncertain of himself and does not quite know whether to opt for the East or for the West, whether to
go in finally for Cynthia or to go back to Kamala. However, he is enamored of this British lady for some of her qualities, for some of the distinctive ingredients in her character:

It was good, to be with her, to feel her obstinate freedom…. Her skin was white, but under the skin. She was Indian, and not simply because of good intentions. There were plenty of facts in her head; but what surprised him was the number of facts in her bloodstream and the live, just awareness which she brought to her comprehension of those facts. Yet, in her heart she wasn’t Indian at all; she’d never learn the meaning of acceptance. “I am” I her interior strength seemed to say and the rest of the world might just as well get used to it.” That was what fascinated him; the vivid and quite deep Indianness, and underneath it, yet in harmony with it, the exotic care of stubborn individualism, which he wanted to see take root in his reality. (DD, 132)

Krishnan decided to accept Cynthia and to part company with Kamala. And it is quite understandable that in his bid to emulate Karna for his single mindedness and sense of commitment, he tells Cynthia;

I will behave like Karna then. I’ll do it for you even if I have to dig my own ditch. (DD, 131)

Krishnan speaks out his mind rather resolutely, and yet the one word “ditch” betrays his character. His doubts and uncertainties still persist, for, as we find him, he has not really been able to overcome the weakness of his spirit.
Krishnan forgets or becomes indifferent to everyone and everything else; he does not care to remember the panoply of rituals and festivities that had marked his marriage with Kamala; it is Cynthia who alone matters to him in the world.

He was with her always; there was no other place he wanted to be. He let himself be seen with her. (DD, 133)

When Kamala returns to Delhi from her mother’s place, he tells her about his decision in a straight forward way. Krishnan says,

“I cannot go on staying with you, Kamala”. (DD, 142)

A misfortune of this kind would have completely unnerved an ordinary woman, but Kamala is made up of stronger stuff and not unexpectedly, she responds to her personal tragedy with her integrity and her “strength of acceptance” (DD,143) spurning all the offers and concessions that her husband is prepared to make to her in the wake of their separation. She leaves for Shanthipur where she stays until premature and sudden death there in the communal turmoil.

Cynthia and Krishnan are, in a way husband and wife now; they love each other. Krishnan still feels strongly for Kamala. In her turn, Cynthia too is aware of this flaw in their relationship; however, since she has never known how to compromise, and wants to possess the whole of Krishnan and not just a part of him. She finds herself in an uncomfortable situation. This tenuous relationship between the two could be breached by the slightest possible jerk of any kind, be it emotional, intellectual, racial or political. Cynthia is, by all means, a
liberal and a democrat; India has always fascinated her chiefly because her grandmother was an Indian, and she has always advocated the cause of India’s freedom, while at the same time decrying every form of repression, including the barbaric massacre of innocent Indians at Jallianwala in the Punjab. Nevertheless, Krishnan charges the British rulers with having fomented communal tension in India, ending up in the country’s partition with all its disastrous consequences.

The novel, depicts the true, the shocking acts of mutilation, rape and massacre, that dominated the Indian scene at the time when India was about to achieve freedom non-violently, find artistic expression in *The Dark Dancer*. People, instead of fighting the foreign rulers unitedly, plugged into inhuman activities against their own countrymen. The long suppressed feeling of hatred, indignation and vengeance erupted suddenly. The terrible communal fire caught the people helplessly. Balchandra Rajan pictures this terrible tide vividly:

The award was the match that lighted the long train of dynamite, snacking and ravaging across the chosen frontier. The violence broke out of honorable men, a lust in their eyes, a smear of satisfaction on the thirsting knives, the burning homes its beacon and memorial. The words, the inflamed reports, the provocative rumors, were like bacteria in the air that one breathed and after reason could summon its reserves against the menace, the contagion had seized you, and you were its screaming
puppet. And after the flaming sky and the broken bodies, after the waiting and the useless appeals, the stripped flesh and the soliciting knees, raped, mutilated and torn into the silence, the exodus came, column upon column, blindly marching upon the vacant future, million upon million of the dispossessed, in what seemed to be history’s greatest tide of suffering….

The pride of being Indian of having helped to bring to its unprecedented climax a generation of struggle in which the sword had not been lifted, was submerged in an emotion in which shame was a component less compelling than helpless bewilderment at the fever and its virulence. It could be escaped. It was in every line that one read and every face one looked at …

Vengeance and agony in the ferocious, endless cycle. How long would it last, how deeply would it wound the newly born reality? How many must die, how many be dispossessed, how many scars be inflicted on the uninjured, before the pestilence devoured itself, leaving behind in the unwashed blood on the stairway and the flickering fear walled up behind the great stones. (DD, 158-159)

The violence put millions of people to fight. There were anxious swarms of people hurriedly crossing the borders in search of a safe land. They ran away from their ancestral homes where the partition suddenly made them ‘foreigners’ and ‘unwanted’ with grievous hearts, lodged in hatred and terror, they ran away, falling a prey to the country. Rajan narrates their sad state thus:
They had nothing to look for, only something to flee from. When the sun rose again in the grimy and blistered eyes they would be a little future from the memory. They passed each other, the endless processions moving westward and eastward, all that remained of yesterday carried on the humped backs, like two rivers moving irrevocably forward, unseeing, as the immense pressure of their pain dictated, in a despair too deep for even revenge to agitate. But on the banks of the disaster the anger festered and smoldered, destroying and pillaging with a compulsive, purposeless violence, as if an eternity of frustrated acceptance was there, inching forward in the implacable orgy, flooding the brain with its unappeasable fever, reaching down, forcing the demented hands to yet another convulsion of hate. (DD, 158)

The novelist makes a modest attempt to diagnose the malady of the partition and its indescribable consequences. B. Rajan artistically analyses the varied factors leading to the Partition and the subsequent tragedy and the gruesome dimensions.

The chapter ‘Seventy Three Days to Freedom’ meditates seriously on the consequences that the partition would create. The division, it was feared, would cause terrible emotional and psychological tortures. The novelist remains artistically true to history, mentions the important broadcast on the air, reports the breaking out of riots in different parts of the country, traces the history of riots right from Calcutta, and describes how the division created the pangs of separation in the hearts of the people. He takes pains to show that it was not only the partition of a country, families were also
broken, uprooted and emotionally ruined. The sense of belonging received a great shock and people were ousted from the land of their ancestors. Through Kamala and Cynthia, Rajan pleads for understanding, sympathy, toleration and trust.

**Impact of Communal Riots on the Characters:**

The three characters in *The Dark Dancer*, are V.S. Krishnan, Kamala and Cynthia Bainbridge. The problem may seem to be of love triangle. However, the matter is much too deep and profound for such a simplistic and facile treatment. The truth is that one aspect of the story in this novel takes to the larger issue of East-West encounter. The characters delineate frustration, loss, uprootedness and helplessness in the face of the destructuring of one power and the restructuring of the other. The extinction of one power and the emergence of the other power condition the characters.

The anxiety and the helplessness of the divided people is felt in the background. The freedom struggle had given a unified identity to the people after Independence. They get separated and divided and more than anything else displaced in their own land. The major problem, therefore, faced by the Indians during this period was self-definition, defining their roles under a different political ideology. The political freedom does not necessarily bring individual freedom with it. This sudden change in the pattern of life comes as a shock and builds the pressure on the minds of the intellectually sensitive citizens. It causes a sense of withdrawal and constant uncertainly about their
roles in the society which is supposed to be free but totally shaken with the confused mass of common people who strive to shape their destinies. As the “foreign returned” Indians who easily get westernized offer deeper insights into human responses outside “home” country as well as in their native land after the return. It is possible to study a psyche which is affected due to “displacement”. The pressure of dual cultured psyche affects the characters and *The Dark Dancer* offers the possibility of exploring such a character.

In the first chapter, “Homecoming” Krishnan’s reaction to the Indian landscape is typical of a “foreign returned” Indian aloof, detached.

He was coming back to an indifferent sky, an anonymous teeming of houses, the road striking forever into a distance which not even the clenched thrust of the temple could make real. (DD, 1-2)

This reaction is typical of a person who is a product of two worlds. Every culture develops a specific value code system which one acquires in the course of one’s living in with the other members of the community. Krishnan decides to leave Cynthia and go back to Kamala who works in Shantipur, the most turbulent part of the country at that time. The communal riots which broke out after Independence and also Krishnan’s experience in the train, depicts the violence, the pathos in the crumbling of human relationship, the awakening suspicion in the minds of friends, the splitting up of the society and breaking away all relationships and facing threat to life in
one’s own land. This is in contrast to Krishnan’s journey to Shantipur where he comes in search of a permanent relationship with Kamala. Kamala accepts him with resignation.

Kamala lives in Shantipur and makes her experience the significance of the co-existence of joy and terror. Shantipur, is torn by the communal riots that came in the wake of the partition. Kamala is now serving the riot affected people at Shantipur. She realizes the profound meaning of terror in its physical and metaphysical manifestations. She is dedicated and committed to the service of suffering humanity, which brings joy amidst terror. It has the virtues of resignation and acceptance, when Kamala dies trying to save a Muslim girl. Her sense of dedication and joy that accompanies it, make her stand in their way. They stab her to death, though, for her, it is a kind of release from tumult and terror to the realm of joy. Krishnan finds in her death a tragic dignity, a meaning in life. He has been a spectator to the disastrous and violent communal broil. Krishnan feels that,

He saw Kamala not simply standing fast but thrusting erectly, passionately, forward, seeming almost to float against the knife. He was shocked by her beauty, her inwardness suddenly stripped bare, and the unwavering and almost eerie arrogance, as if for the first time she was meeting her true lover. (DD, 273-74)

The Sikh officer, who feared to have lost his parents in the eruption of violence, thought that it was the beginning of a great
deluge. Pratap Singh felt that Bihar and Noakhali were the prelude, there was dangerous disaster ahead. Krishnan, in his heart, shared the pessimism of Pratap Singh:

He too was aware of the care of desperation, the violent flood beneath the disciplined surface. The Sikh had torn loose, and the anger started to thrust through. Who was to tell where the beginning would end. (DD, 76)

Calcutta was the starting point of communal frenzy, the scene of gruesome killing. Pratap Singh expressed the dilemma of the Sikhs, and told Cynthia that the present developments made the Sikhs their pray:

The Hindus want independence. The moslims want their theological state; we’ll have to pay the price between the millstones. (DD, 89)

The Sikhs were deeply attached to the land of the five rivers, and the partition meant their pulling out of it. Cynthia, in clear out terms, called it a tragedy and Krishnan smelt the sharpening of knives in the Punjab.

The plan of the partition was to affect ten millions. Vijay Raghavan saw nonsense in Jinnah’s demand for having a linking line from West Punjab and East Bengal. Kamala a true Indian lady, realized that only the acceptance of the Muslims in free India was not enough; something more than toleration was needed. Through her, Rajan throws light on the pangs of the partition:
fathers and sons were going to be separated when the line was drawn it would be not only across the wheat fields golden with their harvest but through people’s lives, through family relationships, across one’s happy rooms where the sense of difference would suddenly harden, and kinship would be subdued to more abstract yet more demanding loyalties.

Pratap Singh lamented the partition. He suggested sarcastically that there were people whose families had lived in India for centuries, but the partition had forced them to discover suddenly that they were not Indians.

He thought that the British had the last say in working out the partition. Kamala thought that the partition would affect every one differently. Freedom and the partition came together. All of the elite audience, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, felt the taste of frustration in achievement. The tragedy made Pratap lose his head a little. He said that the plan of the partition must be to the delight of Imtiaz. Imtiaz took offence at these sarcastic remarks, and the hot exchanges followed. Kamala thoughtfully observed that the tragedy of the partition concerned everyone.

**Politics and Communal Riots:**

The creative achievement of the writer is the way the personal struggle of Krishnan is integrated with the country’s struggle for freedom thus reflecting the political ethos of the times in the novel. Krishnan’s return to his native place, his a struggle to go back to his
roots and assert his identity coincided with the period when the country at large was also struggling against the British Rule and trying to find and assert its identity. The divided mind of the England returned Krishnan, the alienated personality’s attempt to recover traditional values are related to his involvement with his country’s political destiny and the wounding of moral sensibility resulting from partition violence.

The third chapter, ‘Seventy Three Days to Freedom,’ surveys the Political and social scene of India in a very powerful way. Krishnan told Cynthia that freedom with or without the partition was something to be embraced: the partition was immaterial “so long as we run our own lives”. (DD, 72) Cynthia asked Krishnan to see things honestly and clearly. She was aware of the tragic consequences of the division of the country, and said to Krishnan frankly:

A plan isn’t drawn on paper. It’s drawn by the difference it makes to millions of people. (DD, 72)

Krishnan thought that it might be the price of freedom. Cynthia felt that the proposed partition of the country was to cause disaster.

The drama of Krishnan’s slavery and personal freedom unfolds itself against the political upheavals of India’s struggle for independence culminating in the partition of the leading to mass killing and bloodshed.
Britishers and Communal Riots:

Balchandra Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* depicts India’s struggle for freedom, the police atrocities on non-violent freedom processions, and the violence caused by the partition of the country. The suffering lot of humanity, a victim of communal fury attracts the attention of the novelist. He examines the causes of this upheaval, and diagnoses the malady dispassionately, maintaining remarkable impartiality towards the two communities. Though he detects the British land in inciting and fanning the communal fire, yet he observes that the Indians, too, are to share the blame for this avalanche. Kamala, an important woman character, comes out as a sacrificial figure.

The novelist makes a modest attempt to diagnose, the malady of the partition and its indescribable consequences. He artistically analyses the varied factors leading to the partition and the subsequent tragedy.

The protagonist, Krishnan, disdainfully blamed the British rulers for the partition and the resultant destruction. He contemptuously said to Cynthia:
It’s your fault’… ‘you made this awful thing grow. For a whole generation you British have stirred up the trouble. It’s you that made the religious divisions take priority over our common political interests. Communal electorates, communal representation in the civil service. Communal this and communal that. Even the cricket matches were communally organized. (DD, 159-60)

The novelist declares the native people of the Indian subcontinent equally responsible for their ruin. He also pointed out the seeds of the tragedy in Indians.

The second chapter, ‘The Demonstration’, throws light on a demonstration against the foreign rule. The speaker observed judiciously that the British,

Had ruined India politically, economically, physically, psychologically, socially, and morally. (DD, 35)

Krishnan was sickened to see the Indian policemen pouncing up on the demonstrators, their fellow countrymen. Krishnan realized that non-violence for Kamala was not just a philosophy, but something in the blood; it was a moral discovery.

The novelist focuses his attention on the division of the country and the communal frenzy that lead to shocking events. The radio news reported to the riot and carnage in Rawalpindi. Krishnan found the British guilty of the communal violence. He told Cynthia mimicking bitterly:
It’s something that comes out of what you did remember, out of two hundred years of occupation. (DD, 74)

Kamala blamed Indians for the violence.

**Symbolism Used to Signify the theme of Communal Riots:**

As a symbol *The Dark Dancer* seems to pervade the whole of this novel. Its presence, relevance and appropriateness may be interpreted in three ways. First, it is perfectly understandable that novelist himself is South Indian. He speaks of temples, for South India is a region of massive temples, and it is quite in order that a reference is here made to the great temple of Chidambaram with the hypnotic image of Shiva, the Nataraja, the eternal dancer, installed inside it. Secondly, as the carnatic vocalist sings of Shiva, the Nataraja on the occasion of the Krishnan-Kamala marriage, even in the thick of elaborate rituals. The protagonist conjures up the Vision of the great figure,

One leg arched in that supreme expression of energy, the dying smile of the demon beneath the others lightness, all that infinite power of destruction drawn back into the bronze circle of repose. (DD, 28)

The timeless dance of the Nataraja symbolizes the two, in fact, the twin, concept of creation and destruction, birth and death, infinite action and infinite repose. And finally, as V.S.Krishnan is portrayed as “both the dancer and the dance” (DD, 28) It is his drift and his final
homecoming that forms the essential motif of this novel. The symbolism of the “Dark Dancer” says K.R.S. Iyenger, has no ‘clarity and force’.

Structurally *The Dark Dancer* achieves coherence by employing the use of certain symbols. Repetition of symbols brings with it the associated incidents, events and acts as a refrain which mingles with main composition at large. The symbols of the “Dark Dancer” and the “gopum” are used frequently. Considering the dark dancer as Nataraja the creator and the destroyer of life, it also suggests the beginning and the end of life. Gopum suggests a direction from the earth to the infinity. It is the capacity and the strength which a human being can achieve in spiritual heights. There is no limit to rise upwards, but one must know the direction. The subtle and repeated use of these symbols throughout the novel provides a sense of deeper dimensions. K.R.S. Iyenger says,

that the dance of death is the Dance of Life, for resurrection is the other side of destruction, and Kamala’s ending hints at the joining of the two ends of meaning.¹

M.K. Naik is more forthright in his criticism when he observes that *The Dark Dancer* of the title,

Shiva, the god of both destruction and creation …remains an item of colourful stage property and fails to become a powerful symbol incorporated into the fictional world of the narrative.²
There is the western active approach symbolized by the British legacy to India the ‘rail tracks’ running ‘forward like an act of will’ from a known beginning to a predetermined end. And there is the Eastern cycle of infinite possibilities. The ‘road’ wheeling ‘to an end that might have been reached from any beginning’. This imagery suggests the divergence of the Hindu circular concept of time from that of the linear-minded west.

The title is fully integrated with the theme. By using the symbol of Shiva a *The Dark Dancer*, the novelist emphasizes the fact that all the power of creation, preservation and destruction are combined and contained in one fold which tends to bring out the essentials of Indian culture which has all the three powers of destruction, creation and preservation in its values.
Attia Hosain’s ‘Sunlight on a Broken Column'

This chapter discusses the theme of communal riots in Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. It describes the consequences of communal riots and impact of riots on the characters, political aspect of partition and women as victims of communal riots, as well.

Life and Works of Attia Hosain:

Attia Hosain (1913-1998) is a writer, feminist and broadcaster. She was born in 1913 in Lucknow in a taluqdar background; Taluqdari family of Awadh, the product of a liberal English education. Attia Hosain and indeed her writing shows a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Writing in English, at a time when few women, especially Muslim women, used this medium for literary expression, Hosain presents a picture of her own world, that was multicultural, pluralistic and syncretic.

She moved to Britain in 1947 and became a broadcaster for the BBC, hosting a popular women’s radio programme. She has described this world vividly in the story collection *Phoenix Fled* (1953) and her novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and *Cooking the Indian Way* (1967).

Consequences of Communal Riots:

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* is Attia Hosain’s autobiographical account by a fictional character called Laila. Laila is
a fifteen-year old orphan daughter of a rich Muslim family of Taluqdars. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a significant novel by a Muslim lady on the theme of partition. It also emphasizes the presence of the secular section of Muslims in India. The novel covers a period of both Hindu and Muslims who took active part in the struggle for independence as fellowmen. The scene is laid in Lucknow. It depicts ideal two cultural ages. The novelist has woven a story out of her own life and experience. The novel is an autobiographical sketch that allows personal experience to provide the narrative both momentum and also make it impersonal. There is a parallel plot between the events of the novel. The life of Hosain is against the backdrop of the freedom struggle. Like life and events at Ashiana in the novel, Hosain has to face division in her family due to partition. As an autobiographical novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* falls in the line with other Indian novels like, Nayantara Sehgal’s *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), Rama Mehra’s *Inside The Haveli* (1994), and Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* takes us back in time, a time that bears on the pre-partition imaginary of a nation and underlines harmony and solidarity among different religious groups on the basis of shared history and shared cultural experiences. It is a saga that unfolds different aspects of community life.

The novel is a first person narration by Laila from her the age of fifteen to mid-thirties. Covering a socio-politically turbulent period
of Indian history from 1932 to 1952, the novel is a sensitive and poignant span of the growing up of the orphan Laila. The novel is divided into four parts covering a period of twenty years in the life of the country and of Laila. The first part begins with the illness of the orphan Laila’s paternal grandfather Baba Jan and the resultant changes in the lifestyle of the Zahra, the women’s quarters. Laila’s spinster aunt, Abida, who has brought up Laila after the death of her parents, is forced to move into her father’s apartment in order to nurse her properly. Soon after, Baba Jan dies and his only other surviving son is uncle Hamid. He had adopted a western lifestyle and comes back to take over his responsibilities as head of the household. Laila’s aunt Abida is married to her cousin Zahra. Laila’s distant cousins Asad and Zahid are packed off to college and Laila moves into the new household. The second part begins with Laila’s new world of college, new girl friends of her own age. But they are from very different background and society. The third part charts the changes in Laila’s life with the arrival of her uncle Hamid’s sons Kemal; an ICS officer and Saleem a lawyer from England. Through them she has the opportunity to meet other men, nearer her age, go to parties. She soon falls in love with a lecturer, Ameer, who does not come from a comparable aristocratic background. Laila joins postgraduate studies, unheard of in her circles, while the country goes for elections to the provincial Legislatures on the basis of limited adult franchise for the first time. By the end of this section; her affair is discovered while congress forms the government to the United Provinces, Provincial
Assembly. The last section of the novel, the fourth part, is fifteen years later, when Laila revisits her ancestral home in 1952, and the intervening years are narrated in snatches, in flashback. Covering a period from pre-war years to partition, the novel depicts a vivid picture of social and political changes during that period; and its impact on simple innocent life of the villagers. The novelist realizes that before the bestial horrors were enacted on the eve of the communal riots, there was communal harmony in the subcontinent. Though the religious and social life of Hindus and Muslims was different, they respected each other’s religion, loved and valued each other’s culture and life and lived in peace and harmony.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* has a background of Lucknow, where streets and bazars are full of Hindus and Muslims. Laila’s house Ashiana too, is a happy Sunni Muslim family with their Hindu and Muslim friends. When Laila’s parents were alive, her house was a house of feast and music, laughter and play and each moment was a festival for them. Not only Shubrat and Eid but Diwali was also celebrated, which equally haunts the novelist memory.

Diwali and the cool softness of glowing oil-dipped cotton wicks in tiny clay saucers outlining the curves of arches and the straight line of walls and roofs. Lights, lamps, more lights. A hurring and a scurrying in the courtyards, on the lawn, on the roof. (SOBC, 40)

The feudal lords, exploited, a host of servants, but Laila shares a close bond with her Hindu friends Sita and the Hindu servant girl,
Nandi. At the age of fifteen, Laila and Sita are already aware of the Nationalist Non-Co-operation Movement and identify with it passionately, though they lead rather cloistered lives.

Sunlight on a Broken Column takes us back to the time, a time that bears on the pre-partition imaginary of a nation and underlines harmony among different religious groups on the basis of shared history and shared cultural experience.

Impact of Communal Riots on the Characters:

In the novel, Baba Jan, the Muslim patriarch has friends among other communities and religious groups. A friendship among Thakur Balbir Singh, Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur, Mr. Freemantle emphasizes the social bonding that existed among persons of different faiths. From the pre-partition harmony the novel moves to communal drift, riots and final partition of the country that also signals the end of British Raj in India. Partition becomes the terminal event in the life of the characters.

There is a remarkable strength in Attia Hosain’s art of characterization. The novel begins with Baba Jan on his deathbed. There is anxiety in the air for what will happen to the family of three generations living under the same roof after the demise of the patriarch. The family gradually disintegrates after the death of the patriarch and the novel is narrated through the political and social upheavals that affect the family living in Ashiana.
Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) is a more or less, an autobiographical novel. There are many similarities between Hosain’s life and the narrator-protagonist Laila’s story. The novel is a first person narration by Laila from the age of fifteen to mid-thirties, a young girl who has lost both her parents, lives in the household of her grandfather, along with her father’s sisters Abida and Majida and, Majida’s seventeen year old daughter Zahra. She is brought up by her orthodox but principled Aunt Abida. According to the wishes of her father, Laila had the benefit of western education, she too keeps purdah like her aunts. However death of her grandfather makes uncle Hamid, her father’s elder brother, head of the family and her new guardian. Uncle Hamid, a man of ‘Liberal’ ideas, is never the less than an autocratic guardian. No longer in purdah Laila starts attending college. Her University friends as well as her distant cousin Asad become involved in anti-government protests.

Thus, it is an extended family. The fading away of the taluqdar family tradition, its feudal system is suggested in the very beginning of the novel. When Baba Jan is on the deathbed, it is implicitly revealed by Laila when she says,

“We knew Baba Jan had not much longer to live.” (SOBC, 14)

Second part of the novel represents the disintegration of the family. In the novel there are several characters and they are married couples. The out worldly westernized Saira is a mere echo of her
husband. If she has given up purdah or is engaged in social work, it is at the insistence of her husband. Her Westernisation is so super facial that after her husband’s death she reverts back to the traditional values. For Zahra, marriage is an escape from the purdah culture and the rigid discipline it imposes on unmarried girls. Marriage grants her the freedom to socialize. Abida’s marriage is a marriage between two incompatible person. For her, family honour and respectability come before individual happiness. Sita, like Saira, is only outwardly westernized. Even her intense love for Kemal does not give her the courage to fight family, society and the barriers of religion. Laila is a central character in the novel. Laila’s marriage is neither a surrender, nor an escape, a compromise, a social necessity, or a matter of family honour and respectability. It is love and trust in the loved man for what he is. Her love for Ameer, who has neither a social status nor money, gives her courage to flout uncle Hamid’s authority and to face aunt Saira’s angry glares. Love gives her the strength to bear the emotional estrangement that arises between her and her dearest aunt Abida. For Laila, Ameer means safety and completeness in life.

In Muslim family a woman does not have much of a choice as the marriage is arranged within the immediate family members or from amongst the relatives. Laila by marrying Ameer rejects her uncle’s authority. Her marriage to Ameer, who is not well placed in life is also a statement against the subordination of women in the name of family honour and respectability. Thus, her decision about her future is a triumph over the social world that she inhabits.
According to Jasbir Jain and R.K. Kaul Nandi symbolizes it as the “Slavery of marriage”. 3

Nandi grows up as an individual from an illiterate lower caste background and shows her fitness for survival in the most hostile of situations. Women are mostly the victims of male desire. Raja Hassan of Amirpur plays with nude women. Mohsin Bhai treats his wife as a sex object only to produce children so also the Hakim of Hasanpur and Ghulam Ali make Saliman pregnant without responsibility. Nandi criticizes male desire and hypocrisy:

One goes through life with jackles stalking behind. They look like lions and tigers when you are frightened and if you show them your fear they eat you, bone and marrow. But if you turn on them and threaten them, just snap your fingers at them, they turn into jackals again and run away. (SOBC, 228)

Personal love in the novel is prohibited by the social convention. Even uttering the word is considered a transgression. When Laila utters the word ‘love’ before the hawk-eyed Begum Saheba;

“The word ‘love’ was like a bomb thrown at them”. (SOBC, 134)

Aunt Saira in spite of her modern ways of living, respect patriarchal values and tradition, and maintains that,

“No one in decent families talk of love”. (SOBC, 180)
Laila’s college mate’s elopement with her lover is condemned by the women, for

She brought dishonour to her parents. She disobeyed the tents of her religion. (SBOC, 133)

Laila points out of her aunt’s annoyance that her college mate is not wicked; she is not a thief or murderess. She has been a heroine of novel. Novels, plays and poems may glorify her, according to Saria. But it is wickedness for which the lovers should suffer. Love is considered sinful. Even a boy who elopes with the girl, finally, abandons her under pressure and the girl’s parents refuse to take her back. The irony of the situation is that even personal choice of selecting a boy or a girl for one’s own life comes under heavy social pressure, in which two lives are wasted and made miserable. The social attitude towards love is a mistaken one as it is considered equivalent to sex:

Love between men and women is associated with sex and sex is sin and therefore prohibited. (SBOC, 312)

Laila’s love for Ameer is seen in the same light by aunt Abida. She gets angry with her for admitting that she loves Ameer. Aunt Majida becomes angry when Asad confesses his love for Zahra. Unconventional love and marriages erase the people from kinship and they are considered as good as dead. Nandi and Laila’s college mate are declared as dead after their elopement. Even love between married couples is a hidden affair. Laila describes:
I remember Zainab telling me how the bride of the household had been kept in the rooms behind this terrace, and their bridegrooms crept up the steep stairs at night and left as stealthily before anyone was awake. (SOBC, 104)

Women are not only sexual slaves of men, they suffer for making their personal choices, even they are treated as commodities for the honour of the family. Women’s lives are full of failed loves, forced marriages and finally, it is a life of struggle and surrender without freedom of choice. Zainab is fond of Asad but she could not think of marrying him because he is not his equal in blood. Aunt Saira and uncle Hamid reluctantly accept Kemal’s marriage to Prein Wadia, a Parsee and Laila’s marriage to Ameer. Kemal’s love for Sita could never materialize because Sita is Hindu, Sita’s disillusionment in love taught her to look at love in a different almost rebellious way:

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. Follow my example. I married with my mind unblurred by sentiment and everybody is happy. (SOBC, 296)

After marriage, according to Nandi’s parents will, can be considered as her return to patriarchy that Nandi could defy. But even after her marriage she continues to meet Kemal whenever and wherever they could. She confesses to Laila:

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. I think hate is as good as any. Certainly it is the only feeling that remains in memory. (SOBC, 297)

Attia Hosain indeed exposes the limits of patriarchy that except domination it never knows anything else. It is a cruel system that tramples over a woman’s genuine desire and feeling. This is the fact for both Hindu and Muslim women during the 1930s and 1940s in India. Like Nandi, Laila challenges patriarchy and its domination in her own way. Laila chooses to marry with Ameer and she proves her courage and single mindedness to attain her selfhood. Meenakshi Mukherjee maintains:

Laila achieves selfhood by marrying the man of her choice even if it means defying convention and loyalty to family.4

Laila is even capable of looking after herself even after the death of her husband. There is a parallel between Laila’s assertion of her individuality and the freedom struggle. Thus partition affected the major as well as minor characters in the novel.

**Politics and Communal Riots:**

The partition of India, an important event affected many aspects of life. Partition has drawn the attention of politicians, historians and
creative writers. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* narrates the story of the individual crisis of Laila and the political crisis facing the people. The novel is political in as much as the characters not only react but also participate in the political activities in the country and take definite stands for and against them. The political milieu does not overtake the human story. But the decay of the feudal system, Hamid’s entrance into politics, division of the family due to partition, and the characters inheriting political climate and discussions on the political ideas enrich the political flavour of the novel. Laila’s friends in the college hold divergent views about the contemporary politics. Nita Chatterji, who is a nationalist, upholds the Congress; Nadira, an ardent follower of Islamic ideals, upholds the Muslim League and Joan, an Anglo-Indian, upholds the British rule. The novelist very interestingly holds up mirror to three main streams the congress, the Muslim Leauge and the British Raj through these characters. In addition to that, as Novy Kapadiya writes,

Asad’s head injury, Nita’s dismissal from college and death caused by lathi blows on her head, students’ protest at the viceroy’s arrival and plain-cloth policeman at the University campus were all sings of political ferment.

The novel implicitly depicts the struggle for power politics. After the abolition of the feudal system, Hamid wants to find a new political identity by contesting election. Saleem says to Hamid:

In the final analysis what you are facing is the struggle for power by the bourgeoisie. It is not really a peasant’s
movement, but when it comes to division of spoils even class interests are forgotten. (SOBC, 231)

On the other hand, the focus of the novel is on crisis within Muslim community. Historically speaking, partition was an enigma. People were torn between two worlds the newly created Pakistan, a separate homeland for the Muslims, and India, the country where they were born and lived for many years. This kind of climate this yielded two types of Muslim stands; one pro-Pakistan, demanding the division of the country and two pro-India, supporting the united India. At the level of high political scenario also, one can trace the representation of the former in personalities like Jinnah and Liakat Ali and the latter in Maulana Azad.

The Role of Local Parties and Politicians:-

After the death of Baba Jan, the family begins to scatter and the servants too. But the home coming of uncle Hamid brings a new air into the family. He is a follower of both east and west tradition. Hence he is half-feudal and half-western. As an educated elite he decides that Laila has to continue her education. She will have her share in the ancestral property and she will continue to stay with her uncle and aunt. In a dramatic scene of Laila falls in love with Ameer, a lecturer in history, who too dies in the end. Asad is badly wounded in a riot during the Mohurum procession which anticipates the forth coming communal turmoil Zahid and Asad leave for higher studies.
In the third part of the novel, politics begins to affect the family affairs. Hot discussion takes place among the member of the family. The whole local atmosphere is charged with politics:

Even visitors argued. A New type of person now frequented the house. Fanatic, bearded men and young zealots would come to see Saleem; rough country-dwelling land-lords and their ‘courtiers’ would visit my uncle. Saleem had, metaphorically, discarded his old school tie and my uncle his spats and gloves. Suave sophisticated tea and dinner parties had become infrequent and Government House receptions an interlude. Every meal at home had become an ordeal as peaceful as a volcanic eruption. (SOBC, 230)

With the local political changes in the state emergence of the Muslim League and the announcement of constitutional election differences arise between Saleem and his father Hamid. Hamid believes in Hindu-Muslim unity who

Always found it was possible for Hindus and Muslims to work together on a political level and live together in personal friendship. (SOBC, 234)

On the other hand Saleem suspects his father’s notion. As a Nationalist Muslim Hamid is called the Muslim League communal and Saleem thinks that the congress is an anti Muslim organization. Thus the son and the father belong to two different factions. Communal poison begins running in the blood of the villagers.
The effect of the communal riots in India on the country’s economy was harmful to both the Indian union and Pakistan. The integrated economic life, developed through ages within the national boundaries of land, was dislocated. Attia Hosain throws light on the imbalance of the economic norm of the Taluqdar of Lucknow who received a rude shock with the abolition of Zamidari and the division of the family:

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. Other retired to anonymity in their villagers. (SOBC, 277)

The novelist describes that the partition brings new laws and the harassment of people by the officers. Old feudal order loses its property and privileges. The property of the evacuees was taken by the custodian and the Hasanpur house was threatened.

The passion for national unity and solitarily suddenly took a turn towards mutual hatred and antagonism. In the confusion rumormongers had a field day. The communal crisis in the novel starts. The description of the violence of the freedom struggle and partition is limited to a few incidents. We just see Asad hurt twice and Nita dies as suddenly as a result of injuries to her brain caused by police lathi charge. (SOBC, 166)
Zahid dies in a train while going to Pakistan. Asad describes how he was hurt. The narrator from her confinement could have only a brief sight of protest and demonstration against the British.

Then the road was alive with defiant, determined young people. The sound of their marching feet and angry voices was a surging sea, a roaring tempest. In the forefront was a group of girls was Nita among them? They marched across our range of vision and out of it and their voices faded behind them. (SOBC, 162)

All people gathered for March with angry voice. From the roof, a place from where the Zenana could get a view of a world beyond their own. Laila and other women heard a,

Voice chanting in unison, the full throated chorus:
‘Inquilab...Zindabad...Azadiki Jai...Hail freedom. (SOBC, 162)

But this voice of union gets disrupted with slogans demanding Pakistan. Suddenly the whole country faces itself with the inevitable, that the country was partitioned between India and Pakistan. It takes an ugly turn that people had to fight with each others. Rumors added fuel to the incidents of rioting. Hakiman Bua describes how communal riot took place in the city. During the procession of the festival of Muharram, the tazia got stuck in the branch of a peepul tree near Hanumanji temple.

The branch of their sacred tree could not be cut without getting the Hindu angry. (SOBC, 76)
Hakiman Bua simply hears of the riots without reasoning while Zahid and Asad try to find some reason for it in their argument. The British are blamed for bringing in the communal drift. Asad sarcastically remarks to Zahara who asks why there should be a riot:

May be because there haven’t been any for too long, not even Hindu-Muslim ones. Something must be done to prove that the British are here to enforce law and order and stop us killing each other. (SOBC, 56)

The rumor about the riot was followed later by the Partition. The novel brings into focus the dilemma and confusion of the Muslims during and after the Partition. During the Partition movement, the Muslims had gone through a crisis of identity and nationality. Some supported the cause of Pakistan and migrated, while some stayed back for their love for India.

The Muslim novelists depict the pattern of communal relations primarily from the angle of the impact of partition on the fate of Indian Muslim community, which was a tragic victim of this unnatural division. Partition is seen as a Berlin wall dividing the Muslims into two hostile nations not only at the level of the community but also at that of the individual families.6

Attia Hosain deals at length on the confusion and dilemma of the Muslims through the characters of Uncle Hamid, Zahid, Asad Kemal and Saleem.

The members of the Talukdar family contemplate on the condition of Muslims in India and the politics about them. While
uncle Hamid supports congress Saleem support the Muslim League of Uncle Hamid He criticizes Muslim League being communal with heavy ‘Sarcasm’:

This Muslim League ……. I have it is called communal and reactionary by nationalist Muslims. (SOBC, 233)

Saleem on the other hand criticizes the Congress:

I believe the congress has a strong anti-Muslim element against which the Muslims must organize. (SOBC, 233)

Thus the local parties’ plans are different. The novel brings into focus the dilemma and confusion of the Muslims during the Partition. Zahid’s discomfiture and outright criticism of the Shias not only shows the differences within the community but also evokes response from Asad who sees through the mechanisms of the British and pointedly says that Zahid has learned the “Lesson the English teach us, hate each other love us.”(SOBC, 56)

He also holds the British responsible for instigating Hindu Muslim riots:

Maybe because there haven’t been any (communal riots) for too long, not even Hindu- Muslim ones. Something must be done to prove that the British are here to enforce law and order and stop us from killing each other. (SOBC, 56)
Britishers and Communal Riots:

It is essential to study the role of the Britishers in the novel. In the novel, the narrator focuses more on the reason of communal drifts and partition than just depicting the events. The ideological and mutual differences between the British and the Indian are shown through the characters of Mrs. Martin and Sylvia Tucker. Mrs. Martin, though friendly with the native people, never considers India as her home. Sylvia talks of British arrogance toward the Indians. John criticizes the natives. The ideological difference about nationalism and religion causes argument among Laila’s own friends. Differences on religion and nationalism bring conflict even among the people within the same community and the same family. Asad and Zahid, although both are Muslims, have different outlook about religion. Asad’s secular outlook keeps him back in India while Zahid maintains a dogmatic fundamentalist view. He says:

I hate those who are enemies of Islam no matter whom they may be and I am prepared to give my life for it. (SOBC, 69)

Asad condemns this communal hatred and says:

I am sure of nothing except that hatred breeds hated and violence and sorrow even if we ourselves suffer? (SOBC, 69)

Even Laila is pained to see the growing discord and says,
“And now I wonder how for apart we will drive each other ourselves.” (SOBC, 256)

That is the seed of discord sown by the British was nurtured by the communal hatred and now grown into a well rooted tree, the fruits of which were full of bitterness.

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Attia shows that the British imperialists get success in weakening the nationalist movement by their well-known policy of dividing the two communities. She exposes the role the British played in developing the communal struggle. Asad represents the Muslims who know very well about the Britishers policy of hating each other and loving them.

The novelist tries to trace the causes of the growth of communal hatred and partly blames the British and partly the leaders of both communities. Firstly she discerns the “Divide and Rule” policy of the British. Similar views are put by the historian Bipan Chandra:

British policy was solely responsible for the rise and growth of communalism; or that the entire communal antagonism or politics can be attributed to British policy. It is obvious that the British policy of divide and rule could succeed only. 7

It is therefore true and needless to suspect that the British rule played important role in the promotion and growth of communal virus between Hindus and Muslims.
Women and Communal Riots:

The novelist realistically writes about the losses and violence caused by the partition. There are personal and collective losses. It is the women who suffered more than men.

Attia Hosain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column is more important for its depiction of woman’s world during a period of transition than as a novel of political and historical events. In fact the inside of Ashiana, where most actions take place, is more important than the world outside. The novel deals with tradition and change in between dealing with the overwhelming consequences of freedom struggle and Partition.

Through the character of Nita, the growing consciousness of the women, their self respect and self worth is reasserted by the author. Nita shows that a woman can be equal to man in all respects. She is the only woman character who participates in the freedom struggle and sacrifices her life for the country. Uncle Hamid also underlines the importance of women’s education:

I have always believed in the education of girls; it is the duty of parents and guardians to give them the kind of education that will best fit them for their responsibilities in this changing world. (SOBC, 109-110)

With liberal outlook and the ongoing changes in the society women’s role too underwent a change. Women’s life took a different turn with new responsibilities and new activities. Aunt Saira Zahra
Begum Wahid comes out of Purdah and get involved in social service activities. After partition Zahra and Nadira were also involved in the rehabilitation activities. Women are given the right to vote and Begum Wahid becomes a candidate for the constituent assembly and after independence, Sita becomes a political leader. These incidents represent the growing involvement of women in politics. However, Hosain portrays how the superficial changes could not change the internalized values of people. Aunt Saira and Zahra although come out of Purdah, they still remain servile to their husbands. All their concerns have been to satisfy their husbands. Their individuality is seen nowhere through the novel. With partition Aunt, Saira becomes lonely and feels deserted. Her son Saleem migrates to Pakistan. She could not adjust with the Parsee wife of Kemal and with the death of Uncle Hamid, she is left alone without a family. She is reduced to nothing despite her life-long service to the family, husband and children.

Sunlight on a Broken Column tries to depict that women’s subjugation is a universal phenomenon. Women are victims of the patriarchal system even within the domestic space that is supposed to be their sole domain. The novel re-emphasizes that a woman can exercise her will and choice in a quest for her selfhood, as exemplified in the characters of Nandi and Laila. The novel takes us a tour of the conflicts and resolutions, transgression and their effects on family, love, marriage, loyalty and betrayal, tradition and change, nationalism and partition.
Symbolism Used to Signify the theme of Communal Riots:

The theme of the communal riots has a symbolic significance in the novel. It stands for any such event which results into distress and disaster. Similarly, the description of the event is not only for entertainment. Attia Hosain teaches the moral that we should not allow any other partition again, which will cause such evil effect.

The novel focuses attention on India’s struggle for Independence and proceeds to present the ironic rewards of this struggle freedom and partition. The title suggesting the rise of the *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, symbolizes the dawn of independence in the country which is partitioned and divided.

The first part of the novel gives a realistic picture of the family. It is a typical orthodox Muslim family, where the Koran is read and followed, the purdha system is practiced and other Islamic ways of life are strictly observed. The head of the family is, as Laila calls, Baba Jan, who is a symbol of traditional feudalism. His eldest son uncle Hamid is aboard with his family, much against the wishes of his father. The family also consists of Baba Jan’s elder daughter Majida, a widow and her daughter Zahara, aunt Abida, Baba Jan’s younger daughter who is yet to be married. Asad and Zahid, who are the distant relatives, and Laila, the orphaned daughter, are being looked after by Hakiman Bua.
Part one ends with the death ceremony of Baba Jan at the ancestral village of Hasanpur, also symbolising the disintegration of the feudal system and Uncle Hamid starting a new order at Ashina. After the departure of Saleem, Kemal sells ‘Ashiyana and starts staying with his mother at his ancestral village called Hasanpur. The new laws are enacted due to partition and it lead Kemal to the selling of his house in a helpless and desperate state. Because the Saleem’s share in the property is considered the property of evacuee which will be owned by refugees. After Partition, Laila visits ‘Ashiyana’ and is surprised to see her house filled with refugees. Ashiyana which symbolically,

“indicates that the Muslims had made India their home”.

They completely lose its past grandeur and unity and the family is also dislocated. After two years, Saleem and Nadira visit India not as citizens of India but as Pakistanis. They feel strange in the country of their ancestors. The novel ends with Laila who is now a widow, waiting for Asad which is the light of hope for her in the broken world.
References:


