

Chaos, Identity Crisis and Nationalist struggle in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*

¹Sweta Singh & ²Dr. Purabi Panwar

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Mewar University, Chittorgarh (India)

²Associate Professor, Visiting Faculty, Mewar University, Chittorgarh (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 January 2019

Keywords

Aristocracy, Communalism, India, Pakistan, Partition, Patriarchy, Riot

*Corresponding Author

Email: swetasinghdagar[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a culturally rich canvas portraying pre-partition and post-partition times in a unique way. The novel was published in 1961. One might find hard to categorize the novel into a particular ruling theme. It is a supreme example of aesthetically rich work. The novel covers a very volatile and captive time period in the history of Indian sub-continent. Journeying from 1932 to somewhere around 1952, one can experience the major socio-political changes with 'Partition' and 'Self' in the backdrop.

It is a story about human struggling at personal, social and national front. The fight for freedom was not just limited to British's rather it invaded the psyche of every single native and became their dream state. The time was tough and negotiations with power and pressure were on. Congress, Muslim League, Taluqdars and Princely states were trying hard to secure their fronts to gather maximum support in order to strike the best deal. However, there was one more section of society, which was not directly involved in the nationalist struggle of independence but was feeling the need for change and recognition. The air was charged with the thoughts of freedom and against long-denied rights. It threw open the door of numerous households and the women started to question the patriarchal ways and double standards within society.

Sunlight on a Broken Column is one such rare amalgamation of various sub-stories that manages to keep moving without overshadowing one another. It has chaos and confusion on all three fronts: personal, social and national. All these elements made the position and circumstances critical in those times. People faced an identity crisis and failed to recognize their true self. The difference between their personal and social position varied and generated conflict in mind. Amid nationalist struggle, the story *Sunlight on a Broken Column* gives the glimpse of changes and personal fight that an influential Muslim family goes through via the eyes of an adolescent female family member, Laila. The present paper aims an in-depth critical study of the text in modern times.

About the Author

Attia Hosain was born into a well established Muslim family in 1913. Her father was a Taluqdar of Oudh and mother also an intellectual lady. Along with her modern education and exposure, she was well versed with Muslim traditions and had private tuitions in Urdu and Persian. She was a headstrong woman and always questioned the double standards of society. Her rebellion took the form of marriage against her family wish. After Partition, she shifted her base to Britain along with her Husband, Ali Bahadur Habibullah, and her two children. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was her only completed novel other than a series of short stories published and unpublished. The similarity in the life of Attia and her protagonist Laila, in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* let one take the novel as her autobiographical work. Anita Desai had rightly described the work as 'a gallery full of portrait, varied and rich and interesting'. Attia Hosain died in 1998.

Chaos, Identity Crisis and Nationalist struggle in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* Conclusion

Most of the novels written in the 1950s and 60s had much in common. They all dealt with several unanswered questions pertaining to society, nation, and history. Social and political changes along with tussle for power and position left the natives

perplexed and in chaos. The nation and its people were left in the lurch to adjust on their own with the sudden changes that independence brought. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is also one such powerful story of feudal Muslim family struggling to cope up with the change of time.

The novel starts on a note of sadness and describes the illness and deteriorating health of Baba Jan, Laila's grandfather and the head of the family. The otherwise strict, orthodox family structure is suddenly made more accommodating by shifting Abida Bibi from *zenana* into the guest-room so that the house can keep running. The children of the family, Laila and Zahra are unable to understand the claustrophobic atmosphere of the house and remain uncertain and afraid. The family is a staunch follower of patriarchy. The protagonist of the novel, Laila, is unable to keep up with the typical set of values laid up for a woman in the society. She prefers to be left in her own cocoon with a lot of books to read. She is an orphan child living in a joint family. Abida *Phuphi* is her guardian and mentor, both.

Laila is not shown as a confident child till the near end of the novel. The empty space after her parent's death has made her lonely and full of doubts. Even Abida *Phuphi* also couldn't fill that void. The love and care she receives in the joint family

keeps her life comfortably running. Being an introvert, Laila finds it hard to command her will. She always tries to please the elders especially Abida to gain confidence and assurance. Her suppressed emotions often make her restless resultant to which she craves for freedom more than anything else. Her rebellious spirit also seems an outcome of these pent-up emotions.

Zahra, Laila's only cousin sister living with her have a typical woman life approved by religion and her mother, Majida. Laila is often compared with her and Aunt Majida leaves no stone unturned to extract approval and pride from such comparisons. It is only Aunt Abida, protecting Laila and carrying the wish of Laila's late father to bring her up liberally and be provided with English education. The effect of her education and upbringing is clearly visible when there happens to be an argument between Laila and Zahra after Nandi and Uncle Mohsin's episode:

"...Laila, how could you have interfered?
Aren't you ashamed?
Yes I am. I'm ashamed to call him uncle. I'm ashamed that you have no pity because Nandi is a servant girl...
Do you know what is wrong with you, Laila? All those books you read. You just talk like a book now, with no sense of reality. The only cure for Nandi is to get her married quickly.
The cure for good girl is to get her married quickly; the cure for bad girl is to get her married quickly. Do you think of anything but getting married quickly?
I suppose you think you will never get married?
I won't be paired off like an animal." (pg 29; Ch-3; Part-I)

One can feel the clean shift of ideas in Laila's thoughts than her rest of the family members. Her different ways most of the time brings pain and loneliness. She is always in search of the reason why her thoughts differ from others and often struggles as follow:

"...was Zahra right when she said I was heartless and selfish? And yet I cried when reading stories and poems! What was wrong with me inside? What was 'wrong' in itself, and what was 'right'? Who was to tell me?" (Pg-31; Ch-3; Part-I)

Moving forward in text one gets to know more about the narrator's family, friends, relations, religion, and customs. Baba Jan and his friendship with people of importance point out towards the fact that the family has high connections and is respectful and rich. The whole text had been divided into four parts. The first part of the novel consists of twenty-one chapters. They throw light on the demure ways of India's rich culture and heritage in times of Raja and Taliquadar's. The novel is a sneak peek into the life of royal Muslim family and their social and political establishments.

First part prepares the readers for future action. The pre-partition days, struggle, boycott, the troublemaker Congresswala protesting, people going to jail are the subaltern themes in first part of the text. The conversation between Asad and Zahid in chapter six gives one the important information about the divide within the Muslim community. The boys seem

well aware of the politics and social changes taking place. Asad, the elder is much mature. He understands the divide and rule policy of British and detests their mean thinking, whereas Zahid being younger one is shown as more energetic and hyper. Zahid hates the modernization and showbiz on the name of religion. He condemns the procession taken out on the day of Muharram and blames Sunnis for sinful activities. Zahra being a Muslim idealist criticizes Zahid for spelling hatred for his fellow brothers. Zahid also tells that some school boys were talking about riots during Muharram. Asad deconstructs Zahid's information about riots so that Laila and Zahra can understand it better by saying:

"...maybe because there haven't been any for too long, not even Hindu-Muslim ones. Something must be done to prove that British are here to enforce law and order, and stop us killing each other." (Pg-56; Ch-6; Part-I)

Chapter eight let one understand the working of moneylenders, tenants and Talukdar's business. The information about how the cases are decided, the forthcoming of new tenant laws, need of procurement, widespread poverty and collection of revenue etc. is also there.

With the growing storyline, the character of Laila, Zahra, Zahid and Asad starts taking definite shape. Zahra is turning into a typical woman believing in all good theory and performing her religious duty without any ado. Laila is rational, aware and up for equality. She hates double standards and cannot identify with her elder's living ideals. But she chooses to be silent in front of others so as not to displease elders. Asad is a difficult man to understand. He is carving out his future to give definite shape to his ideas and to have a meaningful life. Zahid is most alienated and secretive. He is overpowered with the ideas of religious demands and following dialogue of his vouches for it:

"I hate those who are enemies of Islam no matter whom they may be, and I am prepared to give my life for it." (Pg-69; Ch-10; Part-I)

Zahid generates a sense of fear in the reader's mind and seems brainwashed. Chapter twelve gives more information about the patty issues catching fire and turning into a Hindu-Muslim riot. Asad gets hurt in that and expresses her love for Zahra in his feverish state which upsets Majida. Soon after that, Baba Jan dies out of illness. The family travels to the ancestral village for the last rights. Hamid Uncle and wife Saira arrive next morning. His English ways make him a little out of place and prepare the reader for change.

The life of a woman in those times was strictly controlled by the patriarchal set-up. In *Hasanpur*, Zainab was clear about her duty as a woman and expresses her thoughts about marriage and life as:

"Now I serve my mother and father and brothers, then I'll serve my husband, my father-in-law and mother-in-law. But at least I'll be able to wear jewels and nice cloths." (Pg-95; Ch-17; Part-I)

Her thoughts generate both pity and disappointment. Laila gets disturbed to hear her accept dominance so naturally and detest unreasonable social ways and practices. Everybody has their own version of freedom and dreams in general. To Asad, they are about non-violence and individual self, whereas for Zahid freedom is all about Islam. To Zainab's elder brother freedom and independence did not matter as it will not change the reality or condition of poor peasants. Laila's idea about freedom differs substantially from those of Zahra, Zainab, and Nandi. The younger generation seems struggling to hold on to their line of thoughts. They appear confident outside but in their conversation, there is utter chaos, confusion, disappointment and indifference towards life. The social practices and woman life shown in the text gives the impression that freedom from *Purdah* for a woman has the same connotation and need, as independence from British meant to natives. Both behind it are confused and in a lurch and thus the struggle to discover self take the form of hunger in them.

After Baba Jan's death, some new changes and important decisions are taken by Hamid Uncle. Aunt Abida and Zahra are to be married soon. Asad and Zahid will be sent to hostel and Laila will also continue with her studies. The first part of the novel ends with the celebration of Zahra's marriage. With change in authority changes the people, perspectives, peasants, relations, integrity, guests, maids, servants, rituals, ways of living, and nameplate outside house. Laila only has Saliman to remind her of old days in *Aashiana*. Her relation to Hamid Uncle and Aunt Saira has a superficial meaning which she describes as follow:

"My relation with Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira was simpler and there was nothing deeper than its outward forms. They looked after me, and I tried not to displease them...I was too young to share their social life. We met at meal-times, and on the rare occasions they spent a quiet evening at home. Their conversation was about such matters as float easily on the surface of consciousness. I posed no problems of upbringing. I was outwardly acquiescent." (Pg-123; Ch-2; Part-II)

Laila did not want to complicate her life anymore and thus chooses to keep her personal and social life separate. Her social life is that of an obedient and quiet child whereas in her private world she is an intelligent, rational and sensitive girl. Her college life gives her liberation to be her true self. Her friends in college are Nita Chatterjee, Nadira, Joan's and Romana. They often discuss social problems and politics together. The increasing involvement of students in politics and protests throws light on growing nationalist feeling. But not everybody involved in social service is truthful and dedicated which makes Laila intolerant. She admits:

"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." (Pg-139; Ch-6; Part-II)

The reception given by the Taluqdars of Oudh in honor of the Viceroy feels like a fanfare-cum-show business. But for

Laila, it promises a way to freedom and future light. The day after the reception of Viceroy, saw protest and a kind of civil disobedience at new hostel inauguration ceremony. For the protesters and nationalist, it became a platform to raise their demand and defiance but to the loyalist of the throne, it seemed disturbance and lawlessness. The tussle showcases the two faces of Indian society divided over interests, political passion, freedom of expression and demand for solidarity with fellow students at education institutions. The peoples are further divided in their approach to secure freedom i.e. by means of violence and non-violence. Asad, Zahid, Nita, and many more students were part of that protest. Lathi charge, firing, rustication of students makes things worse and widens the gap between the authorities and the nationalist.

On this note, ends the second part of the novel which consists of thirteen chapters. The part is more about Laila's internal conflict and identity crisis. She reaches college only to discover her vulnerable side. The revolutionary thoughts and clarity in mind of fellow students make her feel helpless and circumscribed. She is shown as a wild bird in cage often questioning about life, morals, status, freedom, power, and politics.

Laila is now almost nineteen years old. Her cousins, the son of Hamid Uncle, Kemal and Saleem both return home after completing their studies abroad. Kemal had joined Indian Civil Service like his father and Saleem became a barrister. Laila finds true friends in them. But other than that, her confusions and questions still had no answer and she remains in search of her release.

In summer's, the family goes to their home in hills but it feels different this time in Kemal and Saleem's company. Aunt Saira starts planning a party to introduce her sons to their social circle. Hamid Uncle remains busy in the planning of coming election and political campaigns. Laila understands Kemal better because they both connect to each other's lost and secluded self.

"How much greater is the ignorance of the changes within that cannot be described but only felt! At least, when people are near each other they have some slight indication...Yet I am expected to think and behave as if I had never been away, as if the patterns of my thought should be familiar to those who have stayed behind. Do you understand me?"

To which Laila replied:

"I do understand. Do you know why? Because without having gone away physically as you did I have never lived completely with the others." (Pg-179; Ch-2; Part-III)

Kemal and Saleem further open up to Laila and tells that Aunt Saira, has discussed their marriage to her to which both of them have refused. This rejection brings them more close to each other. Their trust and friendship strengthen. The Party of Aunt Saira fails to entertain young ones. Kemal, Saleem and Laila with their friends' feel alienated but whenever together, they all bring the fresh air to otherwise seemingly boring and structurally set up get-together by Hamid Uncle and Aunt Saira.

The time is changing and so are the rules and politics. With growing awareness and transparencies the time is getting tough for power hungry people. It is getting hard to retain the title and power they have always been used to and Hamid Uncle is no different. Laila also talks about one such change in the following extract:

“For some time Uncle Hamid had been absorbed in problems and controversies relating to the elections that were to be held under the new Government of India Act...Constituencies and ministries were distributed among gentlemen like cakes, and ladies were offered seats in both houses with bouquets...Uncle Hamid was among the few who recognised the challenge of the Congress and the reorganised Muslim League now that millions of ordinary men and women were being given the right to vote by the new constitutions.” (Pg-193; Ch-4; Part-III)

The communal differences in the history of India cannot be ignored. It has been both, strength and weakness of India. Kemal and Sita introduce the otherwise sublime communal differences in the novel. Kemal is in love with Sita and wants to marry her but religion came in-between and they both part their ways. Saleem's hardened views over religion throw light on the society and differences of time. He once told Laila:

“I am not interested in theological arguments. But Sita's attitude opened my eyes to the realities of the communal problem, 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?” (Pg-197; Ch-4; Part-III)

Meanwhile, as the days passed, Laila's affection starts growing-up for Ameer. To Laila, her love for Ameer is divine and no other can ever match that devotion as theirs. Strange confidence, assurance, and sense of security wrap her round and she became gayer than ever. She is blindly in love with Ameer and their secret date just before Ameer's departure is proof of that. Her love is childlike- pure, innocent, full of restlessness and immaturity. She has loved for love sake, without thinking about the background, status, family and social norms.

In order to give more time to their love and need for stable life, Laila joins postgraduate studies in University. Elections are near and Hamid Uncle is too busy planning them. Muslim League is getting fierce in its motives. People's ideology is being forced to take a definite stand. The effect of the election is such that Nadira is no longer the same liberal girl. Her thoughts changed and stance hardened the opinion of Saleem too. With change in ways of politics, the atmosphere and verbal battles get uncivil and fierce. The rift between Hindu and Muslim widens due to the intense political campaign. To secure power Muslim League is up in uniting against Congress.

Uncle Hamid's thoughts were limited to preserve the heritage and rights endowed to him by his ancestors. He believes in the unity of the nation and wants to safeguard his

interests without trading his birth land. But Saleem, on the other hand, becomes the staunch supporter of Muslim League and is unable to tolerate the idea of being ruled by Hindus. Father and Son's discord often gets ugly and hurtful and amid one such hateful discussion at the dinner table, Saleem expresses his will to marry Nadira. This came as a major shock to his Parents.

A week before an election, Asad came to Lucknow for political work. It is the year 1937. Laila feels bright in the company of Asad but the shadow of outside atmosphere springs over their discussion and reveals the fear for ongoing polarization. Laila comments:

“...I feel just angry-and frightened too sometimes. Such hatreds are being stirred up. How can we live together as a nation if all the time only the differences between the different communities are being preached? I cannot understand why Saleem can't see the danger.” (Pg-245; Ch-14; Part-III)

The divide within the Muslim community is clearly visible at various stages. Muslim League, fascism and talks about division and differences divide the devoted followers from the liberals and democratic ones. So much was changing because of inappropriate awareness among natives that Laila, wishes to run away from the mockery of ideals. Talking about Begum Waheeda or Waliuddin or Aggarwal's and their political dreams, Asad only takes it as a change for good and remarks:

“But at least they have to talk in democratic terms. They have to go to the people for their votes, and talk to them more than Hamid Chacha and his friends ever had to do. That in itself is an improvement.” (Pg-245; Ch-14; Part-III)

Laila's short visit to Aunt Abida's home gives her peace and disappointment, both. The Plight of a woman tied in and around traditions, customs, duties, and responsibility confuses Laila further. The barren life of Aunt Abida testifies the failure of her teachings and strengthens the opinion of 'self' in Laila's mind.

Finally comes the day of the election result. Kemal arrives a day earlier to support his father morally. But to Saleem, the victory of Begum Waheeda and agenda's of Muslim League seems dear and his talks reciprocate the same. The friendships and test of loyalties pave way for Hamid Uncle's success. The visitor from all sect of society throngs-in to congratulate him on his success. There was music, celebration, and food for everybody. An after party is arranged by Ranjit and all friends get excited about it. Kemal went to fetch his father's car and that is the only time Ameer and Laila find some private time. In the wake of emotions, Ameer kisses Laila and Saira Chachi watched it. Laila starts shaking out of fear. She was not prepared to reveal her relationship that way. But at least before Laila's fight for self, she has a whole night to spend with Ameer to plan things out and face the morning.

On this note ends the third part of the text. It contains eighteen chapters. This part is more about change in people, perspectives, life, and politics. Kemal and Saleem have

changed. They are grown up adults and vocal about most of the things in and around them. The change in rights of people, power, politics, election, and democracy takes a toll at the existing ruling system and aristocratic families. Muslim League gets fierce and there are hints about future division as the only solution to achieve independence. The Congress is a synonym to patriotism and is against any dominance. Laila is still the same confused self but is searching life and meanings with Ameer. She can be termed as true escapist, who is always bottled-up about something or the other.

The fourth part of the novel is a journey back and forth. It consists of nine chapters and takes a leap of around fourteen years. The country has achieved its independence and Laila is visiting *Aashiana* one last time before it is being sold. The time has changed leading to a change in surroundings and living style. The estate and palaces have either been taken over sealed or converted into financial units gearing profits. This whole unit is about the change and upheaval of all the past years. It is about Laila's return to her roots and the comparison between past and present. Freedom has changed the mood and atmosphere of various vital things that together constituted her childhood memories. The sight of house brings back the rush of emotions. She summarizes her life as follow:

“There were strangers living in the rooms where I had once searched for my lost father and mother, where I had found refuge in the love of my aunt Abida and Hakuman Bua, where I had developed through conflict with Zahra and Aunt Saira, where I had learned comradeship through Asad and Kemal and tested my beliefs in arguments with Saleem and Zahid, where my will had been disciplined by my grandfather and Uncle Hamid and been freed by my dreams and love for Ameer.” (Pg-272; Ch-2; Part-IV)

Now there are strangers living in that house. After Partition, Saleem's part of the property has been exchanged under the governments 'refugees' and 'evacuees' property claim policy. Laila has a daughter now and it has been five years since Uncle Hamid died. The *Aashiana* is to be sold soon due to the financial crisis. Once Saleem migrated to Pakistan, it became Kemal's responsibility to keep things on track. Just before starting out from Hasanpur, Aunt Saira has cried a lot in front of Laila over apathy. The abolished feudal existence, lack of income, Kemal's marriage to non-Muslim: Mrs.Wadia's daughter, Saleem's migration and Hamid Uncle's death has made Aunt Saira hysteric. The new government reforms were not easy to digest for those living on the fruits of aristocracy and patronage. Some lost their balance of mind while others retired to their village in silence. The royal era was destroyed.

The sitting room, unkempt dining room, gloomy pantry, wild overgrown garden bring back the memories of Gulam Ali, Nandi and childhood days to Laila. At present Nandi is taking care of Laila's daughter at her house in hills. Nandi has proved to be the smartest Ayah in the neighborhood. She has proven most loyal to Laila. During her last days of stay in *Aashiana*, the atmosphere towards Laila was hostile and even Aunt Abida has been cruel to her. All were bitter and indifferent towards her except Sita. It was Sita, who had traveled Day and night to be

with her when she got to know about Ameer's death. Their friendship has been cleansed now and holds real meaning.

After partition, Saleem and Nadira migrated to Pakistan. Saleem has attained new heights professionally. Nadira has been sobered by the pain and suffering of refugees and has devoted herself to charity and welfare work. Zahra with her husband has also shifted to a new land and was more than happy. Zainab's family also went away and with them Sharifan and family too migrated. Romana and Joan went to their land but were in touch and enquired about each other's well being. Raza Ali and his family also went to Pakistan. But out of all, Zahid's destiny shocked most. He was murdered on a train to Pakistan. It was as if *Aashiana* still contained all the emotions and people associated with it. As Laila moves towards her room the courtyard wakes the reminiscence of days when aunt Abida and aunt Majida with their companion and maid-servant use to live and spend their time laying leisurely there. Aunt Abida and the pain of being miss-understood and ignored never let Laila reunite with her. After Ameer's death, everybody had been kind to her but that has led to hatred inside her as if her husband's death was a price for her forgiveness. Aunt Abida died in arms of Hakiman Bua. Laila has been late by an hour to reach to be with her in her last time. Laila's marriage was a simple ceremony and was held at the time of Saleem's marriage to cover up the disapproval and sadness. Laila left her room after marriage with the blessings of not one of her elders and that made her sorrowful. She thought of her last day stay and the conversation she had with Ameer in her room.

The shadow of their family status and background never left Ameer and Laila. But at the time of their start of new life, they were too preoccupied to notice it. Laila found new friends in Ameer's friend circle. They were mostly poor but real. Their discussion and debate helped her sharpen understanding. But her natural distaste would arouse whenever she would come across hallow teaching and over-the-board claims.

Just after a year of marriage, Laila conceived and it changed everything. She started to feel the miracle like none other could possibly have felt. But Ameer became moody and quite. Maybe he was planning and working out on a more comfortable future for his family. Laila gets to know about it only when everything reached an end, and Ameer was to join the Public Relation branch of the Army in 1942. After Ameer was gone on the job, she bought a small cottage in the hills. It was her everything she needed to comfort off for self. Asad was also arrested the same year Ameer joined the army but he was regular even from prison to write to her.

In the coming years of endless wait, Shahla, their daughter, was Laila's life and breath. The news of Ameer being taken as a prisoner made her superstitious and skeptical. He was killed, trying to escape. The news of Ameer's demise pushed Laila deep in her loneliness and solitude. Her silence shut the outer world and people and created the new walls to skip from time and reality. Even her child did not matter at that time. It was Nandi's selfless service that kept the life and house running. Asad's regular messages were her only comfort and ray of hope.

After release, Asad gets back to his educational and political work. His dedication and zeal for the betterment of society have promised him a good position among the young men in Congress. Zahid's death was his dreadful test for faith in non-violence. Laila and Asad's feeling for each other is often a cause of embarrassment.

Now that she is in her own room, in front of her same old dusty mirror she could not help look at the face that has aged and is very different from her past. Her past is over with Ameer, like the memories of a distant land. Her past was always eager for tomorrow and sought the light to freedom, whereas her present often likes to venture into the past to find moments of joy and completeness. On that day in a room full of memories she cried her past out in order to set herself free from any other remaining bondage. On hearing Asad's voice, she wiped her eyes and gets ready to leave everything behind, for a new start.

And, here ends the novel.

Sunlight on a Broken Column is a story of many. The theme of partition, politics, social transformation, self vs. family loyalty and conflicting cultures of east and west makes the text an unparalleled read of all time. The novel finds a significant place in the history of Indian English literature for presenting the Muslim woman perspective over the changing times and covering the most volatile twenty years of Indian sub-continent i.e. a decade before and after Partition.

The *Nawabi* culture of Lucknow, then Oudh, starts to disintegrate as the story progress. With surge of nationalism and western influence there starts a conflict within the society. The complex diverse culture of Indian society and extraordinary expectations from 'freedom' turns the transition process into chaos. Natives were unable to limit their expectation and their misplaced faith in politics and freedom leads to near downfall. Muslims, Hindus, Dalits, Sikhs, all wanted their own freedom and were unable to accept the rule of others, even if it was in form of democratic government. This was the major problem with the idea of freedom that gave birth to Partition, Pakistan, and demand for Khalistan. Freedom was no more limited to independence but got the religious connotation which led to the demand of the independent religious state. The concept of country and unity was no more able to hold the diverse cultural identities and thus falls apart. That is just one aspect of the novel that starts to affect majorly before the second part of the novel is about to over. But apart from politics what holds the storyline of the text together is its women, their lives and ways to live it. Men and patriarchal systems were in place but they seem diseased and fail to generate any direct impact. It is the

women of the text and their stories which make it a masterpiece of time and class.

The novel doesn't favor any religion and is an impartial read. Attia Hosain has by means of text criticized communalism and religion politics for personal gain. She hated Muslim League for inciting hatred and anger and then leaving their coreligionist behind on the mercy of Hindus. During an argument with Nadira in Part four of the text, she praised hundreds and thousands of Sita and Ranjit for risking their lives to save others in riots. She supports equality, justice, mutual respect, and humanity. She hated the double standards of society and was thus never socially desirable.

Most of the characters in the text have faced an identity crisis at one or another point of time. The changes and discovery of self within conventional setup and respect and love for family bring chaos in their life. Amid all these discoveries the nation is also about to achieve its freedom and identity which in turns complexes the life of its natives furthermore. The changing rules, regulations, new policies and endowed rights imbalances the centuries-old structures of society. Thus among the themes of partition, social change, east-west encounter, *Nawabi* culture, joint family structure, and interpersonal relationships, the theme of selfhood also holds an important place in the text.

The whole of the story is told in the first person. It gives the narrator a kind of freedom with character and storyline. It also gives reader a sense of truth being told. The method of narration is autobiographical and is written in retrospective manner with sudden flashbacks to support events in the text. Laila's life comes a full circle in part four when she visits *Aashiana* one last time and draws emotional attachment from once her prison.

In modern times too this novel promises a great deal. It is a part of history that is long lost and lets the readers enjoy the past. It throws light from where we have evolved as a nation and society and what needs to be done in order to not repeat mistakes. Equality and space often create conflicts and is a primary right of everybody. In today's world, one cannot imagine the plight of marginalized groups and their struggle in past. Education and growing awareness have helped each and everyone empowers. One should take pride in their history and journey of evolution, and literature helps play an important role in it. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is an important text as it holds the mirror of society which only texts and documents can help visit readers.

References

1. Arora, Neena. Dhawan.K.R, (2010): Partition and Indian Literature:Voices of Wounded Psyche. Vol.2. Prestige Books,New Delhi.
2. Butalia, Urvashi, (2017): The other side of the Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. Penguin Random House India.
3. Gundur, S.N., (2008): Partition and Indian English Fiction. Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
4. Hosain, Attia, (2009): Sunlight on a Broken Column. Penguin Book India.
5. Kandhare, S., Ram, (2015): A Critical Study of Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column. Vol.2.8. The South Asian Academic Research Chronicle.
6. Kiran, N.S.,(2013): Society In Transition: Cultural History In Attia Hosain's Sunlight On a Broken Column. Vol.1.1.

Journal Of Higher Education And Research Society A
Refereed International.

7. Paul, Chandra, Gopal, (2015): The Evaluation of the Indian Neo Women: A study of Attia Hosain's "Sunlight on a Broken Column". Vol.3.2. The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies.
8. Saykar, satish, (2017): Partition and Communal Conflict in the Select English Novels: Azadi, Sunlight on a Broken Column and The Shadow Lines. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.