

CHAPTER IV : CONCLUSION

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This dissertation started with the discussion of Indian English Literature and Indo-Anglian fiction as a distinct genre. It took for analysis Attia Hosain's novel Sunlight on a Broken Column and her short-stories also. In this chapter I would like to state my conclusions briefly.

Indian English fiction is a distinct genre not simply because Indian writers write it in English. It is a unique phenomenon, dealing with a culture thousands of years old with great diversity in its socio-cultural and religious background and a very rich historical past.

Attia Hosain's novel Sunlight on a Broken Column is a significant contribution as it deals with a great tragic moment in the contemporary history of India, touching deep chords of love - hate relationship among its people. The novel has a distinct value because it is written by a Muslim woman who is keenly aware of the plight of Indian women in general and the Muslim women in particular. It is not only a study of customs and traditions affecting the life of Muslim women, but also a change coming over them in the process of acculturation, specially in their contact with the Western civilization. It records awakening among women, which is manifested in the character of the heroine, Laila, who reminds us of the heroines of Jane Austen. She has great

sensibility, a good sense not to be swayed by prejudices and boldness to express herself. The novel explores a number of other themes such as superstition, exploitation of women, decadence of the feudal system with the advent of democracy, disintegration of the joint family, along with the main theme of Partition. It presents kaleidoscopic picture of Indian life and politics of the nineteen forties through the history of an aristocratic Muslim family. However, it must be noted that the novel deals with high life and barely touches the life of the common Indian or Muslim population.

It would not be out of place here to record what some critics have to say about Attia Hosain's novel. I agree with Sarla Palkar in her observation:

----- one cannot neatly compartmentalise the personal history of Laila from social or national history ----- in fact what makes Sunlight on a Broken Column a three-dimensional novel is the manner in which the personal, the social and the national issues keep interacting and reflecting on one another.¹

On the personal level, the novel is a life-history of Laila in the autobiographical form. The novelist has portrayed the journey of Laila from the orphan girl to a

rebel. From the social point of view, the novel records the transitions in the society during the pre-Independence and post-Independence period. Similarly, on the national level, the novel depicts a history of India which passes from slavery to Independence, from feudalism to democracy and from unity to partition.

The novelist has attempted to interpret the partition, the black event in the history of India, in the novel. She has made a psychological study of it and has tried to show the causes of it. According to her, British people are not solely responsible for the partition of India. She has shown that cultural invasion and the crave for individuality are the root causes of Partition. To support this she has depicted the disintegration of Ashiana which is a miniature of India. What happens in Ashiana happens in the country. The characters like Hamid, Laila, Saleem, Kemal, Zahra are influenced by the Western culture and all of them contribute to the disintegration of the house. Saleem becomes fanatic in his attempt to retain his self-identity. Nadira, his wife, also supports him in order to retain her self-identity. They take help of religion to do so and propagate that in free India Hindu majority will rule the Muslim minority. This interpretation of the event of partition displays the novelist's psychological insight. She is

perfectly balanced in her view towards both Muslims and Hindus and remains unprejudiced and impartial.

The novelist has portrayed the process of transition in the society during the pre-Independence and post-Independence period. She has shown how cultural invasion disintegrates the traditional culture in Ashiana. Hamid, Laila, Kemal and Saleem revolt against the traditional culture because of the impact of Western culture on them. The novelist has traced the process of disintegration which takes place gradually. It is this disintegration of Ashiana which represents the disintegration of country in the form of Partition.

The novelist shows the effect of purdah system on Indian women. Through the character of Aunt Abida she has shown the evils of purdah system. Aunt Saira, Zahra revolt against this system but they can not get rid of purdah mentality. For example, Aunt Saira accepts the traditional values after her husband's death and Zahra becomes the echo of her husband without her own identity. On the contrary, Laila revolts strongly against this system when she marries Ameer going against the wishes of her family.

Sunlight on a Broken Column makes a rich and memorable reading because the incidents of history it presents are still fresh in the minds of most of us, and the other themes

it deals with have significance even now. Awakening among women through education is still a continuing process and the place of women in our Indian society is an important national issue. From this point of view this novel has an immediacy of appeal.

Hosain's stories are analysed on the basis of the thematic patterns adopted by her. Her stories deal with variety of themes such as cultural conflict, caste - prejudice, partition, suffering and exploitation of women, political corruption, Purdah motif , superstition etc. Of all the themes discussed by Hosain , the theme of suffering and exploitation of women appeals to the readers most. We remember a barren woman and her struggle to be a mother , a foster mother and her attempt to improve the life of her son Chand , Bano's eager waiting for her husband Arshad for nine years , Hasina's journey from Kalloo's wife to the life of a prostitute.

Attia Hosain's short-stories make up for the loss in her novel, in that they deal with the life of the common people in India, mostly Muslim men and women. As I have said in chapter III on short stories, they are a preparation for her novel, showing her eye for descriptive detail, presentation of character and skill of narration. However neither her novel nor her short stories show technical

excellence in plot construction. There is mostly a simple chronological presentation of incidents and situations.

Finally , we should agree with K.R. S. Iyengar :

Life is placid enough , human beings are prosaic enough , yet now and then there is a spark , a touch of poetry , a cry of pain and these are the inspiration behind Attia Hosain's short stories.²

Finally, by and large Attia Hosain has dealt with social maladies and communal politics in this country. She is critical and at the same time sympathetic. There is a cry of pain but not anger. The tone of a narrator in her fiction is that of a cultivated and emancipated woman. In all this, she is true to the tradition of the Progressive Writers' Association.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Sarla Palkar , "Beyond Purdah : Sunlight on a Broken Column Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin Ed. "Margins of Erasure (Delhi : Sterling Publishers , 1995) , p. 115.
- 2 K.R.S. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English (Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1985) p. 462.