

## THEME OF GENDER BIAS AND SOCIETY IN ATTIA HOSAIN'S NOVEL SUNLIGHT ON A BROKEN COLUMN

**Dr. Maroti R. Wagh**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,  
Taywade College, Koradi- Nagpur

### Abstract:

*Attia Hosain's very popular novel sunlight on a broken Column is a novel which was published in 1961. It is mainly set in Lucknow. In this novel, the novelist has very successfully intermingled the theme of gender and society through different characters. Basically, it is an Autobiographical account by a fictional character called Laila who is a 15-year-old orphaned daughter of a rich Muslim family of Taluqdars. The researcher has tried to show the theme of gender and society through this work.*

**Keywords:** Gender, society, freedom, struggle, orthodox.

### Introduction:

*Gender is, undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in our lives. I also realised that in a world dominated by male values, while the caste and the class struggle are taken seriously, the gender struggle is not.*

*(Shashi Deshpande, 1998, Of concerns, Of anxieties)*

Attia Hosain was a British- Indian novelist, author, writer, journalist and actor. She has considered as a pioneering woman of letters and classic diasporic writer. Her both the works Sunlight on a broken Column and Phoenix Fled has been recognised as finest in the Indian canon. Her writing career began in England at the end of the 20th century in semi-exile. As she took the title of this novel from the poem The Hollow Men which is a symbol of loneliness, isolation and moral blindness and their inability to see the truth of their own nature. It continues to reverberate with new generations of critics, communicators and recogniser her contribution to post-colonial literature. Many popular Indian writers have expressed admiration for her work and acknowledged its influence. The title of the novel has taken from T. S. Eliot's poem The Hollow Men which is very suggestive for the theme of the novel. As the lines appear:

*There, the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column,  
There, is a tree swinging  
And voices are in the wind's singing*

*More distant and more solemn*

*Than a fading star. (Line-22-28)*

Hosain's character Laila is a young girl who has lost both her parents lives in the households of her grandfather along with her grandfather's sisters Abida and Majida and Majida's seventeen-year-old daughter Zahra. She is brought by her orthodox but principled aunt Abida. Here, we can remind the very world famous line by a great feminist writer, Simone de Beauvoir as she wrote: "One is not born a woman but rather becomes one."

Though Laila according to the wishes of her father had 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 nevertheless an autocratic guardian, along very little freedom to those who live under his rule. As we see such orthodox tradition in Manusmriti: "in childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead under her sons'. She should not have independence". (Manu, Manusmriti, 5148).

No linger in purdah, Laila starts attending college. Here the writer has shown the importance of education to change human life and personal progress and development. Her university friend and her distant cousin Asad become involved in anti-government protest. Surrounded by people who are either pro-British or against. She, however, is unable to take sides. She is enmeshed in the struggle for her own personal freedom. Once when asked by her uncle to opine about the agitation going on in the university, she refused to do so.

On being asked whether she had no freedom of thought she answer that she had no freedom of action. Her rebellion against the hypocrisy visible in the so called liberal views of her uncle and his wife remains limited to her mind until she loves with Ameer. Ameer, a poor relative of their family friends, would never be approved by her family. She goes against their wishes to marry him, and wins her freedom from their authority. Here, the

writer expresses her rebellious thought through the character Laila to change her life. The novel has many shades of gender conflict and class conflict. The novel ends with her loneliness after Ameer's death after the bloody partition and so called independence of India of both the nations, India and Pakistan. Her slow turn towards nationalist politics of India, the confused state of the 'secular' Muslim in post-independence India is symbolised by her subtle acceptance of Asad, her cousin. The novel is open ended and we never know what she finally decides thought.

#### Conclusion:

here, in this novel, we can see the theme of gender and society and its conflicts for their survival and freedom. As the novelist has taken the title of the novel Sunlight on the broken Column from the poem The Hollow Men which symbolizes the Loneliness, Isolation of modern Men and Women

their moral blindness and their inability to see the truth of their own nature.

#### Citations:

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