

## **Title: A Brief Analysis of *Sunlight on a Broken Column***

Subject Title: South Asian Fiction

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Attia Hosain was a British Indian novelist, author, writer, broadcaster, journalist and actor.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel written by Attia Hosain. It was published in the year 1961. The novel is set in Lucknow. It is an autobiographical novel. The novel portrays the life of a fictional character called Laila, a 15-year-old orphaned daughter belonging to a rich Muslim family of Taluqdars. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel written by a Muslim lady on the theme of Partition of India into India and Pakistan.

The title *Sunlight on a Broken Column* comes from a line in the second stanza of T.S Eliot's (1925) poem *The Hollow Men*:

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams  
In death's dream kingdom  
These do not appear:  
There, the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column

Laila, a young girl who has lost both her parents, lives in the household of her grandfather, along with her father's sisters Abida and Majida and, Majida's 17-year-old daughter Zahra. She is brought up by her orthodox but principled Aunt Abida. Though Laila, according to the wishes of her father, had the benefit of western education, she too keeps purdah like her aunts. However, death of her grandfather makes Uncle Hamid, her father's elder brother, head of the family and her new guardian. Uncle Hamid, a man of "liberal" ideas, is nevertheless an autocratic guardian, allowing very little freedom to those who live under his rule.

Laila starts attending college without purdah. Her university friends, as well as her distant cousin Asad, become involved in anti-government protests. Surrounded by people who are either pro-British or against, she, however, is unable to take sides. She is enmeshed in the struggle for her own personal freedom. Once when asked by her uncle to opine about the agitation going on in the university, she refuses to do so. On being asked whether she had no freedom of thought she answers that she has no freedom of action. Her rebellion against the hypocrisy visible in the so-called liberal views of her Uncle and his wife remains limited to her mind until she falls in love with Ameer. Ameer, a poor relative of their family friends, would never be approved by her family. She goes against their wishes to marry him, and wins her freedom from their authority. The novel ends with her loneliness after Ameer's death after the bloody partition and so-called independence of both the nations, India and Pakistan. Her slow turn towards nationalist politics of India, the confused state of the "secular" Muslim in post-independence India is symbolized by her subtle acceptance of Asad, her cousin. The novel is open-ended and we never know what she finally decides, though.

The novel is set against the backdrop of India's pre and post partition period with Lucknow serving as a microcosm of the broader societal shifts. The title *Sunlight on a Broken Column* suggests the casting of hope on the past as the old order with its stability and certainty fades. It explores the themes of tradition, modernity and the search of identity in a changing India.