

Block

4

Novel : *Sunlight on A Broken Column* by Attia Hossain

Block Introduction	179
UNIT 1	
Socio-Cultural Context	181
UNIT 2	
Reading The Novel	188
UNIT 3	
Themes and Women Characters	205
UNIT 4	
Structure of the Novel	222

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* will take you to the past as it recreates scenes and stories of a bygone time. The characters lead vibrant lives and you will soon, as you journey through the book - and through their experiences - start to identify with many of the situations that they face in the novel. You will feel that you are a part of the family you are reading about and will understand how, in spite of the passage of time, human lives are so similar in terms of predicaments and universal emotions.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Nawabi Lucknow

1.1.2 Upheavals of the Period

1.2 Lucknow Society of the Period

1.2.1 Financial Aspects

1.3 Interpersonal Relationships: Hierarchy, Purdah and Marriage

1.3.1 Hierarchy and the Joint Family System

1.3.2 Purdah

1.3.3 Marriages

1.4 Etiquette

1.5 Lucknow in the Novel

1.5.1 The Head of the House

1.5.2 The Beginnings of Rebellion

1.5.3 The Transition

1.5.4 The Partition

1.5.5 The Final Reality

1.6 Glossary

1.7 Answers to Exercises

Words in **bold** are explained in the Glossary

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will be introduced to the socio-cultural context of Lucknow during the time period described in the novel. At the end of this Unit you will be able to describe the characteristics of the Muslim, feudal Lucknow setting of the novel and identify these as and when they appear in the course of events. By reading about some of the features that are relevant in this context, you will arrive at a better understanding of the novel and its characters. You will be better able to understand the various manners of speech and behaviour of the characters and to appreciate why events in the story progress as they do.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sunlight on a Broken Column is set in a milieu unfamiliar to readers who do not come from cities like Hyderabad, Lucknow or Bhopal which have a fairly large Muslim population. As such, it is extremely important to identify the distinguishing features of Muslim culture, behavioural norms and social hierarchies, particularly in Zamindari (landed aristocracy) households. The novel is located in the Lucknow of the nineteen thirties-forties, and ends around the nineteen fifties when the heroine-narrator is about thirty five years of age.

The effects of the partition of India and Pakistan become evident in the last third of the novel. The columns of the house “Ashiana” crumble as one son migrates to Pakistan and, his half of the property being declared evacuee property, the family is both scattered and financially bankrupt when the novel ends. (The sequence of the events will be discussed in the next unit of this block.)

1.1.1 Nawabi Lucknow

Lucknow being the capital of Awadh/Oudh, played host to all the nobility that had fled from political events in Delhi. The disintegration of the Mughal empire in the early eighteenth century caused the culture of Delhi to be transplanted bodily to the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). From Faizabad, the culture moved to Lucknow along with its chief dilettantes - those who patronised it and those who practised it. This culture has been referred to having “a level of splendour and sophistication scarcely paralleled in any other Indo-Islamic society”. Those who possessed large properties and who managed to please the British as well were rewarded with titles, Nawab being one of them. Though the collapse of the Lucknow monarchy, under Wajid Ali Shah (1848-871), in 1856 led to the gradual transportation of this culture to the court set up in Matia Buj (Calcutta), much of it still remained as long as the feudal system survived in UP. With the departure of the British in 1947, this culture too came to an end.

Wajid Ali Shah was a patron of the arts, composed music and had a natural inclination towards the pursuit of pleasure and amusement. However, he was greatly interested in architecture as well. The various monuments referred to by Attia Hosain came up during his time.

1.1.2 Upheavals in the Period of the Novel

Attia Hosain’s heroine-narrator Laila is born in the early years of the twentieth century and we last meet her in 1952 when she has been married, widowed and is the mother of a fourteen year old daughter.

While Laila leads a very cushioned existence in the joint family set up, her progressive guardian, Hamid Chacha, lets her attend convent school and later a University, seemingly in deference to his dead brother’s wishes. Events in Laila’s life are deeply affected by current political events.

The collapse of the zamindari system, the Freedom Struggle, the partition of India and the consequent migration of one of Laila’s cousins to Pakistan affect the financial and social setup of the family. Most **zamindars** had sworn loyalty to the British and found themselves in an uneasy situation. The events caused widespread social changes — hierarchies of power, interpersonal equations and communal issues - all underwent striking changes and the end of the novel leaves us with the central symbol - the house “Ashiana” - sold to “insensitive strangers after having been declared evacuee property. The house still stands but the articles in it are gone, only an old caretaker remains”.

1.2 LUCKNOW SOCIETY OF THE PERIOD

The narrator-protagonist Laila is fifteen when the novel opens in 1933. She had lost her parents when she was about eight, that is, in 1926, and is being brought

up in the household of her paternal grandfather Baba Jan. The extended joint family includes one unmarried paternal aunt Abida, a widowed aunt Majida and her daughter Zahra who is of Laila's age. There are also the various distant relations who come and go - like the feudal retainer, Hakim Bua and so forth. Events narrated about this time relate to Baba Jan's imminent death; discussion of Laila's future thereafter, Imid Chacha's household, Eid, Bakrid, Holi, Diwali.

Laila's is very much the life of a girl child brought up behind purdah by primarily women, who may be semi-literate but are nonetheless deeply imbued with the cultural ethos of their society.

1.2.1 Financial Aspects

Much stress was laid on the display of wealth, real or apparent, to establish the social status of the family. The Zamindars were accustomed to doing nothing for their tenants and as long as the revenue was flowing freely, they barely concerned themselves with the life of the common man.

Exercise 1

Could the wealth of the Zamindars have affected their way of thinking and behaving even after it was gone? (30 words)

1.3 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS : HIERARCHY, PURDAH AND INTERMARRIAGE

Since the novel is written, unusually so, from a female perspective, it is interesting to observe events through Laila's eyes. Hierarchy within and outside the extended family, the system of purdah and the approval of marriages between first cousins were taken largely for granted. Laila was a rebel and her eyes see things that can conceivably be different.

1.3.1 Hierarchy and the Joint Family System

Decision making, degrees of respect due to or expected from other members of the family and society and roles allotted to each individual were more or less inflexible. Men being providers made decisions. These may have been quietly manoeuvred by the women but overtly there was no questioning male authority.

Laila's Hamid Chacha's decision to consult others about the futures of Zahra and Laila is unprecedented and causes emotional outbursts. Often, decisions made by the senior ladies in purdah were implemented by the males.

Next in the chain of command were the senior ladies of the family. Servants and old family retainers were given a good deal of respect and their views were given due regard. (It is a different matter that etiquette alone dictated this seeming importance given to them).

Young boys, unmarried daughters and small children had no say whatsoever in any decision taken even if it concerned their own lives. This feature can be observed in the novel and any deviation was enough to cause upheavals.

Exercise 2

Briefly describe the hierarchy observed in the joint family system in the novel.

1.3.2 Purdah

Purdah or the custom of seclusion of women is ascribed to many sources. It has been argued that

- (a) Islam propagated the seclusion of women
- (b) it came from Persia into the Arab culture
- (c) it is sanctioned by the *Quran* (*Muslim Women in India* by Shahida Lateef, pp. 76-77).

One undesirable result was that “restrictive social structures led to a complete erosion of the rights of Muslim women in the 19th century”. (ibid. p77) Being behind the veil led to lack of access to education and therefore ignorance of their social and financial rights, and to many other related evils.

However, the emergence of the women’s movement in the 1920’s, and the awareness of the evils of purdah changed the scene. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is set in the period of change.

Purdah then, ensured that

- hierarchy (within the family) was maintained
- authority (of the males) stayed intact
- an index of women’s status was made apparent (“our women do not need to earn”)
- there was symbolic Islamic differentiation

It may be noticed that purdah was/is observed with male members of the family not related by blood - sister’s husband, aunt’s husband, son-in-law. Fathers, brothers, uncles such as father’s and mother’s brothers do not come in this category. Purdah was always observed as a mark of respect to male outsiders. Within the female social circle there was no purdah.

Exercise 3

What were the undesirable effects of the observance of purdah? (30 words)

1.3.3 Marriage

Marriage between first cousins, (father’s brother’s son for example) was allowed. In fact, for reasons of retaining family holdings, they were considered desirable. We witness Aunt Saira’s desire that one of her sons marry Laila. Neither the sons nor the girl find this desirable.

The convention was that proposals were sent by the boy’s family for the girl. Of course, often it was so manoeuvred by the girl’s family! Ladies’ maids were match-makers and described the boy’s “wealth, education, prosperity, good manners and looks” and the girls ‘beauty, charm, culture and fascination”.

Muslim marriages are described in great detail by Abdul Halim Sharar in *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*. Marriages and other festive events were usually occasions for the display of wealth and breeding, ostentatious selections of brides and grooms and the making of social contacts. Thus, the Viceregal visit to Lucknow caused a great flutter. To quote Attia Hosain, “Everybody who was anybody of consequence was involved in the visit — officially or socially. And as the degree of investment measured personal importance, invitations to the various functions were of vital importance.” It is of course by chance that Laila meets Ameer, her future husband, at the reception given at the Baradari to the Viceregal couple. The Taluqdars of Oudh, “the nobility and aristocracy of the Province were hosts to all those of consequence”. (ch. 8)

1.4 ETIQUETTE

“Special rules and principles of social behaviour [which] serve to indicate the refinement of that culture exist in every civilized community” (Sharar, 0.193). How one greeted guests, kinds of hospitality offered, the ways one showed respect to others, welcomes and departures – had all been more or less codified.

A great deal of formality was observed. *Tahzeeb* or breeding, and *takalluf* or formality were great indicators of being Lakhnavi. These acts of Muslim culture were often reflected in the behaviour of the Hindus as well. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* refers to the “decay of traditional sociocultural values under the impact of economic change, family patterns being the prime victim”. (Sharar, Introduction by the translators, p. 16) This novel, then, refers to the process of collapse, both of the family house, “Ashiana” (symbolic of the joint family) and the disintegration of an entire culture and a known way of life.

Exercise 4 What do you think the title of the novel means? (30 words).

1.5 LUCKNOW IN THE NOVEL

Attia Hosain ‘exposes the denseness of a society which had become moribund from the effort to preserve the vested interests of the big house’ (Mulk Raj Anand’s Introduction to *Sunlight on a Broken Column*). Anand says the heroine Laila, “glimpses the precariousness of life, the inapplicability of rules of conduct appropriate for the young marriageable daughters.” However, she was obviously like the author whom he describes as “this young lady growing up as a golden bird, protected, enclosed and sustained as a parrot in a cage. And she probably wanted to fly away and be free, but remained, by accepting promises of liberty through marriage with an eligible man in due time”.

Though this novel is not an autobiography, the autobiographical element in it is visible. In the description of a culture, a way of life, socio-political upheavals, the freedom struggle, the partition of India - the novelist is true to life.

1.5.1 The Head of the House

Baba Jan is again a type; his integrity “tempered the unchallenged tyranny which he exercised over his family from his immediate household outwards to the family’s tribal ramifications...”

Laila describes him as a “powerful man who lived the lives of so many people for them, reducing them to fearing automatons”(ch. 3, part I). But he too was human and afraid of death. His grand-daughter, however, cannot imagine him having been one who was “tender and gay and (who) doubted and wondered”. His very presence is intimidating and no one can talk and laugh without restraint. On the one hand, he has three close friends - Hunstey Dada, Motey Dada and Gorey Dada - but he cannot reveal this lighter side to those who must obey him if the joint family edifice is to stand.

1.5.2 The Beginnings of Rebellion

Indian leaders were increasingly urging the people to fight the British in India. College students were being drawn into the politics of rebellion and sloganeering. Physical violence was to be met by non-violence. For a Neeta or an Asad then to encounter lathis was not unexpected.

Towards the end of the novel, proper separatist views were in the air and the last part of the novel deals with India after partition. Many middle class Muslims have fled to Pakistan while those that remain are either tied to their property or to their commitments - social, political, psychological. Laila describes the Council Chamber, where the procession of non-cooperation had been halted, and the police had charged them with heavy wooden lathis. She had vowed to “fight for our country’s freedom as the satyagrahis did”, to lie on the spitstained pavements in front of the treacherous shop that sold foreign cloth, “to march in peaceful protest, to defy the might of the arrogant whites.” Like Laila and her friend Sita, Asad and his friends, “want to stage a demonstration to show the visit [of the viceroy] is not as popular as the banquets, bands and buntings suggest”. (Ch.7, Part 2). Yet, the older generation of the taluqdars of Oudh put up a show of loyalty. The President of the Association makes a long speech that “covered all the problems, aspirations, duties and ideas “of his community. (Ch.7, Part 2)

1.5.3 The Transition

Laila is nineteen when Aunt Saira indicates her desire that one of her sons marry her. The frenetic socializing and dancing, club life and its ramifications are superficial as well as artificial. When she joins the University for postgraduate studies, the Muslim League is already active. Nadira’s mother is accused of being a capitalist and a communalist by progressives and fundamentalists, religious fanatics attack her for being out of purdah. “So called reforms are destroying the personal ties between landlord and peasant and Uncle Hamid’s forecast is “It will be open to any future Government to abolish the landlord system altogether, in spite of statutory safeguards”. (ch. 12, part 3)

1.5.4 The Partition

Laila returns to “Ashiana” in 1952, five years after the Partition of India and Pakistan. “There were strangers living in the rooms once so private and guarded” (Ch. 1, part 4) Saleem is now an “evacuee”, the strangers “refugees”.

1.5.5 The Final Reality

Aunt Saira is typical of the last of the taluqdars who “only know that power and privilege still existed, that position still counted; except that others, whom she

had once patronized, possessed them”. Lucknow’s “palaces and great houses wore the signs of neglect. Shops and surgeries, brothels, and law-courts lost their best customers. The expanding city with its rash of new buildings, its new citizens had new scars added to those left when the royal era was destroyed.” (Ch.7, Part 4) And the title of the novel becomes self-evident.

1.6 GLOSSARY

The author has herself provided a set of words translated/annotated for the reader which you can access when you read the novel. Here are two more:

Taluqdar: wealthy landowners of Avadh (Oudh). The title is like Raja or Nawab

Zamindars: Land owners and lesser proprietors, lower than Taluqdar. Both collected the land revenue from the peasants and kept some while giving the rest to the British.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you were introduced to the Lucknow society and culture in which the novel is placed. Lucknow’s Muslim aristocracy, interpersonal relationships, the joint family system and purdah - the four chief aspects that are uniquely encountered in the novel were briefly described to enable you to appreciate the behaviour of the characters. This was done so that the story can be placed in the proper perspective and thus more easily understood.

1.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

1. Certainly, since they were not trained for anything else. They could not earn their living and yet had to offer hospitality.
2. Men were the decision makers. Often, the senior ladies in purdah advised them but not openly. Servants were respected and had a voice. Young boys and girls had no say at all.
3. Observance of purdah led to a complete erosion of the rights of Muslim women in the 19th century. Being behind the veil led to lack of access to education and therefore ignorance of their social and financial rights.
4. The broken column represents the fading culture and sunlight signifies the light cast on this fading way of life. The title points to a past that is no more.

UNIT 2 READING THE NOVEL

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The City of Lucknow

2.1.2 Lakhnawi Culture

2.2 Summary

2.2.1 First Person Narration

2.2.2 Social History

2.2.3 Networking of Relationships

2.3 Outline of the Novel

2.4 Title of the Novel

2.5 Chapter wise Summary

Part-I

Part-II

Part-III

Part-IV

2.6 Let Us Sum Up

2.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to the novel, its outline and its background. It also takes you through the narrative chapter by chapter.

The objectives of this Unit are to enable you to understand the basic story of the novel. At the end of this unit you should be in a position to give a brief account of the events, understand the first person narrative technique, be acquainted with the major characters in the novel and perceive the relationships which develop towards the end of the novel. This unit also lays the foundation for the subsequent units in this block.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The predominant issue and theme in this novel emerges from the situations that focus on a woman caught in the crisis of a transitional society, where the shift is taking place from the conventional to the unconventional. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a record of the growing-up of a young girl Laila in the two decades before and after independence during which India passed through a number of crises.

The main narrative of the novel is set in Lucknow, a city, known for its sophistication, Nawabi lifestyle and *nazakat* (elegance). It is also known for its composite culture and courtesy.

Lucknow was the capital of Oudh also known as Awadh and its aristocracy was a major power centre. The historian Michael Fisher has described the lifestyle of the **taluqdars** as follows: Each landholder formed a political center of his own, locally based world. Each held court and employed symbols such as a throne of his own and courtiers who made his court in some ways a microcosm of the Mughal and Awadh courts (Fisher 4). This description is based on the lifestyle prevalent in the nineteenth century. The aristocratic world represented a feudalistic pattern where power was not shared but controlled through allegiances and loyalties of the lower ranks to the upper ranks.

The rulers of Awadh were known for their pride as well as their decadence. You may have seen several Hindi films that take Lucknow as a background. Satyajit Ray's film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* based on the short story by Premchand is one such film. You may recall others.

Wajid Ali Shah, the last King of Awadh preferred to live in exile in Calcutta, rather than sell his sovereignty to the British. The kingdom of Awadh was however, annexed on February 7, 1856 and the British army took charge of the area. But within eighteen months the province was aflame with rebellion. Most of you would be aware of the Revolt of 1857, which was called the Sepoy Mutiny and is now known as the first war of independence.

2.1.1 The City of Lucknow

Lucknow is a city with an ancient culture, with Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit centres of learning. It has a history of being a cultural centre of Islamic studies and in the nineteenth century it attracted poets and writers from all over the country.

The city enters the novel in several ways - both direct and indirect. Asad and Zahid go to watch the Moharrum procession; Laila and Ameer meet in the city and go for a drive; the family goes for the taluqdars' reception given to the Viceroy; the approach to "Ashiana" is described in the last section when Laila comes to pay a last visit to the family home.

But on one occasion the city is described at great length. This is when the family goes to Hasanpur, at the end of Part-I, for Baba Jan's burial. Zahra and Laila's drive in the carriage through the city. As the carriage moves through the city, the palaces and gardens are described. In contrast to the wilderness of nature, the gardens and parks give evidence of planning and control. They are well laid out. This is clearly an Islamic influence. Muslim architecture and landscaping introduced formal planning of parks and gardens. Other monuments that are mentioned are the statue of Queen Victoria, Aurangzeb's mosque, the Imambaras of the Nawab-Viziers and the distant clock tower surrounded by a park.

2.1.2 Lakhnawi Culture

Lakhnawi culture supported a tradition of harmony and upheld the ideals of secularism. The elaborate court manners filtered down to people in the lower ranks. A sense of decorum and control governed social behaviour. In fact, courtesans taught the sons of the aristocracy their first lessons in courtesy. In the novel, Laila recalls her father's visit to Mushtari Bai.

At another level it is also a city of artisans and craftsmen and of festivals, of kite flying, cock fights and bangle sellers representative of the traditional crafts. Lucknow is known for its fine embroidery and Lucknawi Kurtas.

Amongst the Muslim population, purdah was a common practice. Purdah is the social custom of the seclusion of women from the male gaze. It should be remembered that the practice of purdah was instrumental in maintaining hierarchy both within the family as well as that of patriarchy. Though considered to be largely an Islamic observance, Hindu high-born women too practiced the purdah as is evident also from Rama Mehta's novel *Inside the Haveli*.

Houses, like the Antahpura in Hindu households, had the women's quarters, known as the 'zenana' and the men's quarters known as the 'mardana.'

Marriages, throughout Indian society were mostly arranged. Amongst the Muslims, marriage between first cousins was socially permitted.

Exercise 1

1. Fill in the blanks:
 - a) Lucknow was the capital of
 - b) Awadh was annexed in 1856 by the
 - c) Wajid Ali Shah was the..... of Awadh
 - d) He lived in in Calcutta
 - e) Mushtari Bai was a
2. Write a short note on the culture of Lucknow (50 words)

2.2 SUMMARY

Cast in the autobiographical form, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel in four parts and covers a period of about 20 years in the life of Laila, the narrator heroine. When the novel begins, she is fifteen years old. At the beginning of Part II, she is almost nineteen, and towards the end of the narrative we find her a mother and a widow "and the second half of the century was now two years old".

An orphan, Laila is brought up by her rich relatives and she spends the impressionable years of her girlhood in Lucknow, joining a University, making friends, dreaming dreams.

Belonging as she does to an influential Muslim Taluqdar family, she is half-distracted by the politics of the thirties. The nationalists are being ranged against the alien bureaucracy and the Muslim Leaguers against the Congress. Even homes are divided and the acerbity of politics enters dining table conversations. Father and son also argue for different sides: "No one seemed to talk anymore; everyone argued, and not in the graceful tradition of our city where conversation was treated as a fine art, words were loved as mediums...of artistic expression, and verbal battles were enjoyed as much as any delicate, scintillating, sparkling display of pyrotechnic skill. It was as if someone had sneaked in live ammunition among the fireworks." (part 3, Ch.12)

Laila herself is more an interested observer than an active participant, and having in the meantime fallen in love with Ameer, she marries him unmindful of the family's disapproval of her choice. Ameer joins the army in 1942, is taken prisoner and is killed when he tries to escape. "I lived and moved through an endless tunnel with no exit," says 'Laila, recalling that anguished time, but she has her daughter, and so she learns to fight despair and come to terms with life.

After the coming of independence along with with partition, Laila visits the home of her childhood and girlhood — Ashiana and finds that things were not what they were in her time: "There were strangers living in the rooms once so private and guarded, strangers who were names in Government files balancing Saleem's name against theirs - he labelled 'evacuee', they 'refugees'. Their presence here, and Saleem's in their erstwhile homeland, was part of a statistical calculation in the bargaining of bureaucrats and politicians, in which millions of uprooted human beings became just numerical figures. The official words describing them had no meaning in terms of human heartache". (Part4 Ch 1)

Of her two cousins, Saleem has opted for Pakistan while Kemal remains an Indian citizen. New times bring new fashions, new fads: "European and American aesthetes and intellectuals and the 'smart set' of Bombay and Delhi had discovered the art and culture of ancient India simultaneously. It appeared at times that neo-Indians wore their nationalism like a mask, and their Indianness like fancy dress". (Part 4, Ch.2)

In the twenty years that witness Laila changing from an orphan girl of fifteen to the 'widowed mother of a girl of that age, India too moves from colonialism to independence. The old feudal order loses its property, privileges and poise. The old world habits and attitudes give place to the exertions and frustrations of the post-independence era. Thus the novel is not only the story of Laila — but also a valuable document of the social and political happenings of that time.

Remember, our summary is in no way a substitute for reading the novel. You ought to read the novel at your Study Centre library or buy a personal copy.

2.2.1 First Person Narration

Sunlight on A Broken Column is a novel written in the first person and the happenings are recorded through the consciousness of the young girl Laila, who turns fifteen at the beginning of the novel (in the second chapter).

First person narration has certain advantages as well as certain limitations. It focuses on everything through a single consciousness, thus it is the responses and the observations of this one person that are central to the narrative. Events and happenings that take place elsewhere have to be introduced through indirect narration or through conversations or reports given by other characters. It becomes necessary for this central character to give importance to a host of minor characters, as this character cannot possibly be everywhere.

The main disadvantages of a first person narrative are that the area that is outside the character's experience or range has to be left out. A writer, very often, has to find other ways and means of bringing in other perceptions and voices. A first person narration may often have an autobiographical base and the dominant point of view that emerges is that of this central character.

Sunlight on A Broken Column is not wholly autobiographical but it does have a strong autobiographic base. The life style Attia Hosain describes is that of her family as is the political power that it exercised. The secular world of Baba Jan's friends is the kind of world she grew up in. Again, the experiences of college life, the choice of a husband according to her own wishes are all reflections of her life.

2.2.2 Social History

The novel is a perceptive account of the social changes that took place in the mid-twentieth century. We find that the purdah household that is ruled over by Baba Jan begins to disintegrate even before his death. The changes that are significant are:

- (i) the breakdown of the joint family
- (ii) growing individualism
- (iii) growing religious strife
- (iv) shifting of power centres and the coming of democracy
- (v) awareness of and resentment against social discrimination

The factors that are responsible for this change are:

- (i) growth of education
- (ii) the two-nation theory i.e. that Hindus and Muslims need different countries as they belong to different religions. This was fanned by the provision of separate electorates
- (iii) employment opportunities
- (iv) voting rights for the people

We see how in the novel the practice of purdah gives way in the face of the claims of modern life. Laila goes to college. Zahra and Sita are changed by their trips to Europe. Even Aunt Saira, who belongs to an older generation, has a more open life than her husband's sisters.

But we also see the kind of gender discrimination that takes place in almost every sphere of life. Aunt Abida's marriage to an elderly widower leads to her unhappiness; Nandi, the washer-man's daughter and Saliman, the maid are both exploited by men and ordered about by their elders who are in control of their lives.

We will examine the networking of relationships in the novel in the next section.

Exercise 2.

1. What do you understand by first person narration (in 50 words)
2. Why are the following dates of significance? a) 1937 b) 1942 C) 1947
3. Write a short note of approximately 100 words about the social change reflected in the novel. Enumerate the factors responsible for the change.

2.2.3 Networking of Relationships

Laila's family is a sprawling joint family with a number of relatives and family retainers living in it. At the beginning of the novel, the author has provided a list of principal characters. The relationships are reproduced in the form of a chart given below:

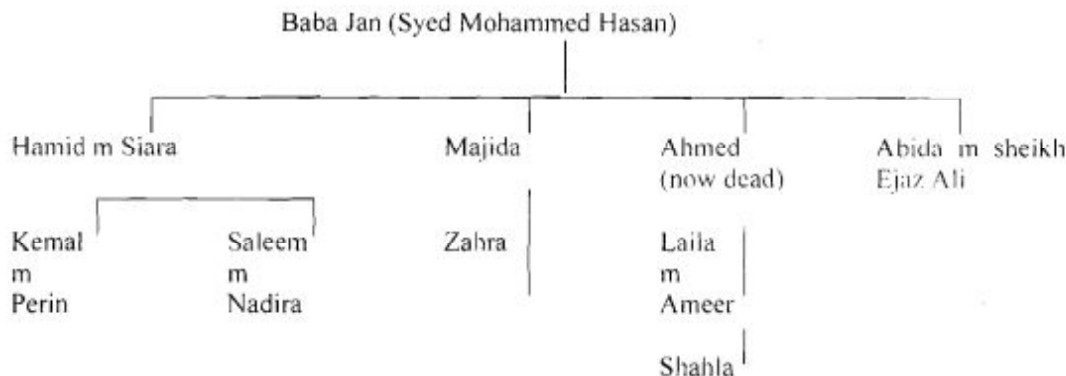
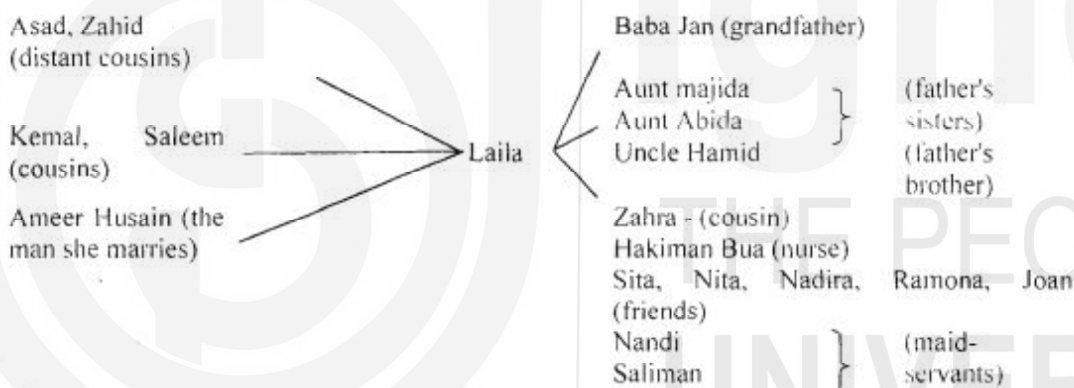


Figure – I

As the narrative voice is that of Laila, the relationships acquire meaning in that context:



Laila's uncle wants her to marry one of his sons, so that the property does not have to be divided. But she marries Ameer Husain and at the end of the novel, after she has been widowed, we find that her attachment to Asad is resurfacing.

Exercise 3

- Name the principal character —
- Who is her uncle? —
- Who does she marry? —

2.3 OUTLINE OF THE NOVEL

By now you would have started reading the novel or already finished reading it. But to help you along the way, here is an account of the main events:

Part I: Baba Jan is ill, almost on his deathbed. Laila, his orphaned granddaughter narrates the story. On Baba Jan's death, the family goes briefly to the ancestral home at Hasanpur for the burial rites. Laila's Uncle Hamid comes home to take

charge of the family. And the joint family is dispersed. Aunt Abida and Zahra are married off. Laila is permitted to go to college for higher education.

Part-II: The reader is introduced to Laila's college friends. The taluqdars give a reception for the Viceroy in which Laila makes her entry into society and also meets Ameer Husain, the man she later decides to marry. The non-co-operation movement led by Gandhi has begun and Laila is advised not to take part in politics.

Part-III: Uncle Hamid's sons come home after completing their education abroad. They are offered as suitors for Laila. Uncle Hamid is busy preparing for the elections of 1937. His son Saleem canvasses for the opposite side, for the Muslim League. Uncle Hamid wins the elections. Laila marries Ameer in defiance of her family's wishes. Saleem marries Nadira.

Part-IV: Laila visits the now abandoned "Ashiana" after a gap of fourteen years. The house is to be sold. She has lost her husband in World War II and as she moves through the house, she recollects the events of the past. Asad comes to the house to take her away, hopefully to a happier life.

2.4 TITLE OF THE NOVEL

The title of the novel has been taken from a poem of T S Eliot's, "The Hollow Men". Some lines from the poem have been used as an epigraph in the novel. The words 'Sunlight On A Broken Column' suggest the falling of rays of hope on something that has suffered. 'Sunlight' stands for hope, for light, for happier times. The 'broken column', here literally implies a pillar that has been damaged and the phrase is used as a metaphor for the past that is now no more. The old order with its stability and certainty which is no more; the family house which is now abandoned; the young Laila, now a widow of thirty five; the orderly garden now growing wild - the sunlight is now falling on this world.

The last section of the novel works consistently with the image of sunlight. First the sun breaks through the clouds, then it warms up to touch the last drops of dew on the leaves and finally it leaves her standing in the 'cold shadows of the sightless house with its locked doors'. As the day ends, another day is promised. Asad has come to take her away.

Exercise 4

1.
 - a) Baba Jan is buried at ———
 - b) Why is the reception to the Viceroy important for Laila?
 - c) Name one important event of Part-III of the novel.
 - d) After how many years does Laila visit "Ashiana"?
2. Write a short note on the title.

2.5 CHAPTER WISE SUMMARY

Part I

Sunlight On A Broken Column is divided into four parts, each part signifying some kind of break with the past. The narrative voice is that of Laila, a fifteen-year old girl who is part of a large family and is, in the initial parts, a bewildered observer.

Chapter 1: The first chapter is a very short one, but it sets the mood of the novel. The novel opens at a moment of crisis in the life of the household. Baba Jan, who has been seriously ill for three months, is on his deathbed and his daughter Abida moves from the women's quarters to the front of the house in order to be close to her father. This move signifies a break with the past and the members of the household move about in hushed silence uncertain as to what the future would bring. Laila and Zahra are introduced to each other. Though they are cousins, they are very different from each other. Laila is fond of reading and looks forward to going to college; Zahra is cast in a more traditional mode and is afraid of the future. The patriarchal control and the feudalistic structure are apparent in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Laila turns fifteen. There is no real celebration of her birthday. Pay careful attention to Hakiman Bua: she has a typical way of dating events in relation to happenings like floods and other major events, a practice very common in the oral culture of the uneducated. Once again, the contrast between Laila and Zahra is stressed. While one thinks of education, the other dreams of marriage. Similarly the two sisters Abida and Majida are contrasted. In this chapter, the issue of marriage is raised, an event which shapes a woman's life. This reflects on the limited control women have over their lives in a traditional society and also on the excessive freedom men have in their relationships with and visits to dancing girls. Into the midst of this discussion is brought in Nandi, the washerman's daughter, who is accused of being caught with the cleaner in compromising circumstances. The confrontation between her and Mohsin Bhai (a male relative) indicates not only sexual double standards but also the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Chapter 3: Already three different strands have been introduced: (1) the need for education and women's desire for it; (2) the issue of marriage as a matter to be decided by the family; and (3) the exploitation of the poor and the control the rich have over their lives. All the themes mentioned here are taken forward in this chapter, which, however is about Baba Jan. As the family surrounds his deathbed, Laila recalls Baba Jan's past, his active years and his various friends. They are a mixed group - Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur who was called Motey Dada, Thakur Balbir Singh referred to as Hasntey Dada and Mr. Freemantle, an Englishman who was more Indian than the Indians, known as Gorey Dada. They formed a foursome and enjoyed poetry and music.

Chapter 4 All along, the reader is familiarised with the kind of behaviour expected from women of respectable families: soft, subdued voices, gentle laughter, observing purdah in front of strangers, and courtesy. Respect for elders is also the accepted traditional code. Aunt Abida tells Laila, 'Never forget the family, into which you are born'.

Chapter 5: Nandi has been sent to the village. The girls are busy dyeing their dupattas. They receive a visit from Mrs. Martin, one of Laila's teachers. Rich, upper class Indian families often employed poor British women and Anglo-Indians

as governesses or teachers. Mrs. Martin's visit brings in references to the non-co-operation movement led by Gandhi and the other Congress leaders.

Chapter 6: As Zahra's marriage negotiations are taking place, Asad, who is in love with her, is unhappy and frustrated. He wants to do something, "to become part of something greater" than him and is inspired by the freedom struggle. On the political front, the connection between religious beliefs and riots is brought to the fore as the differences between Shias and Sunnis and between Hindus and Muslim are pointed out.

Chapter 7: Baba Jan's health shows some improvement. Life returns to some kind of normalcy. Kariman the bangle seller visits the household. This offers a glimpse of the occupations of women and the extent of their contact with the outer world.

Chapter 8: Preparations for Zahra's wedding are afoot and Ram Das, the jeweller, is summoned. The control and power of the taluqdars is also demonstrated through reference to their handling of the tenants who were unable to pay their rent. Personal relationships, feelings, compassion have no place here.

Chapter 9: The reader is introduced to the various kinds of women visitors the family receives. Amongst them are women like the Hakim's wife, the wives of Baba Jan's friends and Mushtari Bai, the courtesan who now wears Khaddar. Mushtari Bai was a courtesan in her youth and young men were sent to her to be taught courtesy and etiquette. But now old and abandoned, she has distributed her wealth and is reduced to want.

Chapter 10: Baba Jan's health suffers a setback. Uncle Hamid is sent for. This is the first week of Moharram.

Chapter 11: They are told that they cannot go to see the Moharram procession because it is feared that there will be disturbances in the city. Laila and Zahra spend a day with the servant girls.

Chapter 12: News of the riots between the Hindus and the Muslims reach them. Asad and Zahid are both missing. Zahid returns at four, unaccompanied by Asad. The sounds of firing raise the level of their anxiety. An hour later, Asad arrives home with a bandaged head. He has seen murder and violence at close quarters. Asad is ill and in his feverish delirium he expresses his love for Zahra. Aunt Majida overhears this confession and is very angry. From that moment onwards, Asad is an outsider.

Chapter 13: The end comes soon after. Baba Jan dies shortly after Moharram.

Chapter 14: The family travel to Hasanpur, the family's ancestral village, where Baba Jan is to be buried.

Chapter 15: Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira arrive. He was a civil servant and is fairly westernised in his speech and behaviour.

Chapter 16: The journey to Hasanpur is described in great detail. It gives a description of the route and the monuments of Lucknow as they travel past gardens and houses to move to the village.

Chapter 17: People from all over the neighbouring areas gather together to pay their homage to Baba Jan. They also meet Nandi. Laila shows kindness to her.

Zahra rules out marriage with Asad because he is not her equal. Marriage to her is not an abstract romantic idea, but a means to ensure a decent living standard in the practical world.

Chapter 18: They meet other relatives. Aligarh University features in the background. Universities were the hotbed of politics. The question of Laila's education crops up once again.

Chapter 19: The girls spend a great deal of time together and discuss the impositions on women and the strict code of behaviour.

Chapter 20: Uncle Hamid gets the family together to take decisions regarding their future. Marriage is proposed for Zahra, and Laila is permitted to go for studies. Asad and Zahid are to be sent to a hostel. Asad wishes to go to Jamia Millia, the University of moderate, nationalist Muslims (as compared to Aligarh which was more revolutionary and religious).

Chapter 21: Within the year two marriages take place. Both Aunt Abida and Zahra are married. Abida is married to an elderly widower, a 'tall, thin negative man' and Zahra is married to Naseer. With this chapter the first part of the novel ends. Baba Jan, after lingering for several months, is now dead and his son is in command.

Exercise 5

1. Why does Aunt Abida shift to the front of the house in the first chapter?
2. Which birthday does Laila celebrate in the second chapter?
3. Who is Nandi?
4. Describe Baba Jan's friends (in 2 or 3 sentences)
5. What is the expected code of behaviour of respectable women?
6. Who is Asad?
7. Why is the family stopped from going to see the Moharrum procession?
8. Why does the family go to Hasanpur?
9. Why does Zahra rule out marriage to Asad?
10. What is decided about Laila's future?

Part II

Chapter 1: Life in "Ashiana" has now changed completely. Asad is in Delhi. Hakim Bua has accompanied Aunt Abida to her new home; Nandi has run away with a peddler. Everything is desolate and lonely.

Chapter 2: The house is renovated according to Uncle Hamid's taste and a new nameplate is fixed. Everything, including the furniture, is changed and only a few of the old servants retained. Laila is left very much on her own.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes her college friends - Nita Chatterjee, Nadira, Joan and Romana. Nita is a serious girl, Nadira is deeply religious, Joan is good at music and Romana is different from all of them, beautiful in a very pleasant way.

Chapter 4: Begum Waheed (Nadira's mother) and Mrs. Wadia pay a visit to Aunt Saira. Even as these women pretend to be modern, they are conventional and orthodox. Laila is viewed as a prospective bride for Begum Waheed's son but her unorthodox views displease the Begum.

Chapter 5: Nandi's mother falls ill and dies and Nandi returns home.

Chapter 6: The earlier resistance of Laila to injustice and intolerance is fast developing into a rebellious attitude. Zahra visits home after a trip to Europe and is now adept in the ways of upper class society. Aunt Abida also pays a brief visit. She is now a changed person, more withdrawn, and motivated primarily by a sense of duty.

Chapter 7: There is excitement in the air about a reception at the Baradari for the Viceroy, and Zahra is keen to take Laila to it. Asad comes home and meets both Zahra and her husband.

Chapter 8: Laila and Zahra have a discussion about marriage and the social freedom that accompanies marriage. Laila questions Zahra's acceptance of this kind of social life where she has no identity of her own and is always dressed to please others. But Zahra does not mind it. She is conscious of her role as a wife and proud of her good breeding. Zahra tells Laila that if she looks in the mirror, she will see the face of the man who will marry her. Just then Asad enters the room and his face is reflected in the mirror. Laila is nervous about going to the reception. She'd rather watch from the purdah gallery. But Zahra is insistent that she join them and thus be introduced to this kind of social life.

Chapter 9: Laila has to wear a sari and dress up for the reception. This is her first formal entry into society. The reception at the baradari is a huge affair with the members of the aristocracy gathered there to receive the Viceroy. One man, however, creates a scene in his drunken state. Running away in fear, Laila runs into the arms of a stranger who helps her trace Zahra and Naseer. (This stranger turns out to be Ameer whom she later marries).

Chapter 10: While there is official display of loyalty to the crown, there is widespread resentment against British rule amongst the students. This conflict, which has been talked about earlier as well, is an ongoing one in the novel. There is unrest in the city, an encounter between the police and the students in the University and an atmosphere of tension and excitement. Laila and her friends Nadira, Joan, Nita, and Romana discuss the issue. They have different views based on their individual backgrounds and ideas.

Chapter 11: This chapter is important. Laila is summoned by her uncle and advised not to take part in the students' agitation and the non-co-operation movement. The anti-British agitation gathers momentum and the sound of slogans can be heard from the house. Asad comes home with a head injury, the result of a policeman's blow. Asad by now is very much a part of the struggle. While one half of the nation is struggling to be free, the other half is still servile to the British. Uncle Hamid is busy carving out his political future. Ameer pays a visit to Asad. Ameer is the man who had come to Laila's rescue at the reception.

Chapter 12: Nita is one of the agitating students involved in the political movement, and is sent home but she dies soon after. Romana is asked to return home in order to be married off by her family.

Chapter 13: Saliman is sent away because of her affair with Ghulam Ali, just as Nandi had been despatched earlier. The men are not punished. It is always the women who are blamed and punished.

Exercise 6

1. Write a note on the changes Uncle Hamid's return introduces in the family house. (3 or 4 sentences)
2. Describe Laila's college friends. (2 or 3 sentences)
3. How do Laila and Zahra respond to the institution of marriage? (2 or 3 sentences)
4. Describe the Reception for the Viceroy in about 50 words.
5. Why do the students agitate against the British? What happens to Nita?

Part III

While the first part was about Baba Jan's illness and death, the second was about the changes in the household after Uncle Hamid's return, Laila's college life and the political conflict. The third part is about the return of Kemal and Saleem, Uncle Hamid's sons and the marriages of some of the main characters.

Chapter 1: Kemal and Saleem return home after their education in England. They are opposites both in appearance and in ideas. Kemal has joined the civil services while Saleem is a barrister with strong religious leanings. In the company of her cousins, Laila's life moves outside the restricted life of the zenana. The family visits Hasanpur where both the boys are welcomed warmly.

Chapter 2: They all go to the hills to escape the summer heat. There is growing understanding between Kemal and Laila. They can share their thoughts with each other. The family wants them to get married. Kemal thinks of Laila as a sister and Saleem wants to marry for love, so the wishes and desires of the family to see Laila wed one of Uncle Hamid's sons cannot be fulfilled.

Chapter 3: Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira throw a grand party while Kemal is on leave. Both Nadira and Sita also come as guests. Sita, who has been abroad, is now extremely attractive. Ameer is also one of the guests. Future meetings are planned between the young people.

Chapter 4: The friendship between Ameer and Laila develops into a love relationship. The preparations for the elections are in full swing. Kemal and Sita are in love with each other but marriage does not seem to be possible.

Chapter 5: Aunt Saira disapproves of Ameer as in her opinion, he belongs to an ordinary family and is not good enough to socialise with the aristocracy. He is a teacher of history at Aligarh University but Aunt Saira attaches more importance to the family background rather than to individual worth.

Chapter 6: There is continued social activity with frequent parties and outings to the cinema.

Chapter 7: Three letters arrive at "Ashiana" and each one of them bears unhappy news and messages of concern, which reflect the callous attitude towards women. One bears the news of Saliman's death, another of Aunt Abida's illness and the

third, more details about Aunt Abida. Aunt Abida's ill health turns Laila's attention from her youthful concerns back to her beloved aunt. She wants to go to her aunt but is persuaded not to do so by her own desire to be with Ameer as far as possible.

Chapter 8: Laila's love relationship with Ameer develops and Saleem is interested in Nadira. Kemal and Sita dance together at a farewell party where all the young people meet. They are very much in love but are painfully aware that they cannot get married across religious boundaries.

Chapter 9: Laila and Ameer meet the next day and as they go riding together, he declares his love for her. As he is to leave the next day, he wants to know whether she will wait for him.

Chapter 10: Laila joins a post-graduate course and her uncle is busy with elections, motivated by his need for political power.

Chapter 11: Nandi uses her charm to attract Ghulam Ali, the man who had seduced Saliman and engineers his ouster.

Chapter 12: Uncle Hamid and Saleem are on opposite sides in the political struggle. Uncle Hamid is primarily interested in retaining his position of power, while Saleem thinks along religious lines. He is with the Muslim League and is helping Begum Waheed in her election campaign. He intends to marry Nadira.

Chapter 13: Laila postpones going to see Aunt Abida as Ameer is likely to come to Lucknow for a week. When he comes, they contrive to spend as much time together as possible.

Chapter 14: Asad comes home in order to campaign for Begum Waheed's opponent. Laila confides in him her intention to marry Ameer. There is natural bonding and friendship between Laila and Asad who is a poorer relative.

Chapter 15: Laila pays a visit to Aunt Abida. It is a strange railway journey reflecting the power of the rich. Aunt Abida lives in a small village with her husband's family. Laila relives her childhood in Aunt Abida's private apartments but in the joint family she senses tension and conflict and the resentment the others show towards Aunt Abida, who accepts this treatment as part of her duty. She tells Laila that obedience to the wishes of her elders should come before any consideration of the self. (This view sadly contrasts with Laila's own dreams of marriage and her need for individual expression).

Chapter 16: Nandi is in trouble again with Ghulam Ali who, threatens to take revenge by cutting off her nose. He does succeed in scarring her face though.

Chapter 17: The elections (of 1937) take place. Kemal is home for the event while Saleem is busy working for the opposite camp. Women from aristocratic classes come to cast their vote but some are as illiterate as the peasants. This is the beginning of democracy. Laila also meets Ameer who comes to their home on Kemal's invitation.

Chapter 18: Uncle Hamid wins the elections and celebrations are afoot. The Congress has won a majority but the rich are afraid of the land reform policy of the Congress that would divest the taluqdars and zamindars of their power and

property. Both Ameer and Laila sense Aunt Saira's hostility and are aware that the family will oppose their marriage. When Aunt Saira surprises them at a moment of intimacy, their love is discovered and the inevitable, the moment of discovery that they had been postponing happens.

Exercise 7

1. Name the two sons of Uncle Hamid.
2. Why are they happy that Laila does not want to marry them?
3. Why does Aunt Saira disapprove of Ameer?
4. Which political party does Saleem belong to?
5. Describe Laila's visit to Aunt Abida's home (in 3 or 4 sentences)
6. Describe the events that take place in chapter 18. (2 or 3 sentences)

Part IV

The fourth part of the novel functions primarily through recollections and flashbacks, as Laila drives back to "Ashiana" after a gap of fourteen years. A host of events has taken place during this period both in her personal life and on the political scene.

Chapter 1: As Laila drives towards "Ashiana", she sees the refugee colonies that have sprung up after the partition of the country in 1947. The city has acquired a different look, the old magnificence and splendour is on the way out. This visit to the house is a farewell visit, which takes place in 1952. She had left this house fourteen years ago when she married Ameer. She now has a daughter Shahla. Uncle Hamid has been dead for five years. Neighbours watch her with curious eyes as she circles the house and enters it from the back door.

Chapter 2: The reader is informed about what has happened in the intervening years. Saleem had opted for Pakistan and Kemal now has to carry the responsibility of the family on his shoulders. The house has to be sold in order to buy up Saleem's share in the Hasanpur house, where Aunt Saira now lives.

Chapter 3: This chapter is a flashback. It gives us an account of Laila's interview with her Uncle Hamid, before her marriage, fills us up on the details of her marriage, the birth of her child and Ameer's imprisonment and subsequent death. There had been a rift in the family on account of her marriage but later her uncle attempts reconciliation through his affection for the child. The years between 1937 and 1946 have been years of World War II (1939- 1945) and social and political unrest with the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the pre-partition riots.

Chapter 4: Laila moves through the different rooms of the house, recollecting the people and the events of the past. As she reflects on those who have opted for Pakistan, it becomes evident that the decision has often been motivated by the prospects of a better economic life.

Chapter 5: The journey through memory continues with Laila's visit to the pantry; she moves on to memories of Nandi and the other servants. This is also a narrative

strategy to give the reader information about the period that has not been narrated. Nandi is now with Laila, looking after Laila's child. Nandi is also a mother. She has a son - a love child - the son of a Pathan who was temporarily in the city. The child is studying at a Jesuit School.

Chapter 6: Laila now moves to the garden. Sita and her father Agarwal feature in their lives in different ways. Agarwal is seen as a typical representative of the coarse, materialistic businessman who has constructed ugly buildings and is occupied with money making. Sita is remembered with affection, she is a leader in the new social world. She plays the role of a married woman but her love for Kemal is always a pain in her heart.

Chapter 7: Saleem has come to India after two years and the family visits Hasanpur together. Laila also recounts an ugly incident that took place at the club between people of different communities - an expression of the hatred that partition had left in the minds of the people. The narration also reflects upon the changes that take place when people belong to different nations.

Chapter 8: The novel ties up the different strands of the story, tells the reader what happened to Zainab, Romana and Joan, and narrates the details of Aunt Abida's death. Laila had not visited her ever since her marriage to Ameer and had not responded to her letter of consolation after Ameer's death.

Chapter 9: This is the last chapter of the novel. It gives a brief account of Laila's brief married life. Ameer had joined the army for reasons of economic security. He had been taken prisoner in the war and killed during an attempt to escape. Zahid is dead and Asad is now a promising Congress leader. As Laila is lost in her memories and recollections, Asad comes looking for her. The end promises a coming together of Laila and Asad.

Exercise 8

1. Why does Laila return to "Ashiana"?
2. When does she return?
3. Describe the events of the in between period. (Not more than 100 words)
4. Who is Sita? What has happened to her?
5. Why is the house to be sold?
6. Who comes to meet Laila?

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, the novel *Sunlight on A Broken Column* (1961), has been introduced to you. We have traced the background to the novel and also guided you through the narrative, chapter by chapter. You must have read the novel by now and are well informed about the events that take place, the characters in the novel and the various relationships that are born, develop and end in the novel. This unit provides the background to the next few units, as we delve deeper into the novel.

2.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. a) Awadh b) British c) last king d) exile e) courtesan
2. Confluence of several cultures, centre of learning, tradition of harmony, secular living, courtesy and utmost politeness. Historic city with beautiful architecture and monuments. (Expand and make sentences which are grammatically complete)

Exercise 2

1. There is a central narrator. All other accounts are reported or acquired second hand. A single point of view dominates.
2. (a) Elections (b) Quit India Movement (c) Independence
3. See 2.2.2 para 2 and para 3 to locate the answer

Exercise 3

1. Laila
2. Uncle Hamid
3. Ameer Husain

Exercise 4

1. (a) Hasanpur (b) She makes her debut into society (c) elections of 1937 (d) fourteen years
2. Refer to 2.4.

Exercise 5

(Only the points are mentioned; you are expected to write complete sentences)

1. Baba Jan's illness
2. Fifteenth
3. The washerman's daughter
4. See summary of chapter 3
5. See Chapter 4
6. Their cousin
7. Because of the riots
8. For Baba Jan's burial
9. She thinks he is not her equal
10. She is allowed to go to college.

Exercise 6

1. See Chapter 2

2. Nadira, Nita, Joan and Romana. See summary of chapter 3 for more details.
3. Laila has a romantic attitude towards marriage while Zahra considers it to be a social institution. One seeks self-fulfilment and love in it while Zahra is prepared to forego her sense of identity and perform a role. Marriage also means greater social freedom for her.
4. See summary of chapter 9 for the answer.
5. They want the country to be free of British rule. There is a lathi-charge and Nita is hit on the head. Subsequently she succumbs to her injuries.

Exercise 7

1. Saleem and Kemal
2. Kemal thinks of her as a sister and Saleem is keen on marrying Nadira.
3. She does not consider him to be a suitable match for Laila as she thinks he does not belong to a family worthy of their aristocratic background for Ameer is beneath Laila socially.
4. Muslim League
5. See summary of chapter 15
6. Uncle Hamid's election victory and the discovery of Laila-Ameer's relationship.

Exercise 8

1. To pay a farewell visit.
2. In 1952
3. Laila's marriage, her daughter's birth, World War II, her husband's death; India's freedom and the partition of the country, the family's division.
4. Laila's friend. She and Kemal were in love but could not get married. She has accepted this but is emotionally dead. Nevertheless she does provide support to Laila in her hour of need.
5. The house is to be sold to compensate Saleem and save the house at Hasanpur. The property is to be divided between the brothers, one of whom is now in Pakistan.
6. Asad

UNIT 3 THEMES AND WOMEN CHARACTERS

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Novel of Growing Up

3.1.2 Tradition to Modernity

3.1.3 The Theme of Partition

3.2 Role of Education

3.2.1 Education and Women

3.2.2 Education, Equality and Justice

3.3 Gender Relationships: Exploitation of Women

3.3.1 Aunt Abida

3.3.2 Nandi

3.3.3 Saliman

3.3.4 Zahra

3.3.5 Laila

3.4 Patriarchy and Arranged Marriages

3.4.1 Property

3.5 Hindu-Muslim Relationships

3.5.1 Moharrum Riots

3.5.2 Political Interests

3.5.3 Kemal-Sita Relationship

3.6 Ideals of Secularism

3.6.1 Baba Jan's Friends

3.6.2 Laila's Friends

3.6.3 The Household Servants

3.7 Tradition and Change

3.8 Let Us Sum Up

3.9 Answer to Self-check Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will comment upon the main themes of the novel and will take up various issues for discussion. You will be then be in a position to

- (a) assess the different characters
- (b) observe the different influences that form their characters
- (c) examine the role they play in bringing out the themes and carrying the plot forward.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Sunlight On A Broken Column is a novel covering a period of about twenty years, approximately 1932 to 1952. This period was an important one in India's history when several events of significance took place. The freedom struggle was at its peak; the Government of India Act, 1935 was enacted enabling the elections to be held in several provinces in 1937, thus beginning the process of democratic participation and self-government. In 1942 the Quit India Movement began against the background of World War II. In 1947, India was divided into two countries and granted independence. All these events are reflected in the novel and they constitute at least two main strands in its narrative. These are (i) the political struggle (ii) Hindu Muslim relationships.

3.1.1 Novel of Growing up

As the story progresses, the heroine Laila steps from girlhood into womanhood, falls in love, marries in defiance of her guardian's wishes, becomes a mother and later a widow. This 'growing-up' is another main strand that makes it possible for the writer to discuss the relationship between women and the patriarchal (male dominated) society. A novel of growing up is often referred to as a bildungsroman, a novel of becoming. This can happen in several ways. An individual is tested by circumstances or a situation of crisis, and is required to take action. In the process the individual begins to ask questions and develops an awareness of inner strength.

Laila is an orphan; Baba Jan's death exposes her to the new regime of her uncle; the question as to who she ought to marry also acquires importance. Later, her husband's death places her in another critical situation. At each juncture she has to depend on her own resources and at times go against the wishes of her guardians. But through all these trials her individuality is developed.

3.1.2 Tradition to Modernity

The personal and political themes also mark the change from tradition to modernity. Education is one of the major factors in this course. The political upheavals are - firstly the freedom struggle and secondly, the partition.

Joint families, purdah, social restrictions and arranged marriages give way to nuclear families, freedom of movement and personal freedom of choice. And feudalistic power structures are weakened. No longer do the taluqdars have the same authority, and heads of aristocratic families have to yield to the claims of their children.

Participation in democratic processes compels the powerful to make concessions and share their power. Thus this mid-century period is a period of social and political change. This is also one of the important issues in the novel.

3.1.3 The Theme of Partition

One of the major themes in the novel is the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. The events of the 1930s reflect upon the widening schism between

Hindus and Muslims and the antagonism that begins to acquire a dangerous form. The partition, it becomes increasingly clear, is not necessarily a religious issue. It is a power struggle between two communities and the exodus of Muslims from India to Pakistan (and also of Hindus from Pakistan to India - though this novel basically deals with the exodus of Muslims to Pakistan -) is also an economic struggle as the Indian Muslims are squeezed out of the mainstream.

The manner in which the political leaders exploit the religious sentiments of the people reveals the dangers of nationalism when it runs wild. In the novel there are several events that reflect upon this. One is the violence of the Mohurram riots that hits the people in various ways.

Another event that is not developed at length is World War II in the background. There is an awareness of the Fascist trends of the European dictators. Ironically enough those who are assisting the British at this point are fighting for the freedom of the western world from its internal enemies while at the same time being instrumental in controlling the agitation for freedom by their own countrymen. This point perhaps needs a little more exploration.

The Indians who are fighting for the British in World War II (as Ameer, Laila's husband also does), the police and the whole administrative setup of the British that is being run by Indians in India, support the war effort of the Allies against the German invasions. Because of their loyalty and service to the British, these people are also used by them for putting down the demonstrations against British rule by their own countrymen as we see in the lathicharge on the students when the taluqdars give a reception to the Viceroy.

The taluqdars have traditionally exercised political supremacy and control through bargaining power with the British and thus they had come to occupy positions of authority. The new democratic forces, and the promised-land reforms by the Congress are going to affect this power. They are going to be divested of their broken authority. It is necessary to look at the non co-operation movement against the role of the British loyalists in the country, as it is equally necessary to view the partition as a power struggle between the two communities. Laila and her college friends discuss this issue in Chapter 3 of Part-II. Read that carefully. Also turn to Unit 4 for a discussion on the impact of partition.

Exercise 1

1. Identify any three main themes of the novel.
2. What role does World War II play in the novel?
3. Why can the novel be called a 'novel of growing-up'?

In the next section we shall analyse the role of education in propelling social change.

3.2 ROLE OF EDUCATION

One of the main themes in the novel is the need for female education. Education does not necessarily perform miracles but it does open up the mind to new ideas and experiences and prepares the individual for taking independent decisions and coping with crisis. Education plays an important role in making an individual

conscious of himself or herself as a person. It is a major formative influence on the character and personality of a person.

3.2.1 Education and Women

It is not only the simple process of education but the method, basis and institutional environment that also matter. In the novel we have two cousins Zahra and Laila. They are given two different types of education and they both shape up differently. Their attitudes towards themselves as persons are very different. Zahra never really learns to think of herself as a person or as a woman who can relate independently to society. She grows up to accept traditional values and the restrictive code of conduct for women. Marriage for her is not a relationship to a person but a means of escape from family restrictions and the way to a more open life, the permission to wear good clothes and jewellery. But Laila thinks of herself as a person and begins to assert herself and take her own decisions.

3.2.2 Education, Equality and Justice

Institutional environment and social environment are both important influences on the building of character and personality. Brothers like Asad and Zahid are a study in contrast, and Saleem and Kemal are also very different from each other. Asad goes to Delhi in order to study in a liberal institution where religion is not treated as a way of separation or antagonism. Kemal also has a more open mind. They relate to others on an individual footing as person to person and do not slot people according to their caste, religion or social position.

Education plays a significant role where the fight against injustice and inequality is concerned. Uneducated and illiterate people are forced to submit to domination and control. When they oppose this domination, this opposition may often lead to violence and brutality. Nandi avenges the wrong done to Saliman by tricking Ghulam Ali with her feminine charms. The whole process of modernisation is dependent on the level of education as the young college students learn to participate in democratic processes and political struggles and the feudalistic control is compelled to give way to greater openness and discussion.

Exercise 2

1. Indicate whether the following statements are True or False:
 - (a) Education can perform miracles. T/F
 - (b) It matters what kind of an education we receive. T/F
 - (c) All types of education are equal. T/F
 - (d) Education teaches us to take decisions. T/F
 - (e) Education is necessary for effective democracy. T/F
 - (f) Spread of education helps in the process of modernisation. T/F
 - (g) The uneducated cannot fight injustice. T/F
2. Mention any two advantages of education.

The question of gender equality and the exploitation of women is another aspect that is dealt with in the novel. The next section will comment on the gender relationships in the novel.

3.3 GENDER RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

Feudalistic society is both hierarchical and patriarchal. It is hierarchical in the sense that power lies in the hands of the rich people, the aristocracy, the propertied men and the landowners. People are subordinated in accordance with their social status, economic power and category of jobs. Within a family the male head of the family exercises authority. And in the relationships between men and women, women are allotted subordinate roles. We see this structure in *Sunlight On A Broken Column*.

Baba Jan is the head of the family. On his death Uncle Hamid acquires the same authority and he has the power to decide for the members of the family. At a social level, the less affluent or not so well placed members of their own extended family are considered inferior just as Asad and Zahid are not considered suitable husbands for the daughters of the family. Ameer Husain is also treated as inferior. The lower sections of society, like the workers and servants, are all considered subordinate.

While the above hierarchical relationships are pointed out throughout the novel, it is the exploitation of women that still constitutes one of the main themes of the novel. The total control that the male members exercise over them is frightening. Their personal feelings and desires are not recognised. The social code of behaviour laid down for respectable women requires them to be obedient and docile. In this Muslim household of the 1930s and 40s, their social interaction is also limited. In social conversation too, they are not expected to voice independent opinions. In the choice of a marriage partner they have no say. Thus the attention is shifted from the person one is to be married to, towards the institution instead. What does marriage promise anyway that women should get married to strangers? Marriage gives social security and greater freedom to Zahra; respectability and obedience to Aunt Abida; self-punishment to Sita; economic security to Zainab. But it does not necessarily recognise them as individuals.

There are two other women who are seen in a different light than these women of respectable, well-to-do families - Nandi and Saliman. Both of them suffer and are subdued first by parental control and later by the men who use their bodies and leave them to cope with the problems. Neither of these women have any social or economic security. Instead their vulnerability is exposed, they are made into victims and pay heavily for every little moment of happiness.

Patriarchy also controls women through the whole notion of respectability. Any violation of this code is seen as bringing disgrace to the woman. In the novel we are exposed to two kinds of suffering - the suffering of those who submit to the code and pay for it in some way or the other. There is also the suffering of those who are considered outside this code but they also suffer as we see Saliman and Nandi suffer. Zahra is seen to be quite contented with her lot in life. But she does not grow as a person. And Sita who cannot marry the man she loves because of

social boundaries, punishes herself through marriage, through reducing herself to a mere body. Laila succeeds in moving outside the arranged marriage syndrome but her defiance alienates her from her family.

3.3.1 Aunt Abida

Although the story is narrated through the consciousness of Laila, Aunt Abida plays an important role in the novel. Her life is the life of an independent-minded woman who is deprived of the full expression of her personality and talent primarily because of the restrictions placed on women. Laila adores this aunt of hers who in every way appears to be a strong woman, sensitive to the need of others, capable of taking charge and coping with crisis. But as the novel progresses the reader finds this woman submitting to her brother's desires. When Baba Jan dies, she is married off to a widower with grown up children, a man who is described as a 'negative man'. Once married, she is placed outside Laila's immediate circle but the relationship continues at various levels and in various ways.

There are at least three occasions when Aunt Abida's life and Laila's life cross each other's and their relationship is tested. Once when Aunt Abida is ill and needs Laila but Laila postpones going to her primarily because she is distracted by Ameer's presence. On another occasion when Laila looks for Aunt Abida's support and understanding at the time of her marriage, Aunt Abida fails her by withholding her approval. She disapproves of Laila's defiance of her uncle's wishes. Later, when Laila's husband dies, the words of comfort which Aunt Abida offers could have brought about reconciliation but, it fails to do so because Laila is too far gone in her own life to turn back to the warmth of a lost relationship. Their relationship is that of one between two strong characters who disagree on the way by which traditional structures can be confronted. They belong to two different generations. But despite the difference of age and attitude they are alike in their approach to problems though different in their way of handling them.

Aunt Abida's life has its tragic undertones. It is a story of how a young, intelligent woman is subjected to a traditional lifestyle and her individuality suppressed, first through the male right to control her life and later through ignorance and prejudice that hinders medical aid from being given in time. The two parts of her life form a contrast to each other. The first period is when she is in her father's house and in control of things, able and efficient, capable of taking decisions. Her father's death and her brother's return change all that. She has to accept his decision to get her married off. No serious effort is made to find her a husband who can offer her happiness, instead she is married off to an elderly person who has for all practical purposes lived his life. He is now a widower with a family of adult children.

Laila does visit her aunt and goes to stay with her for a short period. This visit is described in chapter 15 of Part III. Aunt Abida's house is in a tiny village. It is almost a state of exile from society. Her part of the house is austere in its appearance, her rooms are up 'steep and narrow stairs' and the windows are 'iron - and barred'. As they talk to each other to catch up on the missed years, Laila finds a withdrawn, settled sadness in her aunt, a sadness which has become a permanent feature, an acceptance of the limits of her life. Marriage apparently had not given her any of the satisfaction that young people often dream of. Her

stepdaughter and mother-in-law are hostile towards her: they resented the sensitiveness of a character beyond their reach and understanding. They attacked what was bigger than their comprehension with petty thrusts. (Part III ch. 15).

Aunt Abida's life makes one see the extent to which men controlled women's lives. Her brother, who is keen to wash his hands off her after their father's death, decides her marriage. No consideration is given to her character, her personality or her progressive views, not even to the strength in her character. She gives in submissively because she feels bound by the code of behaviour prescribed for women, that they allow the men to take decisions on their behalf. Later, we witness her brave efforts to make some meaning of her life, but these efforts are met with hostility and antagonism. Her husband's attempts to come to her help relieve the situation only partially. Aunt Abida's life strikes one as a tremendous sacrifice made at the altar of tradition.

3.3.2 Nandi

Nandi is the washerman's daughter. She is a rebel through and through, and of all the household servants, she features in the novel as a positive character capable of taking action. But time and again she comes up against male control and opposition and is punished or victimised. Right in the beginning of the novel, there is an incident when Nandi is brought before the family as a culprit. Her father has caught her with the cleaner in the garage. When Uncle Mohsin, a male relative, accuses her of being a harlot, a woman without any morals and free with her body, Nandi retorts that he is in no position to say so. Apparently, Uncle Mohsin has, on some earlier occasion also made advances on her. Angry with her at her insolent reply, Uncle Mohsin strikes her with a stick. Laila intervenes to protect her and is reprimanded by Aunt Abida for doing so. Uncle Mohsin is able to strike Nandi simply because (a) he is a man (b) and he belongs to a higher class than her.

Nandi being a servant is treated as the lowest of the low. Her wishes and her body are of no significance. She is doubly oppressed. Being a woman she is subject to male control, and being a servant she is subject to the control of her masters.

Nandi's life intersects with Laila's at several points in the novel. To list a few of these events, we need to go back to the beginning. When Nandi is brought before the family and Uncle Mohsin strikes her, Laila rises to her defense and displeases Aunt Abida. Later when Nandi is exiled to the village, Laila is instrumental in getting her back to "Ashiana". During the period when Ameer is courting Laila, Nandi intuitively guesses her involvement with Ameer and is of great moral support to Laila. Still later, when Laila retreats to the house in the hills, Nandi keeps her company and brings up her daughter.

Nandi is a strong, rebellious character, very much like Laila, and she cannot tolerate injustice. She goes out of her way to avenge the wrong done to Saliman and gets Ghulam Ali thrown out, though Ghulam Ali cuts off her nose to avenge himself. She is married off to an old man and when she can no longer endure the relationship, she has a relationship with a Pathan who is briefly in the city, and bears his child. In many ways, Nandi's life represents the wrongs to which the lower classes are subjected. Her life also gives an indication of the moral freedom

which women in the lower classes can avail of provided they know how to manipulate the rules.

In contrast, Laila's subjection cannot be so free nor her rebellion so extreme. She can resist within limits and has to live in accordance with the social code. Love and sexuality do not have the same free rein in her life that we find in Nandi's life.

Respectability has its own constraints, as one can observe from Aunt Abida's life. Laila, Abida and Nandi are all women of the same mettle. Their generation, class and education affect the differences in their lives and their responses to the events in their lives.

3.3.3 Saliman

Saliman's life is one of abject suffering. She has none of the spirit and strength of Nandi. Both are maid servants in the family house "Ashiana" and together with Zahra and Laila, the girls make a foursome as they grow up together sharing their secrets and fears. Her role in the novel is subdued like her character. She makes a rather late appearance in the novel, in Chapter 2 of Part I.

Saliman and Ramzano are the daughters of a woman who had been sold to the family during a famine. Laila's grandmother, Baba Jan's wife, had brought her up and got her married. But her husband has run away with another woman and has abandoned Saliman and their two daughters. Saliman thus has known no freedom or independence coming as she does from this background of slavery and submission. She has no control over her life. Later when Ghulam Ali seduces her and she becomes pregnant, it is she who is sent away and not Ghulam Ali and she dies delivering the child. Her life is an example of wretchedness, brought upon her partly through the circumstances of her life and partly through her own sheer passivity and inactivity, her inability to rebel.

3.3.4 Zahra

Zahra is Laila's cousin, and the two girls of nearly the same age grow up together in their grandfather's house. But both the girls have been brought up quite differently. The education imparted to them is different and the courses their lives take are also different.

Zahra is given an education in Arabic and Persian; she is kept away from modern ways. She is not sent to college and is married off at an early age. She accepts marriage as her destiny and shows no wish to be educated. In several ways, Zahra represents the average woman who submits unresistingly to her fate. Does this attitude necessarily give her any happiness or peace? How does her character shape up as she steps into marriage and adulthood? The reader realises that there is a definite loss of personhood. She does not relate to her husband as a person. Marriage is a means to a different kind of life, a stepping-stone to an outer world, to wearing good clothes and attending parties. She is quite clear in her mind that she will not marry Asad, primarily because he is not in a position to provide her with any of the worldly things that make marriage desirable.

Zahra's character is that of an ordinary woman who is brought up to accept traditional practices without any questioning. She goes through none of the

conflicts and rebellions that Laila goes through. Despite this difference in their attitudes, Laila and Zahra are fairly good friends and set off each other. Through Zahra's character and to some extent Sita's character, the writer is criticising marriages that are entered into for reasons of social respectability or convenience.

3.3.5 Laila

Laila is the protagonist of the novel, which is focused on the years of her girlhood and adult life and her constant resistance to the impositions of traditional value structures. She is also the narrator of the novel, thus what she tells us about herself is given in more detail. When the behaviour or ideas of other characters are conveyed to us, these are also reported and commented upon by her. The narrative technique that the writer uses to counteract a totally subjective view is by presenting events and not necessarily always commenting upon them. Thus the contrasts with Zahra, and the parallels with Aunt Abida and Nandi speak for themselves. Similarly her conversations and interactions with her college friends also reflect upon her character.

Laila is an orphan but she has not been abandoned. Aunt Abida is a surrogate mother to her while her grandfather respects her late father's wishes to impart education to her along the western pattern. She is allowed a greater degree of freedom both by her grandfather and Uncle Hamid than what the two patriarchs allow her cousin Zahra.

There are several aspects of Laila's character that are worthy of admiration. She is sensitive and emotional and tends to be impulsive. She gets along well with people like Asad and Kemal much better than she gets along with Saleem or Zahid. She has inherited some of her grandfather and father's liberal views and having been exposed to a broader education, she is more open-minded than the conservative Zahra.

Laila is a rebel in many ways. She questions the right of men to take charge of women's lives and cannot tolerate injustice. There are several incidents that indicate this. She rushes to protect Nandi against Uncle Mohsin's attack on her, and sympathises with her when she is sent to the village. She has the courage to resist the offer of marrying any one of her cousins, Saleem and Kemal. And later she confronts her uncle in order to get permission to marry Ameer.

Marriage to her means a relationship that has its basis on understanding and equality. This marriage practically implies an ouster from the family and she puts up with this by moving to the hills. There is also a stubborn streak in her. When Aunt Abida offers her comfort after Ameer's death, she does not respond to her aunt's gestures. Her views on personal relationships and marriage allow her to sympathise with Asad as also with Kemal and Sita. Thus her emotional side is well developed. The excitements and uncertainties of girlhood are clearly reflected in her behaviour as she celebrates the different festivals with the family, responds to her ex-governess in a critical manner, dresses up in all her finery for the reception to the Viceroy and joins in the many escapades the girls plan both in "Ashiana" and Hasanpur. On a couple of occasions, the reader may disapprove of her behaviour, especially when she steals away to the bookshop to keep her appointment with Ameer. But that too is part of a young girl's growing up as she moves between traditional structures and individual desires.

Laila's questioning of tyrannical authority is also reflected in her nationalist views. She is not as brave or vocal as Nita, nor as active as Asad, but she is also not a loyalist like Joan or a passive follower like Nadira. She follows the middle path of loyalty to a country rather than to the British King or to religion. Would it be possible to call her a radical? Perhaps not! She does not violate any strong moral conventions but is keen to find space for her personal freedom and enter into meaningful relationships.

By the end of the novel, Laila appears a wiser and subdued person as she has experienced both separation and suffering, seen the collapse of a world which had offered her security but had demanded strict obedience, struggled with her memories, bereavements, loss and loneliness. The farewell visit to "Ashiana" is a kind of cleansing as well as a new beginning as she turns to Asad for personal fulfilment.

Exercise 3

1. Discuss Laila's character (100 words) in comparison with:
 - (a) Zahra
 - (b) Nandi
2. Write a short note on Aunt Abida (100 words)

Having discussed gender relationships in the novel, we need to look at the whole notion of patriarchy that is one of the primary themes of this novel as also to examine the concept of arranged marriages. This we shall do in the next section.

3.4 PATRIARCHY AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES

One of the themes of *Sunlight On A Broken Column* is the questioning of patriarchal structures. Marriage is one institution that is controlled and governed by male privilege and by social customs, it privileges the man. Family, status, education and conformity to social practice are some of the main considerations. A woman's personal desires, dreams and the idea of romance do not necessarily fit into this framework. She is required to adjust to her husband's wishes, interact with others also according to his wishes and work or not work outside the house in accordance with his wishes. In the novel, as it is about an aristocratic family and located in the first half of the twentieth century, there are no examples of working or professional women though women like Begum Waheed do move into political roles and contest elections.

Most of the women characters are located within families as married women, unmarried daughters or dependent widows. It is true that their status differs according to their education, income group and religious/caste background but in the main they are placed within family structures. The three aunts - Abida, Saira, and Majida - belong to the older generation while Laila, Zahra, Sita, Nadira, Perin, Zainab and Nandi represent the younger women. Of these, Laila exercises her choice while Zahra follows the advice of her elders. Sita loves Kemal but is unable to take the final step of marrying him as they belong to different religions and marriage has to relate to society and is not purely a matter between two individuals. Zainab falls into a set pattern and Nandi violates the rule of marital

fidelity. In fact both Zahra and Sita end up thinking of their bodies as simply a means for occupying a social status, though they do it in different ways and for different reasons.

Of the older women, Aunt Majida's personality is totally confined and traditional, Aunt Saira looks for satisfaction in selling a good house but we find Aunt Abida constantly fluttering against the confined role and finally being sacrificed to it. The different attitudes toward marriage and the kind of relationships that emerge offer a strong critique of patriarchal control that brushes aside all emotional and personal considerations and sustains itself upon the docile submission of women.

3.4.1 Property

Property is a major concern in marriage. It is part of social status and power. Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira are keen that Laila marries either Saleem or Kemal so that the family property is not divided. Laila has a half-claim on the family property and thus she is an heiress and desirable as a wife. But she is unwilling to fall in with their wishes as she is in love with Ameer. Fortunately both the young men also are not inclined to enter into this kind of a marriage of convenience. Later, when Laila is on a visit to Aunt Abida, the latter's stepdaughter and mother-in-law discuss the issue. To them it does not make sense to marry outside the family if there are eligible young men in the family. They view marriage as an arrangement to facilitate other transactions.

Exercise 4

1. Why does Laila refuse to marry either Saleem or Kemal?
2. Why is Laila an heiress and Zahra not?

This novel also comments upon Hindu - Muslim relationships. Let us examine this theme in the next section.

3.5 HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONSHIPS

As the novel covers a very traumatic period of India's history of the partition of the country in 1947, it automatically focuses on the Hindu-Muslim relationships. The Hindus and the Muslims live in the same country, share several cultural values, celebrate each other's festivals, form common friendships yet they are driven apart by other factors. One of these is religion. The religious codes are very different and part of the trouble arises when the public aspects of religion clash, like a procession or a building or an object venerated by one community and considered sacred by it but not by the other come in each other's way.

Another difference is the kind of food each community eats and permits. In another novel which some of you may have read, Rahi Masoom Raza's *Aadha Gaon*, the difference in food habits is pointed out and Raza goes on to observe that members of the two communities do not eat food cooked by the other. The concept of 'purity' interferes.

A third area where there is likelihood of conflict is interpersonal relationships, especially marriage. Kemal and Sita love each other but decide not to go against social rules. On the political scene the major divisionary force is political power.

At such a time the question of a majority versus minority arises. Political power is closely linked with economic conditions. The Muslims in the time period of the novel do not look forward to being ruled by a Hindu majority because of the apprehension that the opportunities for jobs and economic betterment will be denied to them.

3.5.1 Moharram Riots

Moharram signifies a period of mourning which is spread over a period of ten days at the end of which *tajia* (replicas of the tomb of Husain, the martyred grandson of Muhammad) are taken out in a procession. In the novel this period coincides with Baba Jan's illness (Part I Chapter 1, 10). During this period elegies (*marsia*) are read out and a passionate identification takes place with the martyrdom of Hazrat Husain and his family. The participants in the Moharram procession beat their breast and practice self-flagellation while moving in time with a frenzied incantatory rhythm. For many, personal grief becomes part of the general sorrow. Moharram is observed largely by the Shia Muslims, Sunnis do not necessarily observe it in the same way.

In the novel, Moharram plays an important role. First, it brings the family together as the *marsia* are recited; second as the servants also constitute an audience, the class barrier is removed in this community mourning. Third, in the novel, it provides the occasion for religion and attitudes to religion to be discussed. Asad is deeply religious but he is a liberal thus proving that religious faith need not shut out others.

Everyone is keen to see the procession. Mrs. Martin, Laila's ex-governess is also keen to go along with the rest but, because there are rumours of likely disturbances, the programme is cancelled (Part I, Chapter 11). The women are disappointed but the men manage to go. The rumour regarding the disturbance turns into a reality. A riot breaks out and many people are killed. The cook reports that a *tazia* got stuck in the branch of a peepul tree and as the branch of the sacred tree could not be cut, the clash took place (Part I, ch 12). Asad too is injured in the clash, not because he has joined a violent crowd but because he wanted to help people who were being beaten. This kind of a flare-up was very common in British India and continues sporadically even now. Most riots are begun by rumours or by some mischievous planning or rigidity on the part of the parties concerned, and then by anger and religious frenzy taking over reason and common sense.

The riot is important for several other reasons in the novel. Firstly, it gives the reader an insight into Asad's character. Secondly, after he is injured and lapses into a state of delirium, his feverish condition becomes a means of revealing his love for Zahra, a fact that he would not have consciously stated. Asad is a believer in non-violence but is caught up in this violent episode. He is deeply disturbed by it and is increasingly conscious of his helplessness. The fact that Asad reveals his love for Zahra in his delirium gives an important turn to the novel as Aunt Majida's attitude towards Asad and his position in the house is shaken up. It also allows us to understand Zahra's character better. And finally, the riots in themselves allow the reader to realise how flimsy the basis of religious disagreement actually is.

3.5.2 Political Interests

The Hindu-Muslim relationship is also affected by the struggle for political power. Uncle Hamid decides to contest the elections primarily because of this feeling. In Awadh the landlords and aristocracy are mostly Muslim, but with the elections, power could pass to the Hindus. Further, the relationship has been vitiated by the presence of the British and the manner in which they have been playing one community against the other. The dominant feeling is that Muslims are alien, outsiders. Joan voices this feeling but Nadira resents this (Part II, ch. 3).

India is divided according to the political significance that the British gives each community. The Anglo-Indians are loyal to the British. And Muslims like Begum Waheed, her daughter Nadira and Laila's cousin Saleem, all think they have to defend their heritage. Thus, rather than work together against a common enemy, they go on to make the enemy the arbitrator and contest against each other's power. The Muslims are further divided into nationalist Muslims who think of India as their country and the Muslim League that had begun to demand a separate homeland. Some of these nationalist Muslims are members of the Congress, others contest the election as Unionists. But at the social level, they have been living together as friends and neighbours and Uncle Hamid still firmly believes that they can continue to do so.

3.5.3 Kemal-Sita Relationship

Kemal is one of the two sons of Uncle Hamid. When their parents want one of them to choose Laila as a bride, Kemal refuses to do so because he thinks of her as a sister. Kemal is a sensitive person, he gets along quite well with his cousin but marriage is another thing. Later when Laila's school friend Sita enters the scene, he is strangely attracted to her and proposes marriage but Sita refuses his offer though very much in love with him. She tells Laila: "I, Sita, loved him, Kemal, and still do. Two individual human beings. But it would have been the daughter of my father and mother marrying the son of his parents, with different backgrounds and different religions, two small cogs in a huge machine". When Laila asks her, "How could you think like that if you loved him?" Sita tells her that marriage is a relationship between two families and social set-ups and just because she loves Kemal very much, it is not possible for her to thrust him into a life-long conflict. Sita says: "I could because I loved him. Our love is our own, inside us, but our marriage would have been outside ourselves, everyone else's. I thought about it until it seemed easier to die". (Part III Chapter 8).

But the sacrifice demands its toll. Sita turns into a mere body and a society woman, well decked and dressed up, but one who has lost her emotional self. They continue to meet even after Sita's marriage but when Kemal decides to get married, Sita tells him that they must stop meeting each other. The Kemal-Sita relationship is a painful one of unfulfilled love. In the novel it serves the purpose of contrasting Sita's behaviour with that of Laila's. Laila who has the courage to defy her guardians and marry Ameer while Sita accepts that her love must remain unfulfilled as a result of religious and social boundaries.

But there is a major difference in their situations. Sita, a Hindu girl is in love with Kemal, a Muslim youth when the country is about to gain independence and to be divided along religious lines. Laila on the other hand is a Muslim girl

in love with a Muslim youth who however, is beneath her socially. The Sita-Kemal relationship also reflects upon the Hindu-Muslim relationships. It is not that real-life marriages between the two communities did not take place. There are several instances of that but at this particular point of Indian history, it indicates the tension and separatist feelings that at that time were tearing them apart.

The relationship also allows us to understand the sensitiveness of Kemal's character. He is very different from his brother Saleem. He joins the Civil Service like his father before him and after the partition, chooses to stay in India. And when he marries, he marries Perin, who again is not a Muslim but a Parsi. Parsi women lose their religion once they get married outside their community. Thus Kemal in the final instance is not tied down to his community. Emotionally and intellectually he has risen above the narrow confines of religion and community. This relationship, like Aunt Abida's life, strikes a serious note in the novel and makes the reader think about events that often lie outside one's control and decisions that impact the future course of life.

Exercise 5.

Give brief answers to the following questions (100 words):

1. What triggers the Moharrum riots?
2. Why does the Muslim League demand a separate homeland?
3. Write a short note on the Hindu-Muslim relationship.
4. Why does Sita refuse Kemal's offer of marriage?

Apart from the themes of partition, patriarchy and gender, the novel also addresses the issue of secularism. The next section examines the ideals of secularism.

3.6 IDEALS OF SECULARISM

As opposed to the portrayal of separatist tendencies, the author also presents a picture of secular ideals. Uncle Hamid tells his sons that Hindus and Muslims have for centuries lived together and shared their cultures.

3.6.1 Baba Jan's Friends

Baba Jan's friends consist of people of all communities and Laila recalls with fondness the memories of Gorey Dada, Mr. Freemantle, Hanstey Dada, Thakur Balbir Singh and Motey Dada, Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur (Part I Chapter 3). These four men were different from each other, had widely different talents, represented different religions, cultures and power structures yet there was a bond of friendship between them. They loved the city to which they belonged.

3.6.2 Laila's friends

Like her grandfather, Laila's friendships also cut across religion and community. Her college friends are an assorted group and so are her school friends. Her close friends include Nita, Ramona, Nadira, Sita, and Joan. Social relationships and social institutions like schools and colleges enable people to think more openly and relate to people.

3.6.3 The Household Servants

The household servants are also a mixed group. They are people from all castes and religions. Nandi is a Hindu but she serves Laila with devotion. The Hindu servants feel free to observe their religious practices and go on pilgrimages. At the same time they join in the celebration of the Muslim festivals with enthusiasm. These relationships, loyalties and concerns indicate the possibility of living together in harmony.

Exercise 6

1. Write short notes on
 - (i) Baba Jan's friends
 - (ii) Laila's friends
2. What role do these groups perform in the novel?

3.7 TRADITION AND CHANGE

Sunlight On A Broken Column traces not only the entry into adulthood of Laila, the heroine, but also marks the change from tradition to modernity. Several changes take place during the course of the years. Some of these are as follows:

Society moves from feudalistic structures towards democracy.

The joint family system yields to nuclear families.

There is the spread of education.

Individuals and their choices begin to count.

All change, however, is not for the betterment of society - some are sad and disturbing. For instance, Aunt Saira's displacement, the coming up of ugly apartments, and the replacement of a sense of refinement by vulgar commercialisation - all these indicate a downward journey. But modernity, like tradition is a mixed bag. It has both its good aspects and bad ones.

Exercise 7

1. Write a note on the transition from tradition to modernity. What are the indications of modernity in the novel? (50 words)

3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed the various women characters, the influences that shape their characters and the manner in which they impact and shed light on the range of thematic strands of the novel. The various themes include: the change from tradition to modernity and commercialisation; the theme of partition and how it affected people, and changed their lives forever; the theme of patriarchy, amongst others. We also looked at the need for female education and the changes that education can bring about. This unit examined gender relationships as well as ideas of secularism that are prevalent in the novel. We have tried to show the relationship between patriarchy and exploitation in the novel. If you have not

read the novel till now, ensure that you do so as these discussions would be meaningless without a proper reading and understanding of the novel.

3.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

1. (a) The Freedom Struggle (b) The Novel of Growing Up (c) A Partition Novel
2. World War II is discussed in the background as Ameer, Laila's husband joins the Imperial British Army along with several other Indian men, to fight the German Nazis for the British Allies. Yet, it is the same Army, the same men who fight the Axis powers (i.e, the Germans, Italians and Russians) so bravely who are suppressing the freedom struggle in their own land because of their loyalty to the British.
3. Because it is the story of Laila's life from the age of fifteen till the age of thirty five when she enters into womanhood, marriage, motherhood etc.

Exercise 2

1. (a) F (b) T (c) F (d) T (e) T (f) T (g) F
2. Individual growth/personhood and social change/responsibility

Exercise 3

1. Laila: resistance to patriarchy; marries according to her wishes, brave and courageous, nationalist in her political ideas, intolerant of injustice.
 - a) Zahra: a traditional girl who accepts patriarchal control and social conventions; considers marriage a social event rather than a personal relationship. More interested in status rather than in love or personal fulfillment.
 - (b) Nandi: rebellious, conscious of her desires. Pays for her rebellion, yields to marriage with an old man but finally has a relationship outside marriage and bears a child. Fiercely independent and fiercely loyal to Laila. An uneducated and unrefined version of Laila.
2. Refer 3.3.1 and work out your response.

Exercise 4

1. Because she wants to marry Ameer whom she loves.
2. Laila's father is a son of the house and she has a right to inheritance whereas Zahra is a daughter's daughter.

Exercise 5

1. The branch of a peepul tree that comes in the way of the *tazia*. The branch of the sacred tree cannot be cut.
2. Because the Muslims feel threatened by the Hindu majority.
3. See 3.5.2. It is a relationship of hostility because of the way the British rulers have divided them and also because it is a struggle for political power.

4. See 3.5.3. Sita refuses Kemal's offer of marriage because marriage is a social relationship and they come from different backgrounds and religions.

Exercise 6

1. They form a heterogeneous group and indicate the possibility of friendship amongst people of different religions and temperaments. Gorey Dada is an Englishman, Hanstey Dada, a Hindu, and Motey Dada a Muslim. Similarly Laila's friends belong to different economic and religious groups and represent different political opinions - Nita, Joan, Nadira, Sita and Ramona. But in personal relationships, they easily overcome these differences .
2. These friendships uphold the ideals of secularism and remind one of the possibility of living together peacefully and in harmony. They also remind us that religion need not be a cause for social disturbance or hatred amongst communities.

Exercise 7

1. The change is inevitable due to passage of time and implies a change in the way of thinking, living and relating to others. The individual has more place in a modern society and hierarchical structures are replaced by more democratic and equal ones. Also people are more mobile as they move out in search of jobs and this breaks the joint family structure.

UNIT 4 STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Structure and Form

4.1.2 Juxtapositions

4.1.3 Space

4.1.4 “Ashiana”

4.2 Time and Memory

4.3 The Last Section

4.4 The Role of Minor Characters

4.4.1 Male Characters

4.4.2 Asad

4.4.3 Kemal

4.4.4 Saleem

4.5 Let Us Sum Up

4.6 Answers to Self-check Exercises

4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses the manner in which the events in the novel are put together to lead the reader to the meaning. It is hoped that you will be able to see that nothing in the novel is surplus or meaningless. And also that no narrative is entirely linear or its meaning limited to what is said by the writer or the characters. At the end of this unit, you should be in a position to comment upon the significance of the structure and the importance of the minor characters.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Structure and form are often used as synonyms, primarily because both are concerned with the organisation of material. In a novel or any other piece of art, it implies the method by which events have been arranged, how parallels are drawn and the manner in which the incidents fall together to make some kind of meaning. It also refers to the way in which meaning is created and separate events or narratives come together in a coherent manner to form a pattern. This arrangement of events is also referred to on occasion, as plot.

4.1.1 Structure and Form

There is, however, a degree of difference between ‘structure’ and ‘form’. ‘Form’ normally means the finished shape, the outward form, the image that emerges and the impression that is made. ‘Form’ is also used to distinguish the shape from ‘content’, in this case, the story or the material of the story.

Structure is concerned more with the fragments, the sections, inter-weavings, the connections, in fact, the manner in which events are arranged or constructed.

The literary form also has another dimension. That is the dimension of time. Do events take place in a chronological linear order? Or are there some points where other events are used to create comparisons? Does time move backward through memory and flashbacks? Or, does time move through letters, diaries and newspaper cuttings? At times linearity is interrupted because of some sudden happening. At other times the character indulges in personal recollections and moves into self-introspection. And sometimes dreams and hallucinations may interrupt the linear flow of the narrative.

4.1.2 Juxtapositions

Sunlight On A Broken Column works through juxtapositions, parallels and polarities. There is two of everything: Laila and Zahra; Asad and Zahid; Saleem and Kemal; Uncle Hamid and Laila's father; Aunt Abida and Aunt Majida. There are even two houses – "Ashiana" and Hasanpur, and two maidservants Saliman and Nandi. These pairs are all contrasted with each other. They bring out the differences.

Laila and Zahra, like Majida and Abida are closely related but think differently and lead different kinds of life. The brothers Saleem and Kemal are also different, they adopt different political stances, and finally opt for two different countries.

Of the two houses "Ashiana" is a big house and city-centred, and Hasanpur has a smaller, ancestral house. Finally it is "Ashiana" that is rendered desolate and is sold, the family dispersed while Hasanpur still continues to offer refuge to the old and the abandoned.

What purpose do these juxtapositions serve? They bring out the differences, emphasise the difference education can make; they also show how political ideas are rooted in social situations of discrimination and hostility. Further, the house "Ashiana" becomes a metaphor for the nation as power centres shift, members feel alienated and move away, and memories become a substitute for living relationships.

4.1.3 Space

The use of space becomes an important part of the narrative of the novel. Space of different kinds is used and serves different purposes. For instance "Ashiana" is a house and this space is an enclosed private space while palaces are public space and gardens are open space. The city, Lucknow, itself is historical space.

Public spaces, the gardens and the city tell the tale of history. The city itself has been a place where different cultures have converged from different parts of the country - Hindu, Islamic and now British. The gardens indicate Islamic influence. Muslim landscaping and architecture brought with it formal planning of parks and gardens. Other monuments like Aurengzeb's mosque, the Imambaras of Nawab-Viziers and the clock tower trace the history of Lucknow. The old city, which is also the centre where the riots take place, is the heart of the city with its crowded streets and decadent houses of the impoverished nobility.

Another important public place is the Baradari where the taluqdars hold the reception for the Viceroy. It becomes a place for the display of royal grandeur, festivity and feasting. People with different political histories and lineages meet for this display of loyalty to the British.

In the novel this reception serves several purposes. One, the power of the British is evident; this is an occasion for Laila to make her first formal social entry; it is here that she meets Ameer for the first time. And in the very next chapter we have the agitating students being lathi-charged. The students' agitation highlights the resentment against the British, whereas the Reception highlights the interests of the aristocratic class who still cling to the authority they derive from their loyalty to the British.

4.1.4 "Ashiana"

The house "Ashiana" symbolises space. It houses a family and is the background for the whole of Part I and the whole of Part IV. In Part II & III, the house plays a role, but the lifestyle, its members and its decor have all changed and it is no longer a protective roof. In fact the house, despite the temporary moves away from it first to Hasanpur and then to the house in the hills, continues to be a strong strand in the novel; its changing appearance and significance also indicate the changing patterns of tradition and of political relationships. In Part-I, it is a house divided into the *zenana* and the *mardana* (the women's and men's spaces respectively), a division that is set aside during Baba Jan's illness as Aunt Abida moves to the front of the house.

Categories of people are very clearly demarcated - the old patriarch and his friends, the two daughters of the house, the third generation represented by the four cousins - Zahra, Laila, Asad, Zahid and the servants nicely settled in the backyard. Everyone is welcome and people are in the habit of turning up all the time. Uncle Mohsin temporarily usurps the decision-making power in the absence of any other male member.

Turn now to Part IV. The house is empty and desolate, the family dispersed. Baba Jan and his two sons are dead. The once well-maintained garden is in a state of wilderness. Aunt Abida is also dead. Saleem has gone to Pakistan. Some of the servants are dead, others have been sent away except one. The house has lost its former grandeur; ugly apartments and refugee colonies now surround it. This is the divided country; the past has been emptied out like the house. It is a house of memories. In the two middle sections, the house no longer exudes the earlier warmth and unity. It is now thought of only as a piece of property - merely a place where people live. The young are all moving away in search of other pursuits and it is now representative of the turmoil the country is going through.

Exercise I

1. Define (a) structure (b) form (50 words)
2. Write a short note on the house "Ashiana". What role does it play in the novel? (100 words)
3. What is the purpose of describing public spaces like parks and gardens? (30 words)

In the next section let us examine the role played by the dimensions of time and memory in *Sunlight On A Broken Column*.

4.2 TIME AND MEMORY

The story of the novel moves through linear time through the first three parts. In the fourth it moves backward to catch up with the events that have taken place during the interval of fourteen years. While the first three parts move in a forward-looking direction, the last part works in the reverse direction. But neither the broken linearity nor its reversal are straight, direct routes or journeys. Look at the following figure:

Time present

ch. 1 Baba Jan's illness

ch. 2 15th birthday

Uncle Mohsin's life ←-----↓

Nandi incident

Nandi's character ←----- |

ch. 3 Laila summoned

fear of Baba Jan's death-----→

Baba Jan's friends ←-----

Ch. 4 meal time |

Ustaniji and memories of childhood ←-----

This demonstration will make it abundantly clear that time does not stand still. It is constantly in a flux. Memories, stories, descriptions, fear of future happenings, reported events all pull time into different directions and fill up the novel with events.

Exercise 2

1. Give the meaning of (i) linear (ii) flashback

4.3 THE LAST SECTION

Part IV of the novel has come in for criticism. Is it relevant to the growing up of Laila or is it only a record of history? Are the events that are recalled in Part IV necessary for the interpretation of the novel?

Part IV serves many useful functions. It moves the novel out of the framework of an autobiographical narrative and places it in the nation's history. It also enhances the use of the house as a metaphor for the nation; it underplays the role of romance and turns our attention to the concerns of real life.

Further, the events of Laila's life bring out Nandi's character and throw light on Sita's conflict with herself. Ameer's joining the Army, being taken prisoner and subsequently being killed draw attention to World War II and the economic necessity of earning a living. Ameer's death also punctures the idea of a fairy tale romance of the 'they lived happily ever after' variety. Aunt Abida's death

strikes the tragic note of a wasted life and comments upon the subordination of women. It also critiques the role of tradition when it constrains and destroys the individual. The last part of the novel gives way to memory and recollection rather than work through participation and narration.

Laila mentions very early in Part IV - 'I was nearly home' (Part IV, ch 1). It is symbolic of a homecoming for her after her alienation from the family in the intervening years, after her rejection of the family's sympathy. She is now finally there - more mature and more at peace with herself, with her uncertainties smoothened out.

This section also tells us about the partition towards which the earlier power struggle has been leading. And it further tells us about the agony, the pain and the heartbreak the partition caused. It not only divided the country, it divided families, and the right of inheritance was impeded by international law. Saleem and Kemal both are their father's heirs, but, Saleem having decided to go to Pakistan, claims his share. In order to do that, Kemal has to sell the "Ashiana" so that he can buy Saleem's share in the Hasanpur house. Zainab's marriage and later her husband's posting abroad in a Pakistani mission also hints at the economic opportunities the new nation offers its citizens and contrasts with the squeezing of the public space for Indian Muslims in India.

The refugees are a symbol of the national tragedy, the wholesale dislocation that had taken place in several parts of India, not only at the borders, but right in the heart of the country. Thus Part IV is important for a number of reasons, all of which are connected with its dominant themes - the theme of partition, of growing up, the recording of history, the movement towards social change and the forces which brought it about, and the critiquing of patriarchy.

It also makes it possible for Asad to be rehabilitated. He had been ousted from favour after Aunt Majida finds out that he loved Zahra. A sensitive young man, a believer in non-violence, socially committed and caring, the reader senses a coming together of Asad and Laila, which is a new beginning for both of them.

Exercise 3

1. Explain in about a 100 words, why Part IV is essential to the novel.

4.4 THE ROLE OF MINOR CHARACTERS

There are several characters or clusters of characters in the novel that are not really developed. Many of them simply perform certain roles. Some of them we only hear about but never meet, as for instance, the Pathan who is the father of Nandi's child, or her old husband, or Uncle Mohsin's family. But there are others who play a significant role like Nandi, Saliman, Zainab, Jumrnan dhobi etc. There are still others who appear in passing but are used for purposes of contrast like Perin Wadia, the woman who marries Kemal. Being a Parsi, the marriage is a bold step for her as well.

From amongst the main characters, even Ameer's character is underdeveloped. In fact, following the autobiographical mode, it is Laila who can be seen as a fully developed character. Next in line are Aunt Abida, Zahra, Sita, Asad, Kemal and Nandi. Baba Jan, Uncle Hamid and Aunt Saira are treated as characters

representative of roles and mindsets, not really developed as individual characters. The other relatives, friends and employees are used to represent views and attitudes. The family at Hasanpur is used to create an atmosphere and provide social history.

From amongst the minor characters, it is Nandi's role that is of significance. She is an unrefined, uneducated Laila, courageous, bold and independent. Her role in the novel is to highlight Laila's controlled rebellion and provide Laila with the support that is no longer forthcoming from Aunt Abida. (Her character has been discussed in detail in Unit 3). The minor characters also provide parallels, create an atmosphere, carry news and bring information. Ustaniji and Mrs. Martin, Mustari Bai all are important facets of a lifestyle as are Begum Waheed and Mrs. Wadia of a social world.

4.4.1 Male Characters

As the novel is written from a woman's point of view, the men are viewed mainly through her eyes and experiences. They are important because they relate to her and either advise and protect her, or support her in her resistance to conventions. They also help her to discover her strengths and limitations and find some kind of a self-realisation for herself. To begin with the men from the older generation, Baba Jan and his friends provide her with a sense of a protected, happy, harmonious world. Baba Jan, who controls the household even during his illness, and is seen as a strong patriarch is kind to her and follows her dead father's wishes in sending her to an English school. Uncle Hamid, even when he is not too keen to send her to college, does so and allows her to continue her studies at the postgraduate level as well.

4.4.2 Asad

Asad is an important character in the novel for several reasons. He is involved in the freedom struggle and presents a contrast to Saleem. Being a poor relative, he is edged out of the family house on Uncle Hamid's return. At that time he decides to go to Jamia Millia University and study there. Jamia Millia represents the secular ideals which Asad follows and is inspired by.

The reader learns early in the novel that Asad is a believer in non-violence.. But ironically enough he does get caught in incidents of violence. The first time it is in the Moharram riots when he is pained that he can render no help to the helpless victims of the riot and where he himself receives a head injury. The second time it is during the student's agitation against the Viceroy's visit. Asad comes across as a sensitive and shy person inclined towards poetry. He cherishes the finer values of life. In his early youth, he is attracted to Zahra, who considers him unworthy of herself and beneath her notice. Later we find that Zainab finds him attractive but Asad does not reciprocate. Throughout the novel, whether he is present or not, his presence as an understanding ally can be felt. In Part IV when Laila goes over the house from room to room and recollects the happenings of the in-between years, it is Asad who finally comes to take her away. The relationship between Asad and Laila has never really been acknowledged or developed but he, apparently, is the anchor that she is looking for. Both have been through a lot of suffering and pain and are people who have come through the storm.

4.4.3 Kemal

Kenlal is another character that is cast in the same mould as Asad and Laila. He too is sensitive and secular and cannot comprehend violence and separatist feelings. He is unwilling to marry Laila as he thinks of her as a sister. Kemal falls in love with Sita. The relationship between Sita and Kemal is like a game played out in public. Kemal flirts with Mrs. Lal and Sita flirts with other men but both are all the time longing to be with each other. There are a couple of poignant scenes between them that are heartrending. They throw light on the contrary directions that the heart and political reality follow. One clashes with the other. Kemal proposes marriage to Sita but she refuses to marry him because marriage, for her, is a social event and a relationship between families and communities. Later, Kemal marries Perin. This marriage is also a significant move. For it shows the reader that he still does not necessarily look for a bride from the same religion. There is a crossing of boundaries that helps to sustain his humanistic values.

Kemal and Saleem together play an important part in Laila's growing up. She is allowed to go out with them when they insist upon it. Kemal also acts as her confidant from time to time. He supports her wish to marry Ameer. And he is the one who stays in India and holds the family together or whatever is now left of the family.

4.4.4 Saleem

Saleem is the second son of Uncle Hamid. He too, like Kemal, has been educated ~ abroad. He is a year younger than Kemal. Saleem and Kemal are quite different both in appearance as well as attitude. He is stocky and slow of movement, not good at games but a person given to reading and intellectual pursuits. His early love affair in England had come to naught. Studying for the law, Saleem gradually turned from a Marxist to a Muslim Leaguer. He campaigns for Begum Waheed as opposed to helping his own father in the elections. Considering it imperative to protect the Muslim heritage, he marries Nadira and on the division of the country, opts for Pakistan. Saleem's move to Pakistan finally divides the family and necessitates a disposal of "Ashiana".

Exercise 4

1. Write short notes on
 - (i) the role of the minor characters
 - (ii) Asad
 - (iii) Kemal
 - (iv) Saleem

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at the structure and the form of the novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column*. We have also looked at the various juxtapositions and parallels at work and at the use of space as an important part of the narrative of the novel. We have examined the movement of time and the role memory plays

in the novel as well as looked closely at the ending of the novel. Apart from that we have also provided an insight into the role of the minor characters. Having read the unit carefully, we expect you to be able to comment on the significance of the structure of the novel as well as on the importance of the minor characters in the novel.

4.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Hints

1. (a) Structure is the process. (b) Form the finished shape and image.
2. It is a symbol of the nation, represents tradition, comfort, a sense of belonging. The changes and the final sale indicate the division of the nation.
3. These descriptions create an atmosphere of the city, indicate its history as well as the Islamic influence

Exercise 2

1. (i) Linear is chronological sequence and (ii) flashback, recollection through memory, turn to the past.

Exercise 3

1. It fills up the 14 years interval, sums up the events; it shows Laila's mature self, it reflects upon the consequences of the partition and the refugee influx. It also shows the change from tradition to modernity.

Exercise 4

1. Go through the character sketches provided and discuss their (a) nature (b) political views (c) relationships.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Ali, Ahmed. (1946), *Twilight in Delhi*, (Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 1991)
2. Amin, Amina. (1995), "Tension Between Restriction and Freedom: The Purdah Motif in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight On A Broken Column*", *Margins of Erasure*, Eds, Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin, (Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd: New Delhi)
3. Baldwin, Shauna Singh. (1999), *What the Body Remembers*, (Harper Collins Publishers: New Delhi)
4. Begum, Jameela. (1995), "Reconstructing History: The Purdah in *Twilight in Delhi* and *Sunlight On A Broken Column*", *Margins of Erasure*, op cit
5. Bharucha, Nilufer E. (1998), " 'I am universalist humanist': Conversation with Attia Hosain". *Biblio*, July-Aug. 1998. Vol. 111, No. 7-8.
6. Desai, Anita. (1993), "Introduction". *Phoenix Fled*, (Rupa and Co: Calcutta).

7. Fisher, Michael H. (1987), *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals*, (Manohar: New Delhi)
8. Hosain, Attia. (1953), *Phoenix Fled*, (Rupa and Co: Calcutta, 1993)
9. (1961), *Sunlight On A Broken Column*, (Arnold Heinmann: New Delhi, 1979)
10. Iyengar, Srinivas. (1962), *Indian Writing in English*, (Sterling publishers Pvt Ltd.,: New Delhi)
11. Kaul, R K ., & Jasbir Jain. (2001), *Attia Hosain*, (Rawat Publications: Jaipur)
12. Kesavan, Mukul. 1995, *Looking Through Glass*, (Ravi Dayal Publishers: New Delhi).
13. Mehta, Rama. (1977), *Inside the Haveli*, (hold Heinernann: New Delhi).
14. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. (1971), *The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*, (Arnold Heinemann: New Delhi)
15. Paramaswaran, Uma. (1 999, "Purdah in Salman Rushdie, Attia Hosain and Rama Mehta", ibid
16. Shah Nawaz, Mumtaz. (1957), *The Heart Divided*, (Penguin: New Delhi, 2004).
17. Sidhwa, Bapsi. (1989), *Ice Candy Man*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth).