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Reflection of Indianness in A Novel 'Sunlight on A Broken Column' by Attia Hosain.

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Abstract

Since ancient times Indians have been moving to the hostland for various reasons. Generally, this kind of concept is known as 'diaspora.' Though they settle there, live a better life, but they never totally disconnect from their roots and motherland. We can see these things in the writings of Indian diasporic writers. Attia Hosain was one of the remarkable Indo-British writers. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was the first and only novel written by Attia Hosain. In the novel, she beautifully describes the lifestyle of the Indian Muslim taluqadar family; Indian customs, cultures, traditions, and lifestyles of different communities-upper class and lower class live happily together before the partition. It is a semi-autobiographical novel. In the novel, Attia expressed her memories through her words and fictional characters.

Keywords:

Indianness, Attia Hosain, Indian, Muslim, Taluqadar, Diaspora, Indo-British, novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.

Introduction

People have been moving from homeland to developed country for a better life and future, which is generally known as 'diaspora.' Generally, the term 'diaspora' depicts the dark side of migration, which is 'forced exile.' 'War' and 'Partition' are the two common examples of forced exile. The migration of a huge group from one geographical area to another is called 'Mass Migration.' There are various reasons behind migration, such as social, economic, political, religious, food, slave, trade, better future, etc. After migrating to the developed country, migrants try to settle there. It does not mean that they don't have any connection to their homeland, but still, they have a strong feeling of affection for their native land.

As we know, many Indians have been migrating to a developed country for a better life and future. But it doesn't mean that they cut off from their homeland; they have strong feelings for their homeland and want to keep it in their next-generation too. But for second-generation, it is too difficult to understand Indianness because they were born and brought up in foreign, accept foreign culture and tradition, and accept the foreign country as their homeland. They hurt when the natives of a foreign country make discrimination and make them feel an outsider. These types of behavior are affected them mentally and psychologically. In this situation, some questions arise in their mind, such as, who am I? what is my identity? Which one is my original homeland? Most of the second-generation of overseas Indians get confused about their identity in foreign. More than 1/3 of the participants agreed that for an Indian to survive in the United Kingdom, he was supposed to be a "coconut" (Kurien, 1999). ¾ of the Indians living in the United Kingdom feel that their culture was at risk of being diluted (Sen, 2006). Most of the Indians had felt that the whites had treated them as an outsider. Some Indians also felt that there was a need for them to be coconuts since they wanted to fit in a society that viewed them negatively (Kakar, 2007). Because of an identity crisis, the Indians faced many challenges in the U.K. There are about 1.4 million Indians now in the U.K and it is one of the most prosperous and dynamic ethnic minority communities. (Chande, Anuj. Feb. 18 2020).

Attia Hosain was one of the prominent Indian diasporic writers. Attia Hosain was an Indian-British novelist, journalist, broadcaster, author, writer, and actor. Attia belonged to the aristocratic family though she was aware of hypocrisy and contradictions of her class and social environment. Attia Hosain was a reformist writer of her time. Her reformist thought had made her worried about the feudal aristocracy, illiteracy, poverty, and suppression of Muslim women. In her writings she describes the condition of Muslim women of pre-partition India. Through the traditional Muslim family of her novel in '*Sunlight on a Broken Column*', she describes the notion of Zenana and purdah. The novel explores the theme of marriage system, women did not have right to select their husband, patriarchal society, Indian culture, tradition etc.

Reflection of Indianness in a Novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.

In the globe, India is known for its unity in diversity. India is the land of different religions, languages, customs, traditions, and cultures. Indianness is not merely a word, but it is a feeling and spirit of people towards their home country. It is not easy to define 'Indianness.' If we try to describe Indianness, we can say that the meaning of Indianness is, wherever Indians are in the world, they have the feeling of being Indian from inside. Indianness is the blend of culture and traditions. Indian traditions and cultures are the heart of India. Indian diasporic writers beautifully describe the Indian culture, tradition, and lifestyle in their works. Native land, dislocation, displacement, nostalgic feelings, a feeling of loss, alienation, and cultural identity, and ethnicity are the primary theme of Indian diasporic writers.

Attia Hosain belonged to a wealthy Talluqadar family. She was an Indian-British novelist, journalist, broadcaster, author, writer, and actor. Attia had inherited a deep interest in politics and nationalism from her paternal side and her maternal side. She had full knowledge of Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages. From her English governess, Attia got knowledge of English. Attia was the first woman to graduate from Lucknow University. She grew up in two cultures, reading the canon of English and European literature as well as the Quran.

Sunlight on A Broken Column is the first and only novel of Attia Hosain. It is a semi-autobiographical novel. Attia expressed her memories through her words and fictional characters and also described Indian customs, cultures, traditions, and lifestyles of different communities- upper class and lower class lived happily together before the partition. Attia Hosain describes the lifestyle, culture, and tradition of Indian Muslim families through the Talluqadar family of the protagonist Laila in Northern India. Her description of the lives of the Talluqadars is so much realistic and trustworthy that it becomes reliable documents of its time from a mere novel.

In the novel, we can see the social and cultural reality of those times through the characters and their actions. Attia describes the life style of Talluqadar family and their thoughts and perspectives towards life. Talluqadars were like Lord and masters of the qasabah (a small town). This qasabah played an important role in providing local religious leadership and spreading religious learning amongst people living in these areas.

They were the most powerful group. During Indian Independence Day, many of them came as a stronghold of Muslim Political Movements.

The characters of the novel Sayed Mohammed Hasan (Babajan), Thakur Balbir Singh, and Raja of Amirpur are believed in the old traditions, customs, and powers. *Sharam* and *Izzat* are the most important things for them. They suppose that they are the Master and Lord of the house; to face any situation in life, they follow old customs and traditions. Their words and decisions are the final in the house, and everyone has to accept it, whether it is right or wrong. No one can go against it because it is like the greatest sin to go against the elders.

In the novel, Attia describes the lifestyle and customs of Talluqadars. It was a common custom for Talluqadars to mix with courtesans. These courtesans were not only flesh trade workers but also highly educated women. They were excellent poetry writer, skilled singers, and dancers. Talluqadars had employed courtesans to teach manners to their sons. Mushtari bai is representative of this class in the novel. Mushtari bai lived in Lucknow. She had once so rich. Babajan gave her job to teach manners and courtesy to his sons. At the wedding feast held at talluqadars house, she sang and danced, and she carried herself so gracefully and dignified that no one could suspect that she was not a 'lady.'

Women have to struggle for their identity in the male-dominant world, not only in India but in the globe as well. Laila struggles for her identity in the male-dominant house throughout the novel. As a child, Laila asked the head carpenter to make a bow and arrow. But the carpenter made 'the little carved doll's cradle,' which shows the typical mentality of the patriarch society. Most of the time, she gets confused, and she does not understand whom to select to follow, whether to follow her instinct or society. She believes in the concept of love, equality, and independence, but she feels helpless in a society in which she cannot openly express her views. The suffocating atmosphere of the house is described in the novel:

".... The sick air, seeping and spreading, through the straggling house, weighed each day more operatively on those who lived in it."

(Sunlight on a Broken Column, p.14).

She respects the tradition and customs of the old world, but at the same time, she hates the double standard. Laila observes the male-dominant system in her house. Babajan's drawing-room describes the control of patriarchal. We can see the power of patriarchal control everywhere, such as the colors of arched doors symbolize the power of patriarchal; on the other hand, light symbolizes the freedom for the women in the house. In the big room, only shadows flicker rather than light. Laila feels that as if women of home live in jail; rather than a house. 'Home' was a small world of the women. The women were kept out of the public realm and social sphere and were the deemed space for their male counterparts. We can get the idea of the suffocating condition of women through Laila's dialogue:

"Zahra and I felt our girlhood a heavy burden".

(Sunlight on a Broken Column, p.14).

Marriage is an important part of everyone's life. In India, marriage is not a matter of only between two people, but it is between two families. Mostly, Indian parents prefer arranged marriage for their children, and no one can go against their decision. Attia beautifully describes in the dialogue how a girl as a daughter could not say anything before her parents in the matter of her marriage, and she thinks they are the judges of her life:

"My parents are the best judges of the man with the best qualifications for being the husband. They have a wider choice; it is only love that narrows it down to a pinpoint".

(Sunlight on a Broken Column, p.216).

In the novel, Sita loves Kemal. Though marriage is her issue, but it becomes a public issue due to different religious backgrounds. She is not able to rebel against her patriarchy. In another incident of marriage in the novel, Uncle Mohsin doesn't like Zara's presence while discussing Zara's marriage planning:

“Is the girl to pass judgements on her elders? Doubt their capabilities to choose? Questions their decision? Choose her own husband?”

(*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, p.20).

In the novel, Attia beautifully describes that girls don't have any right to select a husband of their choice. After Babajan's death, Hamid arranges aunt Abida's marriage to an old widower without her permission. No one has any cares about it, whether a girl is happy or not. They only care about their status in society. Attia describes the incapability of girls to raise voice against the patriarch system. At the time, people were neither completely against nor encouraged women's education and women's empowerment. The importance of female education was only to prepare them as a mixture of Eastern values and Western modernity; so that women may increase the social status of their husbands.

Conclusion

Indian traditions and customs make the characters of the novel more interesting in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Babajan was the ruler and lord of the house, and also the ruler of the village. His world was based on tradition, customs, and principles. The novel mentions the wealthy and pleasure-loving lifestyle of Talluqadars. They ruled all over the village. Talluqadars mixed with courtesans and spent a lot of money only to show off. They believed in the old traditions, customs, and powers. ‘Sharam’ and ‘Izzat’ were the priority for them. Arrange marriage was common in practice, and still, Indians first prefer to arrange marriage because they think marriage is a sacred relationship between two families rather than only two people. We can observe the stereotypical mentality of the male characters in the selection of toys for children. They had dignity in personality and character; everyone gave respect to them in the family. The honor of the family was all above for them. They expected that everyone should follow customs and traditions without raising any questions. They ruled almost dictatorial over their household and estates. Attia herself was born in the upper-class Talluqadar family. She had complete knowledge about the upper-class, partition, and culture she wrote in the novel. Her description of the lives of the talluqadars is so much realistic and trustworthy that it becomes reliable documents of its time from the mere novel.

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