

**NANYANG
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**PATTERNS OF GROWTH: SELF-DISCOVERY JOURNEYS OF FEMALE
CHARACTERS IN SELECTED WOMEN-AUTHORED INDIAN AND
NIGERIAN BILDUNGSROMANE**

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
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**Patterns of Growth: Self-Discovery Journeys of Female Characters
in Selected Women-Authored Indian and Nigerian Bildungsromane**

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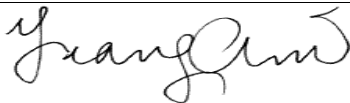
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Supervisor Declaration Statement

I have reviewed the content of this thesis and to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain plagiarised materials. The presentation style is also consistent with what is expected of the degree awarded. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate except as acknowledged in the Author Attribution Statement. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that the emergence of Bildungsroman in India, Nigeria and their diasporas are attempts by postcolonial authors to portray the transformations that occurred during the country's historical development from a colony to an independent nation state and the ongoing decolonising struggles of the postcolonial nation after independence. I assert that women writers tend to focus on how transformations in the public sphere in the form of political, sociocultural, and economic changes invade the domestic sphere and influence gender and familial relations and impact the development of female protagonists. The aim of this research project is to investigate the complex appropriation of the traditional Bildungsroman by postcolonial women writers and their incorporation of other narrative forms to portray the development journeys and growth patterns of female protagonists in the backdrop of a transforming milieu. Feminist Bildungsromane by Indian writers Attia Hosain, Manju Kapur and Kamala Markandaya and Nigerian writers Zaynab Alkali, Chika Unigwe and Sefi Atta are examined using a combination of different theoretical perspectives. Postcolonial feminism, African feminism and intersectionality are used for a nuanced examination of the multidimensional nature of women's oppression and a gender lens is included to examine how the authors challenge ideologies and dismantle power structures that contribute to the social and cultural construction of traditional womanhood and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes that create hurdles in the protagonists' journeys to self-actualisation. In addition, the use of genre criticism illuminates how the authors revise the genre of the Bildungsroman and engage in dialogues with other genres to portray the problematic development of female protagonists in the colonial and postcolonial world. Although written in different historical and sociocultural contexts, the selected novels converge in their incorporation of features of other genres such as the historical novel, autobiography and the memoir and their intervention of the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman to portray double or triple Bildung and include multiple stories of women. Despite the modifications made to the traditional Bildungsroman, the novels largely retain the realist form and affirm the possibility of self-formation for females even though the journey may be long and laborious. The refusal of all the novels to provide a closed ending indicates that the attainment of complete freedom for a female postcolonial subject is work in progress, like the lengthy and prolonged decolonisation process that ex-colonies are engaged in. Negotiation rather than confrontation with patriarchal limitations, more inclusive politics, female solidarity in the form of friendship and mentorship, empowerment through education and career are some of the solutions that the texts put forward to improve the condition of women.

INTRODUCTION

Travelling across different geographical locations, this dissertation examines the portrayal of the growth of young female protagonists and their journeys to selfhood in selected postcolonial feminist Bildungsromane by women writers from India and Nigeria. The Indian texts selected for comparative analysis are Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* (1973) and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) while the Nigerian texts are Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* (2012). While gender is an important category that limits the choices young females in colonial or postcolonial environment have, often creating obstacles or thwarting their quest for self-fulfilment, other axes such as race, religion, class, caste, tradition, patriarchy, colonialism, and nation are also shown as forces that build on one another to contribute to the oppression of women.

The development trajectory of a female protagonist is directly influenced by society and barriers such as the artificial border (physical or invisible) between private and public realms that impact her freedom of movement, access to education and employment opportunity. The historical contexts and sociopolitical dynamics of the countries are given special attention since these factors influence and complicate the growth process of females. Events such as independence struggle of the colony, partition, military coup, dictatorship, ethnic and religious riots, and political upheavals taking place in the colony or the developing nation state result in transformations in the public sphere. These changes seep through the artificial barrier erected between the public and private spheres and are felt in the domestic sphere, affecting familial and gender relations. I analyse how the selected texts interrogate the simplistic binary of public versus private spheres and foreground the impact of historical and sociopolitical changes in the nation invading the private sphere of the home and family to investigate if they hinder or create opportunities for female protagonists and other women characters associated with them to enter the public sphere to further their growth. The influence of sociocultural changes and the economic situation of the nation on the lives of female characters are also discussed.

The research objectives of this dissertation are threefold; firstly, this research project investigates how the selected postcolonial writers reconfigure the genre of the Bildungsroman to depict the difficult growth patterns of female protagonists in the colonial or postcolonial world depicted in the novels. The selected texts are examined in relation to classical Western

Bildungsroman that features a male hero and Western female Bildungsroman to highlight their resemblance to the traditional genre as well as their deviations from it. This allows points of convergence and divergence amongst the postcolonial women writers in their handling of the traditional Bildungsroman genre to be illustrated. This study also investigates how the texts engage in dialogues with other genres and incorporate some of their features in the process. Through these investigations, new values that have been introduced by the authors in their complex appropriation of the Western Bildungsroman genre and their negotiations with other genres can be identified and analysed. Next, the selected authors' portrayal of the impact of transformations in the public sphere, caused by historical and sociopolitical forces and sociocultural and economic conditions, on the domestic sphere is explored. The changes that pervade the domestic sphere and bring about shifts in familial and gender relations are examined to determine their influence on the development of young female protagonists in a transforming milieu. Lastly, this study examines how the selected authors interrogate ideologies and dismantle systems that thwart or delay the self-actualisation of their protagonists, to reveal key determinants that influence their quest and how they resist or negotiate the obstacles placed on their path to achieving freedom. Examining the level of engagement that the selected authors show in dismantling power structures that disempower women, will help to identify patterns of oppression experienced by the protagonists as well as agency exercised by them to overcome barriers that hinder their development.

In this dissertation, I argue that the rise of the Bildungsroman in postcolonial India, Nigeria and their diasporas are attempts to capture the historical, political, social, cultural and economic transformations that occurred during the country's historical development from a colony to an independent nation state and to portray the ongoing decolonising struggles after independence. The advent of colonial modernity and events such as independence struggle against colonial rule, conflict between groups from different political and religious affiliations, the partition of a country, civil war, dictatorship, and military rule that unfold in the public sphere cause transformations whose impact is felt in the private sphere. Postcolonial authors revise the traditional Bildungsroman in various ways to reflect the sociopolitical, sociocultural, and economic situations of their own countries during these periods when everything was in a state of flux because of transitions triggered by events in the public sphere.

Bildungsroman, especially those by women writers, tend to engage with tracing the impact of transformations in the public sphere on family and gender relations and the lives of women in the domestic sphere. Women writers appropriate the traditional Bildungsroman

genre to present female protagonists who are growing up in a world that is transitioning, be it a colony engaging in independence struggle against the coloniser or the emerging nation state attempting to decolonise itself after having achieved independence. I suggest that women writers revise the conventions of the Eurocentric genre that are inadequate to narrate the difficult growth patterns of female protagonists while retaining traditions that are foundational to the premise of the genre, such as the possibility of self-formation, development, and self-actualisation. In the process of revising the traditional genre, I assert that the authors choose to engage in dialogues with other genres that use the autobiographical mode such as autobiography, memoir and the testimonial novel that are linked to the Bildungsroman and other genres like the novel of awakening, historical novel, village novel, quest-romance, popular romance fiction and the epistolary novel. I suggest that the authors' innovative negotiations with other genres results in a postcolonial variant of the Bildungsroman that exhibits a hybrid of genres.

By hybrid of genres, I am not alluding to the use of pastiche, a common trope of the magic realist form, usually found in postmodernist fiction¹. Rather than challenge categorisation by mixing various genres, the selected authors incorporate features of other genres to adequately portray the difficult self-discovery journeys of female protagonists and their multiple affiliations with family and society. While the traditional Bildungsroman focuses on the self-formation of an individual hero, the rewritten genre has more than one protagonist growing up in a collective culture. I suggest that the authors' complex appropriation of the traditional Bildungsroman and their engagement with other literary genres that creates a hybrid of genres, result in the formation of a unique postcolonial Bildungsroman, contributing to the evolution of the traditional genre. By revising the genre, the authors expand the scope of the texts to present more than one female protagonist and include multiple stories of other women associated with the main protagonists. Incorporation of multiple stories of women reinforces the interconnected nature of women's lives and the collectivistic culture of the colonial and postcolonial societies they live in.

In the chapter titled 'On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World: The Case of the Testimonio' in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (1996), Fredric Jameson discusses how third world authors modify their older canon of

¹ Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) which is considered a postmodernist text, employs pastiche whereby hybridity and multiplicity are emphasised. The text incorporates different genres and even parodies them. Different narrative modes and different styles of languages are also incorporated.

Bildungsroman which focused on nostalgic childhood narratives to create narratives that presented the collective experiences of people. He suggests that the new form created facilitates “collective and relatively more impersonal” narratives by embracing features of the testimonio, which has a “dialectical relationship” (180) with autobiography. He proposes that these narratives are anonymous since they are depersonalised but reinforces “the association of one individual with a host of other names and other concrete individuals” (186) within them. Jameson views third world authors’ modification of Western genres such as the autobiography or the Bildungsroman as a step forward since new and rich narrative forms are created as a result of their reconfiguration.

Attia Hosain, Manju Kapur and Sefi Atta show a predilection for the historical novel and the autobiography or the memoir. Embracing features of the historical novel allows these authors to present the life of the protagonists and their communities set in the past and examine the long-lasting impact of specific historical and political events in their lives. The selected writers incorporate the autobiographical mode but what needs to be noted here is that the autobiographical mode employed is more collectivistic than individualistic. Drawing from the observations of James Olney and Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ralph Austen points out that African and Indian autobiographies are more collectivist and do not focus on the private self (216). Austen suggests that this divergence from Western autobiography that is individualistic can be viewed as a deliberate act by the authors who choose to focus on the collective experience of the postcolonial subjects. As such, focusing on more than one individual and her formation can be seen as a conscious choice of the authors to bring out the collectivistic nature of the society in which the protagonists grow up.

The selected writers’ incorporation of the autobiographical mode does not come as a surprise since Bildungsroman and autobiography are closely connected. What is striking, however, is the engagement with the confessional form of the testimonial novel to narrate the traumatic experiences of communities, particularly women. The use of the features of the testimonial novel is found in Manju Kapur and Sefi Atta’s novels. Chika Unigwe’s use of the autobiographical mode differs from the above-mentioned authors in that it uses the memoir of the main protagonist, Ezi, to highlight the repercussions of challenging normative femininity in a traditional Igbo community. The memoir also plays a crucial role in initiating Ezi’s daughter Mma’s journey to self-discovery. On the other hand, Kamala Markandaya and Zaynab Alkali who examine the impact of modernisation on the protagonists and others associated with them and the influence of urbanisation on the village and its residents, enter

into dialogues mainly with the village novel, quest-romance and popular romance fiction, creating a hybrid of genres that allows them to focus on their adolescent protagonists and their village communities.

The use of realism was strictly adhered to in the traditional Bildungsroman. Although the selected novels revise the traditional genre to create a postcolonial variant and incorporate features of other genres, rather than exhibit overt modernist or postmodernist tendencies, the texts largely retain the realist form. However, it must be noted that the realism the authors attempt to achieve in their narratives is not the simple mimetic realism but a more complex and self-conscious realism. The texts are aware of the potential of the realism used as well as its limitations and sometimes resort to experimentation or innovations to manage its inadequacies. It is useful to acknowledge the difference between the terms form and mode in relation to the use of the term realism. Sourit Battacharya highlights that form refers to the type of text studied, a realist text or modernist text, for example, and reinforces that the two forms are not mutually exclusive. On the other hand, the mode used in the text could be social realist, critical realist, gothic or magic realist, and he reiterates that the modes employed in the text shape the realism used into dynamic forms (15).

The selected texts adopt the social realist mode which aids in capturing a changing world and critiquing the impact of various transformations on women, the marginalised and the disenfranchised. Rather than adopt a naïve mimesis which is critiqued for attempting to replicate the real world in a transparent manner, the social realist mode employed attempts to imaginatively recreate the social milieu of the period in which the novel is set or evoke key historical events that took place in that period through mediation. The selection of some and exclusion of other events reminds the reader that the text is a work of fiction that is mediated and not a social document or a historical record of the past.

I suggest that as opposed to including the magic realist mode or postmodernist techniques that are employed to bring out the fragmented identity of the protagonist who inhabits different worlds, the social realist mode used in the selected Bildungsromane helps to bring out the possibility of self-formation, a unified self-identity and self-actualisation for females even though the road to such attainment may be full of hurdles. Even though the Bildungsromane are reworked extensively, I argue that the authors do not overturn the foundational premise of the traditional genre, which is self-formation of the protagonist. Progressive development is important in the traditional Bildungsroman but in the selected

postcolonial feminist Bildungsroman, the journey to self-discovery of the postcolonial female subject is difficult, prolonged, and even thwarted at times, but it is never a case of an anti-Bildungsroman where the protagonist's growth is arrested or stunted. Although a definite positive ending signalled by assimilation into society and sealed by marriage is usually not present, the open endings of the texts provide a glimmer of hope on the possibility of further growth and self-actualisation for the female protagonist; the degree of optimism, of course, varies from text to text. Furthermore, unlike postmodern texts that focus on fragmented identity, the complex realist form used in the selected texts does not dismiss the possibility of attaining a coherent self-identity.

Quite often, the protagonist's prolonged crusade for her own space and freedom parallels the country's forceful efforts to seek independence and the difficulties of the newly formed nation state to decolonise itself from colonial legacies. In the essay titled 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)' in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986), Mikhail Bakhtin who analyses five different types of novel of emergence points out the link between the individual and the nation in the Bildungsroman. Describing the Bildungsroman as a realistic novel of emergence that presents the emergence of man, who is incomplete and not ready-made, in real-historical time, Bakhtin emphasises the link between individual emergence and historical emergence. According to Bakhtin, unlike novels that portrayed the hero as a completed person in a world that is fixed, the Bildungsroman's hero:

emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being (23).

Tobias Boes (2006) credits Bakhtin as the first scholar to view the Bildungsroman as a genre that connects the growth of the individual with that of historical development (236).

In *Third-World Literature in the era of Multinational Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson argues that "third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic - necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69). Three of the novels considered in this study, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Everything Good Will Come* depict the protagonist's difficult coming of age as paralleling the nation's struggle for

independence or its decolonising efforts. Even though national allegorical readings are invited by the parallels overtly or covertly, I do not pursue them because these texts are not national allegories in the sense Jameson sees third world texts as lacking the divide between the private and the public. Jameson's essentialist claim is problematic because these texts engage with the personal development of the protagonist as well as national-political issues, but the main subject of the novel is not nation state even though the interconnected nature of the public and private spheres is emphasised. In other words, while the author may engage with allegory to highlight how the life of the individual and events in the domestic front parallel events in the national front, the individual experience of the protagonist is not subsumed and reduced to a national allegory.

Elleke Boehmer highlights how Jameson's "homogenising and transnationalising" claim was opposed by feminist criticism: "Women's texts focused on family are not always necessarily intended as emblems of body politic, although these texts may recognise at the same time that the family is part of that body politic and may choose to symbolise it" (11). In addition, the characters in the selected novels are not mere symbols; they are realistic, and the realist form used in these novels helps to portray the characters and their growth from naivety to maturation in a changing sociopolitical milieu convincingly. Rosemary Marangoly George, who traces the development of postcolonial feminism, quotes Florence Stratton to highlight that African women writers disagreed with Jameson's essentialist claim because it undermined all the other issues that these writers focussed on (226). Thus, rather than pursue a national allegorical reading that can be reductive, when an event in the protagonist's life parallels a political event, I analyse how the two events could be viewed as enlightening one another instead of one allegorising the other.

A Brief History of the Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman, also referred to as the novel of formation, novel of development and the coming-of-age story has its origins in the eighteenth-century Germany and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (1795) is acknowledged as the prototype of the genre. The Bildungsroman genre travelled from Germany to countries such as Britain and France before travelling to other parts of the world including the colonies. Studies began to include Bildungsroman featuring female heroes when feminist critics raised objections to their exclusion by male scholars and critics. There is no consensus on the definition of Bildungsroman by scholars, but Jerome Hamilton Buckley's broad definition of the genre

proposed in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Goldings* (1974) has been one of the widely used one. In this study, Jerome Buckley traces the development of the English Bildungsroman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on male protagonists. He lists out the typical elements that are required for a novel to be considered a Bildungsroman while acknowledging that it may not be possible to fulfil all the criteria:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quiet early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence) to make his way independently in the city. There his real "education" begins, not only his preparation for a career but also . . . his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soulsearching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice. (17-18)

Tobias Boes considers *The Voyage-In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983) edited by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland "a groundbreaking contribution" (234) that addresses the neglect of female Bildungsroman. Abel et. al.'s work introduces the concept of gender in analysing genre, paying particular attention to the trajectory of female patterns of growth and how they contrast with male development trajectory. This collection of essays reviews nineteenth and twentieth-century European and American texts and Tobias Boes suggests that it is "perhaps the first major scholarly work on the Bildungsroman to privilege the twentieth over the nineteenth century" (234).

Mikhail Bakhtin highlights how the novel effectively reflects the way of thinking about the world and views the Bildungsroman as a realistic novel of emergence that depicts man's emergence in real-historical time in a changing world. Highlighting that the principles used by scholars to categorise a novel as a Bildungsroman were problematic since the use of stringent criteria resulted in a short list of texts while broad or vague criteria resulted in a very long list, Bakhtin proposes that "the image of *man in the process of becoming*" (*The Bildungsroman* 19) presented in the novel should be focused on to overcome the problems encountered in the process of classification of Bildungsroman. Acknowledging that man can

emerge in various ways, he lists out five different ways in which a man may emerge in relation to time: emergence of man in idyllic time whereby man's growth is traced from childhood to old age, cyclical emergence of man from youth to maturity such as those depicted in the classical novel of education or Bildungsroman by Wieland in the eighteenth century, emergence of man in biographical time, emergence of man depicting pedagogical process of education and emergence of man in real historical time (22). Focusing on the fifth type of emergence, Bakhtin highlights how man emerges along with the world, emphasising the link between individual emergence and historical emergence. The maturation of the hero who emerges in the border between two epochs takes place in a world that is undergoing transformation (23).

Franco Moretti sees the Bildungsroman as a genre that signalled the start of modernity in Europe which was undergoing massive changes (5). In *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), Moretti presents a model of modernisation to highlight how authors of classical Bildungsroman capture the changing world that forms the backdrop of the novel as they chronicle the development of the young protagonist. Moretti highlights how youth, which is overlooked in stable societies, is given prominence in a milieu that is ridden by upheavals. Youth is associated with inner dissatisfaction, restlessness, and dynamism. Modernisation that swept through Europe after the French and industrial revolutions is associated with mobility, transformation, and a state of flux. Moretti argues that since these attributes of modernisation correspond to the experiences of youth, youth is chosen to symbolise modernity. Tobias Boes (2006) rightly points out that Moretti focusses on the hero's youth and the inner restlessness associated with youth and its impermanence to delineate the Bildungsroman.

Since Moretti views the Bildungsroman as a reflection of its time, capturing the advent of modernity in Europe, he predicts the lifespan of the genre to be short. Hence, in the second edition of his text, Moretti announces the death of the Bildungsroman:

If history can make cultural forms necessary, it can make them impossible as well, and this is what the war did to the Bildungsroman. More precisely, perhaps, the war was the final act in a longer process – the cosmic coup de grace to a genre that, at the turn of the century, was already doomed” (229-230).

Moretti attributes the end of the Bildungsroman in the early twentieth century to the advent of capitalism and World War 1. The fact that his declaration was premature is evident in how the Bildungsroman is kept alive by postcolonisation of the genre by writers. Bakhtin's description

of the novel as “the sole genre that that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” is very apt in the case of the Bildungsroman that is postcolonised (*The Dialogic* 69). In the twentieth century, postcolonial writers began to appropriate this genre to portray their concerns with issues such as decolonisation, nationalism, war, trauma, violence, and identity. Being a genre that is ever-evolving and has yet to be completed, it best reflects the new world that is still in the making, be it the new nation state that is struggling to emerge through independence struggle or the nation state that is attempting to decolonise itself after independence.

Postcolonial authors who appropriate the Bildungsroman, indigenise it and use it as a platform to articulate the challenges faced by protagonists in postcolonial societies in their journey towards individuation. Tracing the critical trends in Bildungsroman studies over the years, Tobias Boes observes that:

during the past few years, attention within twentieth-century Bildungsroman studies has increasingly shifted towards post-colonial and minority writing. As a result, it has become obvious that the critical commonplace of a decline of the genre during the modernist period is a myopic illusion. In reality, the novel of formation continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multi-cultural, and immigrant literatures worldwide” (239).

The revised form, deviating from the European bourgeoisie model, also provides a site for questioning dominant ideologies and gender biases that affect identity formation and attainment of selfhood. Julie Mullaney’s discussion on postcolonial Bildungsroman draws attention to the alterations made to the form. She argues that the focus on “process and progress” of the Bildungsroman helps postcolonial authors to “deconstruct imperialism” (31). She contrasts the harmonious assimilation of the protagonist into a stable society in the traditional genre with the difficulties that the conflicted protagonist in the postcolonial text faces in reconciling with an unstable society that is plagued by decolonisation struggles. Postcolonial authors who appropriate the Bildungsroman genre highlight how environments that are in a state of flux further complicate the already problematic growth of female protagonists.

Bildungsroman in India and Africa

A brief survey on the emergence of the anglophone novel in India and Africa will be useful in understanding the literary history of the Bildungsroman in these countries. The literary history of the anglophone novel of India is usually divided into three eras: early anglophone novels in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the pre and post independent periods and the post 1980s period. In *A History of the Indian Novel in English*

(2015), Ulka Anjaria terms the three distinct periods of the development of the Indian novel in English as “its emergence, its “realist” phase and its “modernist one” but also highlights the shortcomings of such a periodisation and the need to consider what happens to the novel during and in between the three different periods (1). Critics also use the generational paradigm to refer to writers who wrote in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as the pioneering and first generation, the authors who published in the 1950s as the second generation and those who published from the 1980s as the third generation.

The first anglophone novel in India, *Rajmohan's Wife* was published in 1864 in colonial India by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, during a period when writers used Indian languages such as Bengali to write. The early anglophone novel scene in India was dominated by men since women began writing later when social reforms advocating education for women were introduced. In *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration*, Priyamvada Gopal points out that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's writings in English were limited in two ways. Most of the writers were educated in their mother tongue and therefore wrote more in indigenous languages than English and their writing focused on family rather than history or politics (40). She quotes Tharu and Lalitha's 1991 anthology *Women Writing in India* to highlight how pioneering women writers of the late nineteenth century used the genre of memoir or autobiography to portray their experiences. In *Perishable Empires* (2000), Meenakshi Mukherjee notes that during the colonial period women were not encouraged to acquire English education for the fear of its emancipatory potentials and revolt against patriarchy. She draws attention to poets Toru Dutt and Cornelia Sorabji and novelist Krupabhai Sathianadhan who rose to prominence even though there was no sustained practice of women writing during that period (69). Krupabhai Sathianadhan wrote two Bildungsromane, *Kamala, a story of Hindu life* (1894) and *Saguna, a story of native Christian* (1895). *Kamala, a story of Hindu life* is considered the first Bildungsroman by an Indian woman. In “The Beginnings of the Indian Novel” in *A Concise History Of Indian Literature* (2008), Meenakshi Mukherjee records that Krupabhai Sathianadhan was “the only woman who wrote more than one novel in English in nineteenth-century India (114). Pointing out the author's preoccupation with the theme of “the predicament of women who resist being cast in the standard mould of domesticity”, Mukherjee commends the two novels for representing some of the “earliest articulations of feminist and cultural concerns in English by Indian women” (116). While both books draw from the author's life experiences, Mukherjee observes that *Saguna, a story of native Christian* which is considered radical, is “largely autobiographical” (114).

Although the first novel in English was published in the second half of nineteenth century, Mukherjee points out that “the take-off decade for the Indian novel in English” (*A Concise* 105), that is, the beginning of the modern Indian novel is the 1930s. This pre-independence period saw pioneer men writers Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R K Narayan, dubbed the trio, dominating the literary scene till the 1950s. Mulk Raj Anand wrote several novels and his first two novels, *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are Bildungsromane. Raja Rao’s first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) explores the reach and impact of Gandhism in a small village in the 1930s. R K Narayan’s novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) is also a Bildungsroman. Bibhutibushan Banarjee’s *Pather Panchali* (1929), a Bengali Bildungsroman, was translated to English in 1955 and given the title *Song of the Little Road* and in the same year it was made into a film by prominent director Satyajit Ray. The translated *Pather Panchali* is considered a core text in the older canon of Bildungsroman in English in India.

In “Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s” in *A Concise History of Indian Literature*, Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee note that it was only after India’s independence in 1947, in the early post-independent period that more women writers began writing in English. Their writings reflected their concerns with issues such as female education, the purdah system and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee suggest that the preoccupation of the writers with individual growth and alienation in the two decades following independence indicates the writers’ own alienation as English educated elites. Their study underscores how the 1950s saw several single novels of self-discovery by women writers such as Venu Chitale, Zeenuth Futehally and Mrinalini Sarabhai, featuring English educated female protagonists who found themselves in a difficult position with regards to society’s expectations of them as women. They also highlight how women’s novels in this period contained autobiographical elements (253). It can be seen how women writers in this period used the Bildungsroman form to bring out their alienated identity in a social milieu that was grappling with dichotomies of tradition and modernity. This period also saw the emergence of writers such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal, considered the second generation of women writers, who went on to become prolific writers (248). Kamala Markandaya published from the 1950s to the 1980s but most of her novels appeared in the 1950s and the 1960s while Anita Desai published mostly in the 1960s and the 1970s. The oeuvre of these prolific writers includes several Bildungsromane. Shashi Deshpande is another prolific writer who began her writing career in the 1970s with short stories before writing several novels from the 1980s onwards. While some consider several of her novels to be

Bildungsroman, they appear to align more with the novel of awakening where the female protagonist goes through a “cathartic crisis” usually after marriage or childbirth (*Feminism* Jackson 168).

The third literary stage, the post 1980s period saw the trend of revisiting India’s recent past and the use of magic realism and postmodern techniques. Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee refer to this period as the Salman Rushdie generation and point out how writers were engaged with “politics and allegory” (251) in their novels after the success of Salman Rushdie’s debut novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981) which is considered a Bildungsroman. Priyamvada Gopal asserts that Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993), are two novels that “encapsulate key preoccupations, both formal and thematic, of the postcolonial anglophone novel in India” (91). The 1980s and 1990s also saw the emergence of another type of novel referred to as the diasporic or transnational Bildungsroman. Bildungsroman by first generation immigrant Indian women writers such as *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharathi Mukherjee, *Manhattan Music* (1997) by Meena Alexander and *Oleander Girl* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bildungsroman by second generation writers like *Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri deal with hybrid identity, culturalisation and assimilation issues. Besides men writers like Salman Rushdie and Aravind Adiga who shot to fame with their debut Bildungsroman, the third generation of women writers like Arundathi Roy and Kiran Desai, also gained international recognition with their debut coming-of-age novels *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *An Inheritance of Loss* (2005) respectively. This third literary era also witnessed the emergence of neo-liberal Bildungsroman such as the award-winning *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga. Queer Bildungsroman and Dalit Bildungsroman also started appearing in the early twenty-first century.

Before moving on to the Nigerian literary scene, it will be useful to look at the development of the anglophone novel and the emergence of the Bildungsroman in the African context in general. Acknowledging the limitations of the generational paradigm as pointed out by Harry Garba, Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton use the generational model to categorise the literary history of Africa into three periods. Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton describe the first and second-generation African writers as those “mostly born during the first five decades of the twentieth century (1900 - 1950) when the colonial event was in full force” and the third-generation writers as those “born after 1960 when most African countries (except Zimbabwe and South Africa) attained their independence from colonialism” (14-15). Harry Garuba stresses that critics need to acknowledge that literary boundaries are not concrete as literary

works are linked to one another and therefore the divisions should only be seen as “markers of general trends” (51).

In ‘Weaving Memories of Childhood: The New Nigerian Novel and the Genre of the Bildungsroman’, Ogaga Okuyade traces the preoccupation of the different generations:

If the first generation of African writers grappled with the issue of the colonial subjugation of Africa and responded through the celebration of cultural nationalism in their writings, writers of the following generations have more to contend with because the socio-political and economic disorder of the postcolonial present continues to be overwhelmingly discouraging. The obvious failure of Africa’s post-military democracies has made a tremendous number of third-generation writers feel a demand to construct their own values from the only material available to them—the events of their personal lives. Like the writers who wrote from the second half of the twentieth century who used their art to advance nationalism, this generation of African writers has withdrawn from nationalism; thus from the 1990s, almost every first novel appears to be a novel dealing with the topic of adolescence (2010: 141).

Scholars refer to Ghanian J. E. Casely Hayford’s *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (1911) as one of the earliest novels in English by a black African writer². The first anglophone novel by a native African, published outside of Africa, is Nigerian Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). Anglophone novels began emerging more regularly in Africa in the 1950s. *The Dark Child* (1954), written by Guinean writer Camara Laye is considered the first African Bildungsroman in English by a native African. It is the translation of *L’enfant noir* (1953), originally in French. However, there have been debates on whether the novel should be classified as an autobiography or a Bildungsroman. Like other novels that emerged during Africa’s first literary stage, *The Dark Child* focuses on the theme of colonial experience. Other Bildungsromane that were added to the canon include Nigerian Chinua Achebe’s *No longer At Ease* (1960), Mongo Beti’s *Mission to Kala* (1957) (translated from French *Mission terminee*), Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961) (translated from French *L’Aventure Ambiguë*) and Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not Child* (1981). These novels published in Africa’s first literary stage form the early canon of

² Ketu Katrak attributes the difference in the starting point of anglophone novels in India and Africa to the long two-hundred-year period of British colonisation of India and the colonial educational policies in India. Katrak highlights that formal education had an early start in India compared with Africa and English literature was first introduced in India and the classics were “first tried out in the Indian colony before being repatriated to Britain” (104). She also points out that India was the trial ground “for the balancing of religious and secular education” (104) since the natives protested against the propagation of Christian ideology in the name of English education. In contrast, the missionaries played a more important role in mission education in Africa.

Bildungsromane that focus on the colonial experience, bringing out the conflict between indigenous and Western cultures.

Men writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o dominated the Anglophone novel scene in the 1950s and the 1960s. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is considered the first modern African fiction. However, some scholars have pointed out that adopting a generational paradigm that situates the start of anglophone novel in the 1950s and 1960s and focusing on Achebe's generation as the founding fathers of the Anglophone novel in Africa overshadows the literary history of South Africa in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In *The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership* (2018), Mukoma Wa Ngugi points out that black South African writers wrote in indigenous languages such as Xhosa, Zulu and Sesotho and their works were translated to English in the 1930s. Even as he acknowledges the important role of Achebe's generation in the literary history of Africa, he points out how South African literature by its pioneers was overshadowed by Achebe's generation.

Scholars divide Nigerian literary landscapes into first, second and third generation writers³. The first generation of Nigerian writers were mostly men authors such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi and Wole Soyinka, and they published in the 1950s to the 1960s, focussing on their colonial experience. As a result of cultural and gender discriminations, the works of women only started emerging during the later part of the first stage of literary production in Nigeria. Women started writing novels in English in the post independent period after Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960. The first novel in English by a black woman is Nigerian author Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966). Nwapa is considered as one of the pioneer women writers in Africa along with Kenyan Grace Ogot who published *The Promised Land* in the same year, 1966⁴. Other first generation Nigerian women writers include Mabel Segun who wrote plays, short stories, and children's books.

³ Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton state that the use of generational paradigm to consolidate Nigerian writers took place in the decade 1985-1995 (8). They acknowledge Harry Garuba's reservation about the limitations of the generational approach but acknowledge that it "remains one of the cornerstones of literary criticism largely due to the possibilities it offers for a systematic understanding of literary trends and currents synchronically and diachronically" (13).

⁴ In her review of Florence Stratton's work that examines contemporary African literature, Susan Andrade notes that Grace Ogot who started writing in the sixties is not discussed as much as Flora Nwapa (194). Rose A. Sackeyfio points out that women writers in Ghana started writing in English before the 1960s though not in the novelistic tradition. She cites playwrights such as Mabel D Danquah and Adelaide Casey - Hayford who wrote in the 1930s, and pioneer dramatist, Efua Sutherland. Even popular Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo published plays in the sixties before writing novels in the seventies (*African* 9).

Second-generation Nigerian writers were preoccupied with representing the disillusionment experienced during the post independent period when the nation state underwent decolonisation struggles. The second generation of Nigerian men writers include Ben Okri and Ken Saro-Wiwa and women writers who emerged in this period include Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali. The emergence of female Bildungsroman can be seen in the writings of these second-generation Nigerian women writers. For instance, Emecheta's debut novel *In the Ditch* (1972) and her subsequent novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) are Bildungsromane with autobiographical elements, set in Nigeria and England while Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984) is also a Bildungsroman. This is a marked difference from the scene in India which saw some prominent women writing novels in English (including Bildungsroman) in the first literary stage, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, to view the 1970s as the starting point of Bildungsroman by women in Africa may not be accurate since the novel *The African Farm* (1883) written by a white colonial South African woman writer, Olive Schreiner, is considered a Bildungsroman.

Olive Schreiner wrote three novels and mainly published her works in London in the late nineteenth century⁵. In "The Colonial Bildungsroman: The Story of an African Farm and the Ghost of Goethe", Jed Esty suggests a re-reading of *The African Farm* as a Bildungsroman, even though the novel is a combination of several genres:

it is one part South African plaasroman (farm-novel), one part New Woman fiction, one part Dickensian farce (featuring pale sentimental orphans and ruddy sadistic adults), one part naturalist tragedy (with a merciless rising sun and a pitiable fallen woman), one part colonial Gothic, one part Victorian melodrama (featuring hopeless love and missed letters), one part allegorical tale, one part satire of provincial manners (with a dusty Boer wedding scene), one part spiritual autobiography, and one part neo-Transcendentalist novel of ideas (407).

However, Jed Esty's focus on the arrested growth of the protagonists, Lyndall, Waldo and Em, suggests that he views the novel more like an anti- Bildungsroman rather than a traditional one. He suggests that the protagonist's stalled development parallels the uneven progress in the colonies as a result of modernisation.

⁵ Olive Schreiner (1855 - 1920) wrote under the male pseudonym, Ralph Iron. Kenneth Parker, who examines novels in English by white colonials that emerged in South Africa from the late nineteenth century onwards, credits Olive Schreiner's debut novel as the first novel written by a colonial that enjoyed immense popularity in Britain. He details Olive Schreiner's background, her life as the daughter of pioneering missionaries in South Africa and how she wrote novels that were distinguishing despite the limited education she received in comparison to her brothers who were educated in Cambridge. He points out that the difficult growth of precocious young women in traditional societies is a recurrent theme in her novels (28).

In the same vein, Mandy Treagus suggests that although *The African Farm* begins as traditional Bildungsroman, it diverts from the conventional development trajectory because of the setting and the limited options available to the heroine: “The form, in a colonial setting, and with a female protagonist, is forced to collapse, and *The Story of an African Farm* stands most clearly as an anti-Bildungsroman” (108). On the other hand, observing that settler colonial writers and writers in the metropole approached the Bildungsroman differently, Brian Reinken (2023) perceives *The African Farm* as exhibiting “an open-ended model of development” (209) rather than an anti-Bildungsroman. The debate surrounding the genre of *The African Farm* was sparked by a renewed interest in the novel in recent times and it indicates that the evolution of the Bildungsroman began in Africa in the late nineteenth century. These discussions also highlight how women writers away from the metropole approached the genre differently, especially in the way they resorted to dialogues with other genres to compensate for the limitations of the male-centred traditional genre.

Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton identify two phases in the third-generation Nigerian writing, observing the shift from poetry to prose. They note that “the first decade of third generation writing was, unquestionably, a decade of poetry” and the novel that was stagnant then was revived in the early millennium when writers such as Helon Habila, Chris Abani and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie rose to fame with their novels that became critically acclaimed (10-11). Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and *Measuring Time* (2007), Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Abani’s *Graceland* (2004) are award-winning novels. Like the trends discernable in the post 1980s era in India, the third-generation Nigerian writers used the Bildungsroman genre to return to the country’s past, revisiting events such as the Biafran War, dictator rules and military coups. These coming-of-age texts included child soldier narratives such as Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beast of No Nation* (2005), Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Chris Abani’s *Song for Night* (2007). Bildungsroman dealing with transnationalism, hybrid identity, migrant experience and assimilation issues have also been on the rise since many of the third-generation writers have dual nationalities and they live in the diaspora or divide their time between Nigeria and the diaspora.

Besides Nigeria, scholars have noticed the emerging trend of novels of development in Africa in general amongst the third-generation writers. Primorac Ranka who shared details of her book project in progress titled “Queues of limitless hopes: The Bildungsroman and decolonisation in southern Africa” during a Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) seminar on 6 May 2021, described the emerging literary trend in Africa as follows: “African

literature in English has experienced something of a renaissance in the last ten years or so, and many novels that have become internationally available in that period have been described as novels of formation”. She analyses Bildungsromane from Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa in relation to the changes that the novel form undergoes in postcolonial nations that experienced prolonged periods of decolonisation. Scholars have also observed how debut novels by third generation African writers tend to be Bildungsroman especially those written by women. In “Continuity and Renewal in the Endless Tales of a Continent: New Voices in the African Novel”, Ogaga Okuyade claims that “new African narratives - especially the debut novels - often exhibit traits associated with the Bildungsroman” (2013: 11). He quotes Tanure Ojaide who observes that African diasporic writers were preoccupied with “themes of coming of age” (2013: 11).

Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton point out that the third generation of writers consists of more women writers and feminist oriented texts. Ogaga Okuyade also observes this trend of an increased number of Nigerian women writers amongst the third generation. Furthermore, Adesanmi and Dunton observe that texts that deal with LGBTQ issues and the sex trade have emerged. For example, *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi, who identifies as non-binary, portrays identity issues related to sexual orientation and Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* (2009) deals with prostitution and the exploitation of women.

From the brief survey above, it can be discerned that the Bildungsroman is not an exclusive third generation African or Nigerian phenomenon. First and second-generation African writers have written debut novels that are Bildungsroman. Debut novels, especially those by women, tend to be Bildungsroman in India too and this can be observed across the different generations of writers. Quite often, though not always, these coming-of-age narratives draw from autobiographical elements from the authors’ lives. This fusion of Bildungsroman with autobiographical writing shows how the genre allows writers to create fictions that narrate development of their protagonists in a changing world, utilising materials from their own lives.

Literature Review

In *Postcolonializing the Bildungsroman: A Study of the Evolution of a Genre* (2006), Ericka A Hoagland traces the history of the European Bildungsroman and discusses how postcolonial writers appropriate the traditional genre to tell the coming-of-age stories of postcolonial subjects. She underscores how race, gender and class complicate the development

process of postcolonial subjects. Hoagland highlights the differences between the growth of the marginalised protagonist of the postcolonial Bildungsroman and the traditional Bildungsroman's white, heterosexual middle-class male hero in her examination of works by authors such as Jeannette Armstrong, Amma Darko, Calixthe Beyala, Nawal El Sadawi and Shimmer Chinodya. While Hoagland's theorisation is useful and can be applied to postcolonial Bildungsromane from other countries, her focus is on African Bildungsroman. Besides a few texts from Canadian authors, all the other authors, both male and female, are from different African nations such as Ghana, Cameroon, Egypt, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

Other studies on postcolonial Bildungsroman that discuss coming-of-age narratives from different the parts of Africa include Jarad Fennel's dissertation *Non-Identical Anglophone Bildungsroman: From the categorical to the De-centering Literary Subject in the Black Atlantic* (2016) and Walter P. Collins's dissertation *Tracing Personal Expansion: Reading Selected Novels by Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Calixthe Beyala as Modern African Bildungsromane* (2004). Jarad Fennel analyses Bildungsromane written by men featuring male protagonists and feminist Bildungsromane by women, starting with British Bildungsroman before moving on to Nigerian, Zimbabwean and African-American narratives. He examines how the selected authors use the Bildungsroman form to narrate the coming-of-age stories of marginalised subjects by experimenting with modernist techniques to highlight their problematic growth. Walter P. Collins analyses anglophone Bildungsroman that emerged from Nigeria and Zimbabwe and francophone Bildungsroman from Cameroon in the late twentieth century. Focusing on the ways in which the novels adhere to the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman rather than address interventions made, Collins examines how the authors bring out the possibility of individuation for female characters.

While critical analysis of African Bildungsroman set in the home country and diaspora is available, the same cannot be said of the Indian Bildungsroman. Not much scholarship on Indian Bildungsroman set in India is found while some studies on hybrid, transnational or migrant Bildungsroman is available. Even though novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* are critiqued widely, they can be argued as anti-Bildungsroman because the protagonists in these novels fail to achieve growth and maturity that is typically associated with the novel of formation. In the case of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai who is cracking and breaking apart, disintegrates at the end of the narrative while Rahel and Esta in *The God of Small Things* experience arrested development because of unresolved childhood trauma whereby Esta becomes silent and Rahel drifts in her

life. However, in recent times coming-of-age narratives such as Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2000) have been discussed as neoliberal Bildungsroman narrating growth in the world of capitalism. Studies on hybrid Bildungsroman by diasporic Indian writers exploring discrimination, biculturality, conflicting identities and assimilation issues experienced by migrants in the diaspora include *Hybrid Bildungs in South Asian Women's Writing: Meena Alexander, Bharati Mukherjee, and Babsi Sidhwa Re-imagine America* (2001) by Anupama Jain. In her dissertation, Anupama discusses the portrayal of the maturation of female protagonists who migrate to America from South Asia in the hybrid Bildungsroman by Indian and Pakistani diasporic writers.

Large scale studies adopting a comparative framework examining the works of Western, African, Caribbean and South Asian (mainly Indian) women writers include Jaspal Kaur Singh's *Representation and Resistance: South Asian and African Women Writers at Home and in the Diaspora* (2007) that compares texts and films by South Asian, Caribbean and African writers and artists and Radha Chakravarty's *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers: Rethinking Subjectivities* (2008) that explores novels by women writers from the United States, Canada, Britain, India and Nigeria. Jaspal Kaur Singh compares the representation of identity and the portrayal of the alienated subjects in her selected postcolonial texts. While several of the texts examined by her are Bildungsromane, such as Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* (1997), she does not discuss at length the authors' appropriation of generic conventions of the Bildungsroman form to tell the coming-of-age stories. On the other hand, Radha Chakravarty's selection of texts for her cross-cultural comparison does not include novels that can be categorised as Bildungsroman.

Ketu Katrak's *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World* (2006) employs a unique comparative framework that examines a variety of sources such as novels, poems, stories, essays, activist materials, and oral works by West and Southern African, Caribbean, and Indian women writers to highlight the commonalities and differences in the patriarchal and colonial oppressions experienced by females. Discussing the works of writers such as Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta, Katrak contends that oppressive traditions related to female sexuality have the most devastating impact on women and shows how patriarchy, in the form of fathers, husbands and sons, controls female bodies in complex ways. In her analysis of Bildungsromane by Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga, Caribbean writer Merle Hodge

and Indian writers Kamala Markandaya and Attia Hosain, Katrak demonstrates how colonial English education alienates adolescent girls. Since Katrak's chapters are organised by themes and varied materials are used to build her argument on female body politics, they do not include in-depth discussions of the various axes intersecting and impacting the development of the protagonists in her selected texts.

The above survey highlights that works comparing Indian and African writers is part of large-scale studies adopting a comparative framework to examine the works of Eastern, Western, South Asian, Caribbean, and African writers. No book length studies focusing on comparing African and Indian Bildungsromane or even novels in general have been conducted. Furthermore, in existing studies that adopt a comparative framework, scholars tend to focus more on overlapping themes and women's oppressions at the expense of discussions on genre and form. Even though India and Africa are two distinct geographical regions, they share the same historical experience of European colonisation. I believe that more large-scale comparative studies analysing Indian and African postcolonial Bildungsromane would be productive especially given their shared British colonial history.

Even though the historical and sociopolitical circumstances of India and Nigeria are different, I propose that reading the selected Bildungsromane side by side will deepen our understanding of the narratives from the two countries. India achieved its independence in 1947 after some two hundred years of British rule. Meanwhile, British occupation in Nigeria was for about a hundred years since Lagos was occupied by the British forces in 1851 before it was annexed in 1865, and Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901. It was named Nigeria in 1914 when the British combined three regions for their administrative convenience. Artificial borders drawn by the British to denote new nations, which housed groups belonging to different religions and ethnicities with a history of hostile relationships, appear to have a similar problematic impact on the two countries. Both India and Nigeria have a long history of clashes between different ethnic and religious groups which is believed to have been aggravated by the divide and rule policy of the British. In India, the communal tension has been mainly between the Hindus and Muslims while the Partition of India into two nation states that witnessed unprecedented violence also involved the Sikhs when people tried to cross over or return from the newly formed Pakistan based on the boundary that had been drawn up to divide the country. After Partition and independence, sporadic incidents of communal violence have been typical in the sociopolitical landscape of postcolonial India. Nigeria that came into being in 1914 achieved its independence in 1960. Clashes between major ethnic groups of

Nigeria, the Igbo, the Yoruba and the Hausa and tension between the Muslim north and the Christian south have been common and the Civil War that broke out in 1967 is a significant event that tore the country apart.

Even though the circumstances that led to the long-term problems between the different religious and ethnic groups is different, Partition in the case of India and Civil War in the case of Nigeria, the legacies of colonialism and these tragic historical events have a long-lasting impact on the citizens, as depicted in the selected novels. While the emergence of anglophone novels in India is much earlier, the literary scene in Nigeria has also been dynamic. As noted earlier, both Indian and Nigerian writers have attempted to capture the country's past although the focus of the different generation of writers may have been different; Bildungsromane from both countries have strived to present the coming-of-age stories of their protagonists while simultaneously capturing the transforming sociopolitical milieu that impacted their development.

Besides their colonial inheritance, the two countries share similarities in the following areas even though culture specific attitudes and practices may differ: collectivist culture that give emphasis to community or groups over individuals, significant role of traditions, customs, superstitions, myths and taboos and importance given to the family unit, marriage, motherhood, and male children. As such, it is not surprising that the influence of patriarchal and colonial doctrines is visible in the context of the selected novels. I argue for the productive nature of a comparative study even as I acknowledge the differences in culture specific attitudes and practices and the pace of transition into urban life in these countries. Elleke Boehmer reinforces the benefits of comparative studies and justifies her use of relational feminism in her project, asserting that such an approach will allow women "to proclaim the specificity of their particular historical experience, yet also to affirm common interest and political transformation across cultural and national borders, as they act from a commitment to social justice for those constructed 'woman'" (13).

By focussing on the selected Bildungsromane from India and Nigeria, I attempt to highlight how transcultural correspondences can exist without universalising human experience while examining narratives of female development set in the Global South and how reforms addressing inequality of women can be proposed. In addition, I believe that the cross-cultural comparative framework engaged in this dissertation will bring out connections that

have yet to be explored in-depth between literature from these countries and add to scholarship on postcolonial Bildungsroman and feminist literature.

Selection of Texts

Several criteria were used to select the texts for this study. Bildungsromane authored by women writers of Indian and Nigerian origin (though some of them have migrated from their homeland and write from the diaspora) featuring female protagonists were selected (texts featuring both male and female protagonists were excluded). Texts set in the home country (not in the diaspora) were considered. Novels featuring protagonists who display dissatisfaction with their situation and take efforts to tackle obstacles that block their attempts to develop, regardless of the outcome of the efforts were considered. Novels of awakening that focus only on crises experienced by women in their mid-life, usually after marriage and childbirth, and do not include the maturing of protagonist from childhood or adolescence to adulthood were excluded.

The Indian novels considered in this study were published in the period between 1961 and 1998; Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a Bildungsroman written in the early post independent era while Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* is from the late post independent era and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* belongs to the post 1980s era. The Nigerian novels were produced in the period between 1984 and 2012; while *The Stillborn* is written by second-generation writer Zaynab Alkali, *Night Dancer* and *Everything Good Will Come* are authored by third-generation writers Chika Unigwe and Sefi Atta respectively. I am not suggesting that the selected texts are representative of Bildungsromane that emerged during the different distinct eras in India and Nigeria.

The chosen novels not only indigenise the traditional Bildungsroman genre to reflect the historical and sociopolitical situation of their countries but also engage in conversations with other genres to bring out the problematic growth of their female protagonists and other women associated with them as they attempt to fight against their marginalisation and oppression in a transforming milieu. Besides thematic overlaps, all the six texts converge in their intervention of the depiction of the growth of the single male hero associated with the traditional Bildungsroman to portray doubling or even tripling and incorporate multiple stories and voices of women from different generations and backgrounds to highlight the intertwined nature of the individual, family, and society in colonial and postcolonial societies that are collectivistic. Abel et al. posit that it is not unusual for novels featuring female protagonists to

explore double Bildung since women invest more on relationships and bonding and therefore “share their formative voyage with friends, sisters or mothers who also occupy similar spots as protagonists” (12). All the novels under discussion in this study narrate stories of mothers and daughters, cousins, sisters and friends. This reinforces the multiple affiliations that women have and the close link between female notions of identity and family, society, and female community, distinguishing the narratives from the traditional genre that focuses on individual development.

Set in the pre and post Partition periods and post independent India, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Difficult Daughters* reflect the reverberations of the tumultuous political atmosphere on the development of the protagonists in a country torn apart by religious and political conflicts amidst struggle for independence from the British. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* depict the lives of two cousins, Laila, and Zahra, from a feudal family in a politically charged environment of India. Besides the coming-of-age narrative of the cousins, the text incorporates stories of other women; we are presented with the stories of the older women in the feudal family, the servants and the friends of the protagonists. *Difficult Daughters* depicts the lives of three generations of women in the backdrop of India’s struggle for independence and the subsequent Partition of India with Virmati as the main protagonist along with her mother Kasturi and her daughter Ida. The stories of Virmati’s cousin and friend are also included besides Virmati’s co-wife, Ganga. *Two Virgins* portrays the coming-of-age stories of two sisters, Saroja, and Lalitha in post-independent India in the sixties, a period that saw urban migration and modernising changes sweeping through villages. The narrative is expanded to include the portrayal of the sisters’ mother, aunt and their neighbour. *The Stillborn* portrays an independent Nigeria in the sixties also witnessing the mass migration of people from villages to cities and how these modernising changes affect the lives of the main protagonist Li, her sister Awa, and her best friend Faku. The inclusion of the stories of Li’s mother, grandmother and Li’s landlady expand scope of the texts. *Night Dancer* depicts the intertwined lives of Ezi, Ezi’s daughter Mma and Ezi’s maid, Rapu. Although the narrative begins in 2001, we are taken back to the period between the sixties and the eighties, highlighting the economic hardships suffered by families and single mothers during this period. We are also presented with the stories of Ezi’s mother and Ezi’s best friend, Madam Gold. *Everything Good Will Come* focusses on the coming of age of two friends, Enitan, and Sheri in a post-independent and post-Biafran Nigeria undergoing inter-mitten military rule and dictatorship. The inclusion of stories of Enitan’s mother, Sheri’s stepmothers and others like Enitan’s mentor, Grace Ameh,

and the women prisoners, allows the text brings to out the interconnected lives of women in Lagos and how they are impacted by patriarchy and the military rule. By including double or triple Bildung and stories of various women related to the protagonists, the selected writers emphasise how the development of the female individual as a colonial or postcolonial subject in a nation in a flux is contingent upon her complex relation with her family, the female community and society.

Of the six Bildungsromane under study, four are debut novels. As observed earlier in the section ‘Bildungsroman in India and Africa’, debut novels by women authors from both regions tend to be Bildungsroman. Of the ten novels written by Kamala Markandaya, her debut novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *Pleasure City* (1982) featuring a male protagonist are considered as Bildungsroman besides *Two Virgins* considered in this study. However, Markandaya’s debut novel was not included in this study because the protagonist Rukumani is presented as an idealised woman who accepts her lot in her life full of ordeals without exhibiting any dissatisfaction or making efforts to alter her condition. Although Chika Unigwe’s Bildungsroman *Night Dancer* is her third novel, it is considered her most African novel since it is set entirely in Nigeria unlike her first two novels that are set in Belgium.

Theoretical Framework Used

In this dissertation, I use a combination of different theoretical perspectives to study the selected novels, namely, postcolonial feminism, African feminism, gender theory and genre theory. Postcolonial feminism, also referred to as third world feminism, addresses the lack of attention to gender in postcolonial studies and challenges the universalising tendencies of Western feminism. Representation of women is an important aspect of postcolonial feminism and in her seminal essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” (1984), Chandra Mohanty critiques Western feminists for their “monolithic” representations of “Third World women” (333). Mohanty challenges Western feminism’s representation of Third World women as a homogenous group and helpless victims lacking agency and its assumption that a monolithic notion of patriarchy is the cause of oppression of women in Third World countries (335). Postcolonial feminism reinforces that gender ideologies in postcolonial societies are more complex because of race, religion, culture specific beliefs and traditions and caste hierarchies or class divisions. In “Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” (2003), Mohanty clarifies that she is not against transnational feminist practices and does not value divergences over convergences. Reiterating the link

between the local and universal, she argues for “careful, political, local analyses”, avoiding generalising based on global sisterhood:

In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully (226).

Drawing from Mohanty’s postcolonial feminism, I analyse the selected texts from India and Nigeria by paying particular attention to the individual lives and experiences of women from each country and interpret issues within their specific contexts before highlighting the commonalities that can be discerned.

Many postcolonial feminists are from nations that were once colonies although they may be living in the diaspora. For example, the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Chandra Mohanty (1991) who are of Indian origin are considered seminal in the field of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial studies have also been influenced by the Subaltern Studies that was pioneered by Indian historian Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s. The Subaltern Studies aim to integrate the subaltern from the South Asian region who had been excluded by mainstream history, but their main focus is on the Indian context. In her influential essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988), Gayatri Spivak addresses the issue of representation by raising questions about whether the subaltern has the agency to speak up and even if the subaltern has a voice, is his or her voice heard. The issue of who can or should speak on behalf of whom is also raised in her essay.

Rosemary George underscores that besides representation, another key focus of postcolonial feminism is ‘the politics of location’ (225). Emphasising that the “location from which and about which one writes and reads is critical” (225), Rosemary George highlights that much of the seminal postcolonial writings in the early 1980s are from India and its diasporas and therefore fit the Indian context. Postcolonial feminist studies developed in tandem with other feminist projects as can be seen in how the works of African American feminists like Alice Walker and Kimberle Crenshaw and Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldua challenge Western feminism for not giving due consideration to race and culture.

Over the years, scholars from other postcolonial nations such as Africa began to formulate feminist theories that suited their own context, coming up with various strands of feminism. Many African feminists refuse to be called a feminist and are more comfortable

with the term womanist. The term womanism was coined by African American feminist Alice Walker in 1983 who defines a womanist as a “a black feminist or feminist of color”, one who is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (*Search* 58). Alice Walker’s womanism is more inclusive in that it reinforces the solidarity between men and women in working towards a more egalitarian society. African American Clenora Hudson-Weems, coined the term ‘Africana womanism in the late 1980s and her theorisation focuses on women, including women of African descent in both Africa and the diaspora (Nkelah 66). Womanism/Woman palavering proposed by African feminist Chikwenye Ogunyemi in 1985 and African womanism formulated by Mary Kolawole in 1997 are different from Alice Walker’s womanism. Ogunyemi’s womanism is popular and widely used and was reformulated in 1996 to focus on Nigerian women rather than privilege black women all over the world. Unlike Alice Walker’s womanism, Mary Kolawole’s African womanism “overtly rejects lesbianism” (Nkelah 65).

While many of the postcolonial feminist concepts are applicable to the African situation, I also conduct my analysis of the African texts within the framework of African feminism, with references to Chikwenye Ogunyemi's womanism, Obioma Nnaemeka’s nego-feminism, Novian Whitsitt’s Islamic Hausa feminism and African-Islamic feminism proposed by Shirin Edwin. The different strands of African feminism converge in the importance they give to family, motherhood and complementarity with men, whereby both men and women work together to improve the situation of women.

Reading the texts through a gender lens reveals the social and cultural construction of gender, normative femininity and masculinity and the formation of male and female subjectivities in a patriarchal society. I use the term subjectivity to refer to the condition of one’s being which enables one to see oneself as a subject and understand the world around him/her. This ability to generate knowledge about oneself and the world around oneself, allows one to exhibit one’s subjectivity and use agency to change one’s environment and gain independence. A gender lens brings out female modes of subjectivity, how women are socialised to perceive themselves as the ‘other’, who is complimentary, in a masculinist world where men are perceived as the subject, and masculine modes of subjectivities are linked to men having agency. In addition, drawing from gender theory allows me to examine how the selected authors’ challenge gender stereotypes that limit women’s potential through female characters who resist the imposition of traditional womanhood on them.

Judith Butler argues that gender is a doing, not a noun, and becoming a woman is a process, using the drag act to illustrate how gender is constructed culturally. I refer to Butler's concept of "gender performativity" to highlight how repetition of culturally coded acts by women results in the construction of normative femininity (178). The selected novels highlight how prescribed gender roles and responsibilities play an important role in defining women's identity and the formation of female subjectivity. A woman's sense of self and notions of identity are closely tied to the roles she plays in her natal and extended family as a daughter, wife, mother, sister, cousin, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law. Besides these strong familial connections, a woman's sense of self is also linked to her role as friend, mentor, and guide in the female community since women invest much of their time bonding with other women.

Besides the various roles that women take up in their lifetime, the gendered responsibilities that they are tasked with are significant in how women perceive themselves as women and how engaging in such activities provides them comfort and a sense of belonging. Reading the texts through a gender perspective illuminates how the novels use female domesticity to highlight how women's identities are closely tied to their responsibilities in the domestic arena and how it contrasts with men's identities which are closely linked to their main role as the breadwinner in the outer world and the public sphere.

Another important concept in gender theory is 'Intersectionality', a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality focuses on inequality and examines how different factors such as gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and disability may combine to create multiple forms of oppression. Critiquing Western feminism for its generalisations, stereotypes and lack of cultural specificity when addressing gender inequality, Intersectional theory aims to analyse the multiple forces that discriminate the marginalised by focusing on power relations. The emphasis of Intersectionality is not so much on how the individual is caught in the intersection of various axes but more so on how ideologies such as colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism build on each other and act together. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge elaborate on six key concepts of Intersectionality: "social inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity and social justice" (5). While all these core ideas can be applied in the examination of the various axes that oppress women protagonists in the selected novels, investigating how power operates in subjugating women by addressing four interlinked domains of power, "structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal" (7) will be most useful. I believe that a combined use of postcolonial feminism,

African feminism, Intersectionality and gender theory to interpret the selected texts will result in a more nuanced examination of the multidimensional nature of women's oppressions.

In addition, I engage a dialogue between this combined theoretical perspectives and genre theory. Generally, postcolonial scholarship has the tendency to prioritise discussions of theme and ideology at the expense of the form of the novel. I believe that including a lens that focuses on form and narrative structure of the texts will result in a meaningful discussion that links ideological and thematic analyses with genre criticism. Examining how the selected postcolonial authors reconfigure the traditional Bildungsroman and engage in conversations with other genres will help to identify the strategies they use to expand their scope to present the stories of their protagonists and multiple stories of other women associated with them in the colonial and postcolonial contexts.

I draw from Franco Moretti and Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation of the idealised European Bildungsroman and their view of the Bildungsroman as a 'symbolic form' of modernity, signalling the birth of a new era. Moretti's view that links the emergence of the classical Bildungsroman to revolutionising changes taking place in Europe can be applied to the growing number of postcolonial Bildungsromane that narrate the development of marginalised youth in societies undergoing transformation as a result of nationalistic struggle, sociopolitical turmoil, and economic crisis. I examine the selected texts' adherence to the classic Bildungsroman traditions and their deviations from the conventions.

Since Bakhtin and Moretti focus on texts with male heroes for their theorisation, I also draw from feminist theorists such as Abel et al., Esther Labovitz and Rita Felski who analyse the Western female Bildungsroman genre, focusing on the impact of gender on female development. Abel et al.'s pioneering work on female Bildungsroman and Esther Labovitz's *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* (1988) list out the characteristics of the female Bildungsroman and contrast it with the male version. I believe it will be useful to examine the conventions of the Western female Bildungsroman that are embraced or subverted by postcolonial women writers in addition to the comparison made with classical Bildungsroman with male heroes. In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), Rita Felski categorises female novels of self-discovery into feminist Bildungsroman and novel of awakening. Her discussion of the inward and outward journeys that women undertake in their quest and the role played by the female community in their

endeavour towards self-actualisation is useful in tracing the protracted development of female protagonists in the novels.

Feminist scholars have drawn from Michel Foucault's power-relations theory to analyse how institutions and patriarchy engage in socialisation of women. In *Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body* (1999), Susan Bordo traces how feminists have drawn from Foucauldian thinking (social normalisation and social resistance) to expand their original simplistic model of oppressor versus oppressed model (190). Foucault's concept of power that normalises and disciplines to produce 'docile' bodies (*Discipline and Punish* 138) is useful in demonstrating how patriarchy directly targets the female body in the construction of normative femininity and illustrating how women themselves contribute to the perpetuation of female subordination when they act as patriarchal agents. While the selected novels feature protagonists who are non-conforming, they also portray female characters who are successfully socialised into accepting the idea of normality, like the male hero in the classical Bildungsroman. Using Foucault's power-relations theory, I examine how patriarchy and its agents in the form of mothers or mother-figures, socialise daughters to conform to social expectations.

Organisation of Chapters

How the selected authors engage with the Bildungsroman form to portray the different ways in which external historical, sociopolitical, and economic forces impact and alter family and gender relations in the domestic sphere and how this in turn affects the lives and growth of female characters forms the chapters of the dissertation. Rather than arrange the chapters according to the year of publication, I organise them according to the period in which they are set in, starting with the earliest period. I begin with the Indian novels since India attained its independence in 1947, thirteen years before Nigeria and the two novels that depict both the pre- and post-independence periods, and the Partition of the country are set in the early 1930s. *Sunlight on Broken Column* that spans a period of twenty years from 1932 is written by Attia Hosain who was part of the history that she tried to recapture in the novel that portrays the collapse of the feudal Muslim world in Lucknow, North India. From *Sunlight on Broken Column*, I move to the Punjabi world that Manju Kapur recreates in *Difficult Daughters* in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore (Lahore was part of North India before Partition) covering a period of about forty years. Next, I travel to the post-independent world of the late 1960s in a South Indian village depicted in Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*.

As for the Nigerian novels, I begin with *The Stillborn* set in a northern Nigerian village populated by Hausa Muslims, depicting the early independence period in the 1960s, covering a period of twenty years. Next, I consider *Night Dancer* which begins in the early millennium in northern Nigeria but goes back into the past to the 1960s up to the 1980s to present a traditional Igbo society in eastern Nigeria. Lastly, I discuss *Everything Good Will Come* that begins in 1971 and ends in 1995, spanning a period of twenty-four years, focusing on the Yoruba world in the city of Lagos in southern Nigeria. Arranging the Nigerian novels in this sequence also brings out the feminist ideals proposed by the authors, Womanism that promotes harmonious relations between men and women in *The Stillborn*, radical feminism that is shown to be extreme in *Night Dancer* and Nego-feminism suggested in *Everything Good Will Come* that is believed to yield better outcomes.

Chapter One, ‘*Sunlight on a Broken Column* - New Beginnings: Out of Purdah and Self-Exile’, discusses how Attia Hosain’s Bildungsroman portrays the impact of dramatic historical and political transformations leading to the independence and Partition of India on the domestic realm of Laila’s feudal Muslim family. I examine Attia Hosain’s use of Laila’s joint family as the microcosm of the nation, highlighting how the division of the family resulting from opposing political views and the dispersal of its members after the division of the country, reflect the rising rift between groups of different religious and political affiliations and the eventual Partition of the country into two nation-states. Investigating the different ways in which *Sunlight on a Broken Column* reconfigures the traditional Bildungsroman genre, I propose that it is a combination of a feminist Bildungsroman that portrays Laila’s development from girlhood to young adulthood in a linear fashion and a novel of awakening that comprises inward voyages that are circular to depict Laila’s attainment of maturity while in self-exile. I argue that Attia Hosain engages in conversations with two other genres, the historical novel and autobiography, to present the life of the feudal Muslim community in the late colonial period and how it was impacted by modernising changes. The autobiographical mode used is collectivist since it includes the stories of a wide array of other characters other than the main protagonists Laila and her cousin Zahra, reinforcing the interconnected and interdependent lives of the citizens in a sociopolitical milieu in transition.

In Chapter Two, ‘*Difficult Daughters* -The Battle Not to be My Mother’, I read Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* as a feminist Bildungsroman that engages in dialogues with the family memoir, the historical novel, the testimonial novel and the epistolary novel. I argue that by incorporating features of the historical novel and the family memoir, *Difficult Daughters*

addresses how national history unfolding in the public sphere affects family history in the private sphere and how these two histories combine to shape the identities of women growing up in that milieu. While the main protagonist from the second generation, Virmati's fight for her own space and freedom through education and employment takes center stage, it is her daughter, Ida, who documents the family memoir. While Virmati may have tried and failed in her attempts to seek emancipation and self-actualisation, Manju Kapur brings out the emancipatory potential of education and career through the characters Shakuntala and Swarna Lata who embody the new Indian woman. I argue that the Manju Kapur attributes the success of the new Indian woman, who is modern and liberated, to her ability to negotiate successfully with patriarchy and use her subjectivity and agency to enter public space to be educated, have a career and engage in political activism.

In Chapter Three, '*Two Virgins - Adolescent Sexuality and Society, the Beastly Tamer*', I discuss Kamala Markandaya's portrayal of a South Indian village in the late 1960s that is affected by urban migration and the advent of modernisation that invades the traditional way of life in the village, unsettling the joint family system and causing shifts in family and gender relations. Specifically, I examine how *Two Virgins* depicts the adolescent lives of sisters, Lalitha, and Saroja, to show how their Bildung unfolds differently because the conflict between tradition and modernity influences them in opposing ways. I draw attention to how the novel engages in conversations with the idyllic village novel and quest-romance and employs Bakhtinian chronotopes to evoke the contrasting temporalities of the village and the city. I argue that by embracing features of the idyllic village novel and quest-romance, Markandaya presents the contrasting growth trajectories of the sisters and at the same time critiques post independent India in the 1960s, drawing attention to the uneven development in the nation state, inequalities that affected the marginalised groups and the social and economic crises in that period. Using a gender lens to read the text, I assert that Markandaya reveals the cultural construction and perpetuation of ideal Indian womanhood by focusing on the mundane village life.

In Chapter Four, '*The Stillborn - Dreaming on Despite Aborted Aspirations*', I analyse Zaynab Alkali's portrayal of the impact of modernisation and urbanisation on an unnamed village, populated by the Hausa Muslims, in a newly independent Nigeria. I examine how the family that experiences shifts in familial and gender relations is used as the microcosm of the multicultural and multireligious nation undergoing transformations in the 1960s. Using a gender lens, I point out what is considered normative femininity and masculinity and how these

social constructions are unsettled during this period of transition. Specifically, I trace the difficult development of the three protagonists, Li, Awa and Faku and how their dreams are shattered when they make wrong choices in selecting their husbands. I examine Zaynab Alkali's use of the mystic structure of the Nigerian village novel to show the changes that sweep over the village, its residents and the landscape and her incorporation of the features of *Littattafan Soyayya* (romance novels written in Hausa) to bring out the love and marital relationships of the protagonists. I argue that by appropriating the Nigerian village novel and *Littattafan Soyayya*, Alkali provides the bigger picture of a village in transition and a closeup of the protagonists who fantasise about having fulfilling marital lives and satisfying careers. I draw from African feminism, particularly from Novin Whitsitt and Shirin Edwin, to examine the feminist dimensions of the novel. I suggest that the traumatic events in Li's life and her adoption of values such as patience and tolerance when she embraces Islam wholeheartedly, play an important role in her maturing process. I analyse Alkali's literary representation of polygyny through Faku's polygynous marriage, suggesting that the text's focus is to highlight how polygyny is manipulated by husbands in the city and how women oppress other women in polygynous households. I suggest that through the character of Awa, who is presented as the epitome of patience and tolerance but becomes embittered and hardened eventually, Alkali highlights how women can become victims of their own circumstances.

In Chapter Five, '*Night Dancer - The Price of Emancipation*', I explore how Chika Unigwe modifies the Bildungsroman genre to portray the intertwined lives of three protagonists, Ezi, Ezi's daughter Mma and Ezi's housemaid Rapu in *Night Dancer*. I trace the journeys that Ezi, Mma and Rapu embark on to seek independence, establish self-identity, and fulfil a prophecy respectively. I consider Ezi as the main protagonist and analyse how her decision to walk out on her marriage to lead an independent life impacts her and Mma and allows her house maid Rapu to take over her place as the wife in Mike's house. I analyse the novel's structure, suggesting that the disruption of a linear narrative structure, to travel back and forth in time to present the past, reflects the difficulties that Ezi faces in establishing her independence and the struggles Mma faces in her search for her self-identity. I also discuss the crucial role played by journeys in bringing about awareness and self-knowledge in the protagonists. Drawing attention to the novel's negotiation with the genre of memoir, I argue that Ezi's letters serve the dual purpose of giving voice to Ezi to tell her own story and bridging the wide gap that existed between Ezi and Mma. Highlighting Unigwe's use of proverbs and adages to create a traditional Igbo world which reinforces the secondary status of women and

demands women's submissiveness, I argue that the novel uses the social realist mode to critique patriarchy's control and commodification of women's bodies. I assert that Unigwe's critique of the patriarchal Igbo society is targeted at mothers and mother-figures who act as patriarchal agents, socialising younger women to accept their secondary status and internalise the importance of marriage and children, especially male heirs. I suggest that by targeting these older women who oppress the younger women, Unigwe reinforces the need for "feminist empathy" proposed by Chielozone Eze (*Feminist Empathy* 311). I propose that through the character of Ezi, who becomes a "night dancer", Unigwe suggests that challenging patriarchy to regain control of one's body and attain freedom is possible, but it comes with a hefty price.

In Chapter Six, '*Everything Good Will Come - From Apathy to Political Empowerment*', I examine how Sefi Atta maps the coming of age of the main protagonist, Enitan, in relation to key sociopolitical events that mark the history of Nigeria, to highlight the impact of decolonising struggles that the postcolonial nation undergoes after its independence in 1960 on Enitan's growth. Enitan's birth that coincides with the year that Nigeria achieved its independence and Enitan's laborious journey to achieve self-knowledge and emancipation that parallels Nigeria's struggle to establish itself as a republic amidst multiple coups and military rule, invite a national allegorical reading. However, I view Sefi Atta's use of parallels and the portrayal of the family as the microcosm of the nation as her attempt to reinforce how events that unfold in the public invade the private sphere of the home, avoiding a national allegorical reading that might be reductive. I trace the growth of Enitan from a shy eleven-year-old girl to a mature and assertive thirty-five-year-old woman, paying particular attention to how the journeys she embarks upon facilitate her development. I suggest that Enitan forges her adolescent identity before establishing her sexual identity and this leads to her attaining her feminist identity and finally her political identity. I discuss the role played by the female community in Enitan's life, arguing that her best friend, Sheri, and her mentor, Grace Ameh, are pivotal in her development to become a self-assertive individual. While Sheri who influenced Enitan during her adolescent years continues to be supportive of Enitan upon Enitan's return from England, Grace Ameh encourages Enitan, who has long been a bystander, to become politically involved. Examining Sefi Atta's revision of the Bildungsroman conventions, I assert that she resorts to using the feminist Bildungsroman features in the later part of novel when the male Bildungsroman form that she uses in the beginning to convey Enitan's gradual growth becomes inadequate. I propose that in addition to rewriting the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman, Sefi Atta incorporates elements of the historical

novel, autobiography and testimonial novel to present multiple stories of women from different backgrounds to highlight the impact of Nigeria's historical, political, economic and sociocultural transformations on its citizens.

I have used the term modernity several times while outlining the chapters and it will be useful here to explain my usage of the term. Alain Touraine proposes that modernity has been defined as “the progressive triumph of reason over tradition, of scientific or technological actions over systems of social and cultural control, of universalism over particularism, and of production over reproduction” (29). He suggests that the classical perception of modernity in the context of private life is liberation from repressive norms, tolerance, respect of minorities and a positive view of pleasure, success, self-interest, and sex” (29). Even though this Western definition of modernity excludes religion and tradition which are important aspects in the context of Indian and Nigerian societies, this definition is still useful because it can be linked to modernity in the lives of women who attempt to become emancipated by challenging existing sexist and repressive cultural norms and by giving importance to individual aspirations in a society where fulfilling familial and societal obligations are considered to be more important than individual desires.

As such, in this dissertation, I use the term modernity to refer to ideas, attitudes, behaviour and practices that are progressive, such as the relaxing of the restrictions placed on women, their movements, education and careers and the rejection of sociocultural norms, traditions and superstitions that are restrictive, oppressive, and sexist. Even though the emancipatory potential of modernity is acknowledged, oftentimes it is viewed as intruding and unsettling established cultural norms in a traditional society since it brings about shifts in familial and gender relations. Modernity is typically seen as the result of colonialism, social reform projects that campaign against oppressive customs and the influence urbanisation and liberal city values.

The selected authors' portrayal of modernity, especially the ambivalent attitude it invokes and the influence it has on female protagonists are examined. In the case of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Difficult Daughters*, since the focus of the narrative is on the late colonial period of India, unlike the other novels which are set in post independent India and Nigeria, the term colonial modernity is used. In the contexts of these two novels, colonial modernity refers to progress brought about by the British (the rationale used by the coloniser for conquering countries is their civilising mission) such as English education and the changes

brought by Indian social reform movements in conjunction with nationalistic projects such as female education and the deployment of women in protest movements against the coloniser.

Chapter One

Sunlight on a Broken Column - New Beginnings: Out of Purdah and Self-Exile

Attia Hosain (1913-1998) was born in a *Taluqdar* (feudal landowner) family in Lucknow, United Provinces, a place she describes as the “centre of culture” (Khan 3). *Phoenix Fled* (1953), a collection of short stories¹, is Attia Hosain’s first published fiction while *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is her debut novel. Susheila Nasta suggests that the Partition of India into two-nation states affected Attia Hosain tremendously and “formed the creative inspiration” for her first two works (35). *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was well-received when it was first published in the United Kingdom in 1961 and there was renewed interest in Attia Hosain’s writing when Virago republished it in 1988. In an interview, Attia Hosain shares that she wrote *Sunlight on a Broken Column* intermittently over a period of a few years (Khan 13)². Attia Hosain’s uncompleted novel was published posthumously in 2013 in an anthology titled *Distant Traveller: An Attia Hosain Miscellany*³. Priyamvada Gopal critiques Attia Hosain’s choice of English over her mother tongue, Urdu, since the language of the milieu was Urdu and Attia Hosain’s contemporaries wrote in Urdu (141)⁴. But Daniel Morse refers to Attia Hosain’s radio programme titled *Writing in a Foreign Tongue* that throws light on her “complicated relationship with English and why she chose not to write in Urdu” (163). Attia Hosain admits to having a limited vocabulary in her mother tongue, having read more widely in English than Urdu, sharing the difficulties she faced in translating Urdu words or concepts that were not easily translatable.

Set in the pre and post Partition periods of India, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* begins in 1932 when the main protagonist Laila, a Muslim teenager from a conservative *Taluqdar*

¹ *Phoenix Fled* is a collection of twelve short stories by Attia Hosain. A wide range of characters from different backgrounds and social classes are portrayed in these stories. Several of the stories present the lives of working-class women who are impacted by gender and social inequalities. While the setting of some of the stories are not stated explicitly, most of them are set in the pre-Partition era.

² In an interview conducted by Khan in May 1991 (but published in Pakistani website Harappa.com in 2004) Attia Hosain talks about her family background, political affiliation, her family’s move to Britain and her writing, especially how *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was conceived and written over a period of time. Attia Hosain has also been interviewed by Laura Bondi in 1997 and Nilufer E Bharucha in 1998.

³ *Distant Traveller* was published by Attia Hosain’s children, Ameer Hussein and Shama Habibullah. This anthology contains chapters from Attia Hosain’s unfinished novel and her unpublished stories.

⁴ Ismat Chughtai, a contemporary of Attia Hosain, wrote in Urdu during this period. However, Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee, who trace the development of the anglophone novel in India in the 1950s and 1960s observe that this early post-independence period saw more women writers writing in English (248).

family in Lucknow, North India, is fifteen and covers a span of twenty years. Orphaned at a young age, Laila lives in her joint family home, Ashiana, under the care of her grandfather, Baba Jan, and the supervision of her aunt, Aunt Abida. Although Laila's life is confined by traditions and religious beliefs, she is provided with an English education since it was her late father's wish. When her grandfather dies, Laila is transferred to the care of her England-returned Uncle Hamid. Having lived in both traditional and modern patriarchal contexts, Laila realises that contradictions related to women's issues still exist despite attempts to modernise the domestic sphere in a period where tradition and modernity coexisted. Laila's alienation increases when she becomes aware of how different she is from her cousin Zahra, who embodies the model Muslim womanhood and rebellion builds within her when she witnesses gender and social inequalities around her. During the period leading up to the Partition of India when feudal powers were challenged and tensions escalated between different religious and political groups, Laila refuses to take sides and remains politically inactive while her extended family members act on their political views passionately and this creates cracks in the family. It is only when Laila falls in love with Ameer that she chooses to act by marrying him. However, she is ostracised by her family as her love marriage is perceived as going against the Muslim code of honour expected to be upheld by females; furthermore, Ameer's social class is beneath Laila's feudal family's high status. Laila's life with Ameer is short-lived because he joins the army and is shot dead when she tries to escape while in the Middle East. Laila's joint family members are dispersed after Partition since some of them move to the newly formed Pakistan while others remain in India. Laila, left to fend for herself and her daughter, retreats into solitude after Ameer's death but is helped by her friends, Sita, and Ranjit during Partition. Having experienced suffering and loss, Laila returns to Lucknow fourteen years later, having achieved maturity albeit delayed and, ready to move on with her life together with her distant cousin, Asad, who has been a pillar of strength during her difficult years.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the novels selected for study converge in how they revise the traditional Bildungsroman that reflects bourgeois individuality by privileging the story of a single hero to present doubling or tripling of protagonists. In the case of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the doubling comes in the form of two cousins, Laila and Zahra, whose maturity from girlhood to adulthood takes on very different trajectories. Besides doubling of protagonists, stories of Aunt Abida, Aunt Majida, nurse Hakimani Bua, and servants Nandi and Saliman, bring out the intertwined nature of women living in the *zenana*, showing how elite women depended on their faithful aids from different backgrounds. Laila's Hindu friend Sita

not only consoles Laila when she is widowed but also saves her during Partition violence, acting as the female community that supports the heroine. Though women are given more emphasis in the sense that women's perspectives are central in the novel, the novel is heavily populated with both male and female characters, that a glossary listing out characters and relationships is presented at the start of the novel. Daniel Morse describes the novel's multiple perspective succinctly: "*Sunlight on a Broken Column* registers historical events and disruptions through the lens of individual experience, while simultaneously widening its frame of reference through the inclusion of characters from different social classes, faith, and genders" (156). I suggest that the narrative gains strength in its vivid portrayal of varied characters whose contradictions and idiosyncrasies are brought out during a period of dramatic changes.

Attia Hosain depicts the changing political landscape of India leading to independence and the Partition of the country in 1947 and how this affects the protagonist, her family and those associated with her. Although the novel covers a period of twenty years from 1932 to 1952, the emphasis is on the precolonial period of the 1930s, bringing out the impact of colonialism, modernity and nationalism on Laila and her extended family. The thirties were a period when nationalistic struggle against the coloniser was gaining momentum in the form of Gandhian Satyagraha (non-violent protest) and Swadeshi campaign (boycotting of foreign products). Many social reform movements also attempted to improve women's condition through female education during this period.

Laila turns fifteen at the start of the novel and the narrative focuses on six years of Laila's life until 1938, capturing the sociocultural and political changes taking place in the country. Attia Hosain meticulously establishes the lifestyle of the Muslim landowners, the *Taluqdars*, and presents the sheltered lives of their women in the zenana, who observe purdah, before highlighting how modernising changes in the name of colonial modernity and English education impact the protagonists and their family. Initially, the political changes taking place in the public sphere and the nationalistic struggle against the coloniser form the backdrop of the novel. Subsequently, these events take on more significance when their impact is felt in the domestic sphere when family members begin to fight over their opposing views on whether the *Taluqdars* should fight to retain their privileges and whether they should support Congress for a united India or Muslim League for a separate Pakistan.

The narrative resumes in 1952 after a lapse of fourteen years and what had transpired in these years is summarised through flashbacks which are not in sequence. As Laila takes one

last tour of Ashiana before it is sold off, she reflects on her brief married life with Ameer, his subsequent death, her self-exile, how the *Taluqdars* lost their privileges, the Partition of India and how the division of the country dispersed her joint family members and impacted all the others associated with her and how she survived the ordeal. When India attained its independence on 15 August 1947 from the British, it was divided into two nation states, India and Pakistan. Muslim League, the political party that had the interest of the Muslims in India at heart, considered the issues between the Hindus and Muslims as irreparable and proposed a separate country for the Muslims. The talk of a separate country for the Muslims, escalated the friction between the Muslims and Hindus and incidents of communal riots and killings increased in 1946 leading up to the Partition in 1947. Muslim League's proposition for self-rule for the Muslims was accepted in the end by the British who hastily drew the borders to divide India. The Partition of India was a devastating event whereby around one million people were killed in the clashes between the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs and some seventy-five thousand women were abducted and raped. The territorial division also saw the mass migration of some twelve million people (Butalia 2).

There have been debates on the genre of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* which has been described as Partition narrative, domestic novel, Bildungsroman, memoir, autobiography, semi-autobiographical novel, historical novel, slippage between a novel and memoir/autobiography, and hybrid of modernist Bildungsroman and historical novel. When Laila's growth trajectory is examined against the two main female development found in self-discovery narratives suggested by Rita Felski, namely, the feminist Bildungsroman that focusses on outward journeys for "active self-realisation" and the novel of awakening that focusses on journeys that aid "inward transformation", it is evident that Laila's growth does not model one pattern exclusively but instead exhibits significant features from both patterns (128). As such, I propose that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a combination of a feminist Bildungsroman that uses a linear narrative structure to portray Laila's transition from girlhood to young adulthood and a novel of awakening that comprises inward voyages that are circular that result in Laila's maturity while in self-exile.

In addition, I suggest that Attia Hosain engages in conversation with two other genres, the historical novel and the autobiographical novel. Embracing features of the historical novel allows Hosain to depict the life of the feudal Muslim community in the late colonial period and the impact of dramatical transformations that took place during the division of the country on the feudal community and those associated with them. Autobiographies present life stories of

individuals but in the Indian and African contexts, they take on a more collective form. The individual in a colonial or postcolonial society leads a life that is closely connected to the family and community and a collective autobiography reinforces the intertwined lives of the individual and his/her family and community. As such, although Laila and Zahra are the main protagonists, the collective autobiographical mode used brings out the stories of multiple characters especially other women connected to these protagonists.

In this study, attention is not only paid to the historical and socio-political contexts that shape the lives of the protagonists and the women associated with them but also to the contexts in which the texts were produced. Chris Weedon points out that “literary texts cannot be read independently of their contexts” (288) when a postcolonial feminist approach is used, quoting Susi Tharu and K Lalitha. According to Susi Tharu and K Lalitha, who compile and analyse Indian women’s texts, by mid-twentieth century women’s writing in India was participating in the “profound re-articulation of the political world and of imaginative life that took place in the forties and fifties with the birth of the Indian nation and continues in many ways to underwrite culture and politics into the nineties” (qtd. in Weedon 288). Antoinette Burton classifies *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as a Partition novel that can be “counterread as history” (106), rightly pointing out that the focus of the first three parts is on the 1930s: “Though it was not written in the 1930s, I read it as a memoir of the 1930s that represents itself as history of that period” (15).

Hosain, who wrote *Sunlight on a Broken Column* in 1961, recreates life in India in the thirties to the early fifties by drawing from own her life experiences, portraying the impact of public events in the pre and post Partition periods on the domestic sphere and as such, the novel inevitably contains some autobiographical elements. As noted in the Introduction, debut novels of women writers tend to be Bildungsroman that sometimes contain autobiographical aspects of the author. Listing out all the differences between Attia Hosain and Laila, Daniel Morse reinforces that it is important to “detach Laila from Hosain” in order to appreciate “how the novel’s critique functions simultaneously on a formal level” (182). In a similar vein, Jill Didur draws attention to Hosain’s comments on the limitations of overdetermining the novel’s autobiographical elements: “All first novels are autobiographical. But the characters in the book do not have a one-to-one relationship with real life people. It’s the attitudes that are real rather than the people. Its [sic] not purely fictional, it’s factional. Laila has something of me

in her” (99).⁵ The point here is that Hosain’s life experiences illuminate the novel’s context and the protagonist’s complicated life, enabling Hosain to paint a realistic picture of the historical and sociopolitical milieu of the late colonial period and early post-independence period and the contradictions Indian women faced growing up in that period of transition.

Hosain who worked as a journalist and wrote short stories in the 1930s, was influenced by the nationalistic movement in that period and The Progressive Writers Association⁶ that was formed in 1936. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Hosain uses the realist form largely to recreate the feudal life in the thirties and to critique patriarchy, both traditional and modern, and colonialism. The novel uses a complex form of realism by employing a social realist mode that is aware of its limitations. When the social realist mode becomes inadequate to present Partition chaos and trauma, Hosain resorts to experimenting with different narrative strategies to represent the unnarratable. Hosain’s use of the realist form can also be linked to the novel’s incorporation of features of the historical novel. Besides *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Difficult Daughters* discussed in the next chapter, and *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in Chapter Six, also evoke the historical novel. Hamish Dalley proposes reading postcolonial historical novels as “serious interpretations of the actual past”, suggesting that the authors’ engagement with historical “plausibility” links the historical novel with the realist form (52). These novels attempt to portray the atmosphere and the spirit of the social milieu in which they are set in so that actual historical and sociopolitical events of the past and their impact can be analysed and interpreted ethically.

In this chapter, I discuss *Sunlight on a Broken Column*’s portrayal of the impact of dramatic historical and political transformations of the pre and post Partition periods on the domestic realm of the feudal Muslim family through the consciousness of the main protagonist, Laila. Hosain reinforces the link between the public and private spheres and how the events in the public realm invade the domestic realm, affecting the lives of families especially women during a time of unprecedented transformation. Besides political events that unfold in the

⁵ Taken from Jill Didur who quotes Hosain’s reply to Nilufer Bharucha’s question if *Sunlight on a Broken Column* was an autobiographical novel, during the 1997 interview.

⁶ Ulka Anjaria traces the use of the realist form by writers to a short period in the nineteenth century when it was first introduced by the British. She notes that in the early twentieth century writers from Progressive Writers Association returned to the use of the realist form during nationalist struggle and to represent the marginalised. Mulk Raj Anand’s Bildungsromane *Untouchable* and *Coolie* written in the thirties portray protagonists from the lower class and caste. Progressive writers Ismat Chughtai, Sajjid Zahir, Ahmed Ali and Rashid Jehan were Attia Hosain’s contemporaries.

public domain during the country's nationalistic struggle against the British for independence and the disintegration of the feudal landholding system, Hosain also highlights the sociocultural changes taking place in the 1930s in the name of modernisation that was sweeping through the country.

Sunlight on a Broken Column is considered an early attempt at portraying the trauma of the Partition of India and the feudal Muslim community's experience during the late colonial period leading up to independence. I examine how Hosain achieves this representation through her use of double protagonists, Laila and Zahra, their feudal Muslim family, and multiple characters associated with them and their family, reinforcing the interconnected nature of the lives of the people and the collectivist nature of the communities. I assert that Hosain portrays Laila's joint family that experiences dissonance and cracks as the microcosm of the colony undergoing historical and political changes in its journey to achieve independence that comes with the Partition of the country. I propose that Hosain revises the traditional Bildungsroman genre that results in a feminist Bildungsroman that is in combination with the novel of awakening to bring out the complex growth pattern of Laila and her delayed maturation. I suggest that modernity in the form of English education, in a period where tradition and modernity coexisted rather uncomfortably and created tensions between the different generations, empowers Laila even though many critics cast doubts on the emancipatory potential of English education, which is seen as a double-edged sword. English education increases Laila's alienation and her outsider status within her family, but it provides her the impetus to exert her individuality in making the choice of marrying Ameer for love. However, tragic events taking place in her life delay her maturation until she is in her thirties.

Sunlight on a Broken Column, I argue, engages in dialogues with the historical novel and the autobiographical novel to portray the impact of modernising changes and dramatic transformations taking place during the pre and post Partition of India from the feudal Muslim perspective, and as a result exhibits a hybrid of genres. Adopting features of the historical novel, Hosain establishes the feudal lifestyle of the Muslim aristocrats in the late colonial period and then traces the changes the feudal system undergoes before disintegrating. The use of autobiography can be observed at two levels in the novel. Firstly, the narrative is fully presented by Laila with the consistent use of the first-person perspective, and this establishes the autobiographic mode. Secondly, the novel contains autobiographical materials from the life of the author as mentioned earlier. Hosain's use of autobiographical elements in the novel

can be linked to debut Bildungsromane and self-discovery novels by women writers in the late nineteenth century as noted in the Introduction.

While the focus is on Laila and her extended family, the novel also broadens its purview to capture the stories of an array of other characters who are connected to Laila and her family during this period of flux, incorporating both male and female characters from different communities, social classes, religion, and political affiliations. This inclusion of a large cross section of characters, I suggest, brings out the interconnected and interdependent nature of the lives of the citizens, especially women, and how some of their lives change forever when the colony achieves its independence that comes with trauma of a division. Laila's family acts as a microcosm of the nation since the conflict amongst family members that leads to the eventual break-up of the joint family and its disintegration reflects the state of the colony that witnesses riots and acts of violence when tension between the different factions increases and the country is divided into two nation states eventually.

Even though Laila is the narrator and protagonist who presents the narrative, the autobiographical mode used is more collective than individualistic. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is not just the story of Laila and her cousin Zahra but also the story of other feudal Muslim women such as Abida, Majida, Saira and Nadira and men such as Baba Jan, Hamid, Kemal, Saleem and Asad. It also encompasses the stories of employees of the feudal home such as Nandi and Saliman. Beyond Ashiana, it presents the stories of Laila's Hindu friend, Sita and her father, Agarwal and Laila's classmate Nita Chatterji.

Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity and the Lives of Feudal Muslim Women

In the following section, I discuss Attia Hosain's use of the social realist mode to depict the life of the feudal Muslim community, especially the life of the women in the zenana, in the pre-independence period when tradition and modernity coexisted uneasily, and her critique of patriarchy and colonialism. I examine the various factors that shape Laila's childhood and girlhood, paying particular attention to tradition in the name of religious beliefs and orthodox rules governing the behaviours of women in the feudal Muslim family before discussing the impact of colonial modernity and English education on Laila. I also underscore how Laila's attempts to forge an independent identity and exert her agency to make her own decisions are further affected by the presence of her cousin Zahra who embodies traditional Muslim womanhood. The use of a gender lens reveals the construction of femininity and masculinity

in relation to gender roles and responsibilities and sexuality. I discuss how the novel challenges gender stereotypes in a masculinist world, exposing the mystification of female sexuality which is deemed dangerous and needs to be controlled while male sexuality is perceived as normal.

Sunlight on a Broken Column exhibits features of the historical novel in its attempts to recreate the sociocultural conditions of pre-independent India in the thirties, especially in the way it conveys the etiquette and lifestyle of the feudal Muslim community, focusing on the women in the *zenana*. The atmosphere of a world in which different cultures coexisted and different religious festivals were celebrated together is seen during Baba Jan's time before things start to change. The poetic language used by Hosain brings out the aristocratic lifestyle and the Urdu culture of the feudal community. Nasreena Markar observes that Hosain's lyrical prose reflects the traditions of Urdu literature (227) while Muneeza Shamsie notes that Hosain's language evokes a combination of Persian and Urdu literary style that is similar Ahmad Ali's use of language in his debut novel *Twilight in Delhi* published in 1940 (139).

In an orthodox *Taluqdar*⁷ joint family ruled by Baba Jan obedience and respect towards elders at all costs, adherence to religious beliefs and codes of honour and upholding the family's status are of utmost importance, more important than individual happiness, as constantly reinforced by Aunt Abida, who is responsible for bringing up Lalia. While the older women of Ashiana are housed in the *zenana*, adolescents Laila and Zahra have their rooms across the courtyard and garden. However, both the women and the girls observe *purdah* strictly⁸. By meticulously establishing the lifestyle of the feudal Muslim women who are dependent on the men in the family in the first part of the novel, Hosain shows that traditions and religious beliefs play an important part in indoctrinating women on their subordinated status and controlling their sexuality besides restriction of movement imposed on them.

The subordinated status of the women in the *zenana*, having no say in decision-making concerning their lives and their future, is brought out in the scene where Mohsin, a distant relative, brings news of a potential groom for Zahra, a thirty-year-old widower with no children, who is in government service. Mohsin justifies his proposal by stating that Zahra was of marriageable age (Zahra is seventeen, two years older than Laila), reinforcing the need to seize this opportunity since her future was uncertain because of Baba Jan's prolonged illness. Angry

⁷ Tracing the landholding system back to the nineteenth century Bengal (Zamindari system), Nasreena Markar explains that the *Taluqdars* of Lucknow also belong to "an aristocratic class" (245).

⁸ Antoinette Burton stresses that the terms *zenana* and *purdah* are not the same; *zenana* refers to "a spatial location" (the women's quarters of upper-class women) while *purdah* refers to "a social practice" (*Dwelling* 10-11). Nasreena Markar provides a detailed explanation of the concept of *purdah* in India (233 -7).

with Abida for including Zahra and Laila in the discussion, he rages: “Is the girl to pass judgement on her elders? Doubt their capability to choose? Question their decision? Choose her own husband?” (20). Although Abida appears more liberal than Mohsin because of her inclusion of the girls, she nevertheless states that “the girl cannot choose her own husband, she has neither the upbringing nor the opportunity” (21) and admits that she was not part of the changing trend outside Ashiana. This scene not only underscores that traditional patriarchy, in the form of Mohsin and patriarchal agents, aunts Abida and Majida, was firm about arranged marriages for girls but also foreshadows Laila’s defiant act of choosing her own husband.

By constantly contrasting the behaviour and attitude of Zahra and Laila, Hosain reinforces the opposing outcomes of obedience leading to acceptance versus non-conformity resulting in alienation. As critics have noted, Zahra’s character could have been developed more fully by Hosain. However, I suggest that Zahra who acts as a foil for Laila is essential for the following reasons: Firstly, Zahra represents traditional Muslim womanhood, having been successfully socialised by traditional patriarchy. Secondly, it is through Zahra that Laila is able to acknowledge how different she has become and how she is unable to fulfil her family’s expectations of her as a daughter of the elite *Taluqdar* family. Erica Hoagland’s point that doubling of protagonists helps to bring out how sisters (in this case cousins) living in the same household can grow up to be very different is relevant here (59). Lastly, after her marriage, Zahra becomes the model modern wife as she exhibits her newfound freedom in modern patriarchy.

Mohsin compares Zahra with Laila, stating that Zahra would accept the elders’ decision on her marriage because she was “brought up differently, correctly, sensibly” (23). When he associates Laila’s disobedience with her “mem-sahib’s education” and critiques the way she used to dress “like a native Christian” (23), the anxiety that English education is corruptive and a threat to the ideal Muslim woman’s identity is brought out. Aunt Majida is pleased with herself for her part in ensuring that her daughter, Zahra, fulfilled the Muslim family’s expectations, since Zahra “said her prayers five times a day, read the Quran for an hour every morning, sewed and knitted and wrote the accounts” (14). This reinforces how Zahra is successfully socialised into accepting prescribed gender roles.

Why is Laila different? Laila’s class status and her late father’s wish provide Laila access to formal English education and unprescribed reading, like the male hero of the classical

Bildungsroman⁹. Besides learning Persian and Arabic, Laila receives English education from her English governess, Mrs Martin and Laila's voracious appetite for reading is satisfied by the books in her grandfather's library. However, Laila's nurse Hakiman Bua reminds her to stop reading books and read the Quran, like Zahra and chides her: "Pull your head out of your books and look at the world, my child" (140). I suggest that Laila's English education and extensive reading are empowering because they increase her knowledge and skills, making her a thinking individual.

Laila's objection of arranged marriages, her admiration for heroines in novels who follow their heart and her emphasis on the individual over the community appear to originate from her English education and her extensive reading. While Jill Didur is sceptical about the freedom that education brings to women, I agree with Daniel Morse who is certain of the emancipatory potential of English education, stating that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* presents "liberatory ideas as both modern and Western" and asserting that Laila's extensive reading provides "the source of individual liberty" (184) other than a form of immediate escapism from her constrained environment.

English education may encourage females to resist oppressive traditions that hinder their path to autonomy, but it can also cause cultural alienation. Laila, who feels like an outsider because of her status as an orphan, is further distanced from her family and its way of thinking because of her English education. Discussing the paradoxical nature of English education that can be empowering as well as disempowering, Ketu Katrak highlights how English education causes cultural alienation within the English-educated females, making them "insiders/outsideers in their own families, communities, and cultures" (155). Conflicted by her family's expectations of her and her own needs that are different, Laila appears to regret the way she had turned out to be and wants to ask Aunt Abida, "Why did you not bring me up like Zahra?" (38). Thus, Laila's sense of alienation increases when she compares herself with Zahra who willingly submits to the demands of patriarchy.

As rebellion builds up within Laila, she questions the feudal way of life and the double standards practiced, condemning hypocritical traditions. At times, her conflicting thoughts

⁹ In *Season of Youth*, Jerome Buckley describes how extended reading spurs creative ideas in the hero which his family is unresponsive to and how formal schooling that he receives is unable to cater fully to his needs (17). Dissatisfied with the environment that is not conducive enough for him to achieve his full potential, the hero embarks on a journey of self-discovery to the city.

give in to uncontrolled outbursts, but Laila is cautious in choosing the battles that she wants to fight. Arguing that the way in which the heroine responds to her state of exile will determine her growth, Ketu Katrak links Laila's selective confrontations with self-preservation and likens her to Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*, who is selective of the battles she fights while residing in her uncle's house as a poor relative.¹⁰ Laila complains to Ameer: "I have never been allowed to make decisions; they are always made for me. In the end not only one's actions but one's mind is crippled" (265). Laila's frustration at not being allowed to become an independent young adult is underscored in her lament.

Laila, nevertheless, develops independent thinking, forms her own opinions, and questions some of the feudal attitudes and traditions rather than accept things because they follow customary practices while other youngsters like Zahra and Zainab conform blindly to traditions. Laila is observant of the contradictions around her and the incongruity related to female sexuality unsettles her the most. She acknowledges how marriage and motherhood are considered important milestones in a woman's life even though female sexuality is mystified and controlled. Hosain critiques patriarchy's control of women's sexuality through the characters of Laila and servant Nandi in the scene involving Nandi's 'bad' girl behaviour. When Nandi is reprimanded by her father for being alone with the cleaner, despite her explanations, Mohsin accuses her: "This slut of a girl is a liar, a wanton" (28). When Nandi retaliates and questions his audacity to call her a slut since he is the one who would have made her one if she had not stopped him, Mohsin begins to hit her, and it is Laila who intervenes to protect Nandi.

While men's transgressions such as their exploitation of servants who are of lower class and their visits to brothels, even the younger ones in the family were aware of Uncle Mohsin's association with "the dancing girls of the city" (21), are overlooked, women are condemned in matters related to sexuality even if it is not their fault. Witnessing the contradictions related to women's sexuality, unlike Zahra who enjoys her class privilege, Laila stands up for the justice

¹⁰ In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga portrays the impact of English education and how it creates cultural alienation in the natives. The English-educated natives are conflicted by the perception that their culture and traditions are inferior in relation to the coloniser's and become alienated from their family by their loss of fluency in their mother tongue, Shona, when they acquire English. Tambu's mother laments that English education not only usurped her son's ability to speak in Shona and alienated him from home but also killed him, since he passes away of illness while acquiring English education, living in his England-returned uncle's house. In the case of Tambu's cousin, Nyasha, she finds it difficult to readjust to living in Zimbabwe after spending her formative years in England and her cultural alienation is manifested in the form of bulimia leading to destructive outcomes as she engages in head-on collisions with her authoritative father.

of the servant girl¹¹. While the subaltern Nandi is silenced by the beatings she receives, Laila is chastised by Aunt Abida for her disrespectful behaviour towards Mohsin. Concluding that young Nandi has been immoral, Zahra proclaims that marriage is the way to control her. Angered by the lack of logic in Zahra's verdict, Laila expresses her frustration: "The cure for a good girl is to get her married quickly; the cure for a bad girl is to get her married quickly" (29).

What is emphasised in these scenes discussed above is that in the traditional Muslim society women's sexuality needs to be controlled so that they exhibit normative femininity while male sexuality is considered normal, and men's indiscretions are considered as part of their masculine behaviour. Perceiving female sexuality as dangerous, patriarchy believes that arranged marriage for girls is the effective way of controlling it. Tanvir Sachdev's explanation on the rationale behind Muslim patriarchy's supervision of women's body and sexuality is illuminating in reading the restrictions imposed on both the upper-class women of the zenana and the lower-class servants. Considering how threshold can be used as a tool to study upper/middle-class women's transgression of traditions that bind them, Sachdev traces the impact of Brahmo reform (Hindu reform movement that began in early nineteenth century) and Islamic culture of the Middle East on Muslim patriarchy, suggesting that Muslim patriarchy viewed women's sexuality as "a potentially destructive force" that releases "chaos or *fitna* by its power to invoke desire" (69). Through this scene, Hosain reveals how women are oppressed because their sexuality is seen as a threat to patriarchal order.

Patriarchy's regulation of female sexuality is seen in the way teenagers Laila and Zahra dress to hide their physically maturing bodies and burgeoning sexuality. Ketu Katrak's suggestion that adolescence is the period when "female sexuality is controlled more rigorously (under the name of protection) than in childhood" (121)¹² explains the teenagers' self-policing acts. Mystification of female sexuality is reflected in the husband-wife relationship as the sexual nature of marital relationship is not acknowledged by traditional patriarchy. When Zainab's talks about how the bridegrooms of the house in Hasanpur secretly crept in the dark

¹¹ In 'Gender and Social Class in India: Muslim perspectives in the fiction of Attia Hosain and Shama Futehally' (2018), Elizabeth Jackson examines the link between gender and class hierarchy, highlighting the power dynamics within and among groups. She draws attention to how elite Muslim characters such as Laila of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and Tara of *Tara Lane* exhibit strong social conscience when they witness social and economic inequalities and exploitation of household servants and the poor.

¹² *Two Virgins* by Kamala Markandaya, discussed in Chapter Three, portrays the coming of age of adolescent sisters, Saroja and Lalitha. Saroja complains about having to use a half saree (to cover her growing breasts), a progress from using the usual blouse and long skirt, since it gets in the way of riding her bicycle to school.

into the rooms in which the brides were kept, Laila asks how long this practice could go on since it would have looked ridiculous when children were born¹³. To that, Zainab relates how her mother continues to avoid being in front of her father in the presence of her grandmother. While Zainab and Zahra accept such behaviour as tradition, Laila calls such customs “nasty”, pointing out their absurdity and contradictions: “If it is such a shameful business being married and having children, why talk of nothing but marriage from the moment a girl is born?” (105). According to Ketu Katrak, only marriage and motherhood are seen as admissible in the postcolonial regions whereby patriarchy controls female sexuality by determining its “acceptable vs censored expressions” (11) but in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* Hosain highlights how Muslim patriarchy even mystifies these acceptable expressions.

Hosain not only highlights the contradictions inherent in patriarchy’s ideals of traditional womanhood and its control and mystification of female sexuality but goes further to interrogate and dismantle patriarchal structures through characters who challenge, subvert or manipulate the system. Nandi who is married off to an old and impotent man, subverts patriarchy by getting herself impregnated by a young foreigner and the extreme means by which Nandi achieves motherhood, reinforces the importance given to the status of mother in the traditional society. Even though servants are exploited by men from the upper class as well as their own working class, women like Nandi are shown as exercising their agency despite their subaltern status. On the other hand, Laila’s friend Sita, a Hindu girl from a rich upper-class family, uses her sexuality to empower herself and even manipulate patriarchy. Sita is depicted as liberated and exuberating confidence in appearance and attitude and sexually empowered. Frustrated that she is not able to marry Kemal because of religious difference, she marries a Hindu man but engages in extra-marital affairs to deal with her unhappiness.

While Nandi and Sita subvert and manipulate patriarchy, Laila challenges patriarchy by objecting vehemently to arranged marriages, stating that she refuses to be “paired off like an animal” (29). When Laila chooses her own life partner, her act is seen as a transgression of modesty and respectability expected of her as an upper-class feudal Muslim woman: “I had been guilty of admitting that I loved, and love between man and woman was associated with

¹³ This scene that brings out the absurdity of traditional patriarchy’s mystification of the sexual nature of marital relations, is developed in Salman Rushdie’s novel *Shame* (1983) in the most humorous manner. Rushdie narrates how in Raza Hyder’s grandmother’s house, where people adopted backward village ways, the menfolk steal into their wives’ beds at night like thieves, in the chamber shared by all the women of the big family, (some even have fun exchanging partners in the dark) and when children were born how it was viewed as something miraculous.

sex, and sex was sin” (312). Surprisingly, the passages that depict the courtship between Laila and Ameer and their stolen moments together evoke elements of popular romance novels in this otherwise serious novel. Laila’s romantic idealism is reflected in her admiration of heroines who fight for their love “in novels and plays” and her appreciation of “poems have been written about such love” (134). It is interesting that Jill Didur links Laila and Ameer’s relationship to the famous love story of Laila and Majnun which has its origins in Persian and Arabian legends (113).

While Laila’s transgression forces her to leave Ashiana after her marriage to lead a modest life with Ameer in the hills, Zahra appears more sophisticated in her dressing and at ease with her body after her marriage. Looking at Zahra’s tight-fitting blouse, Laila thinks: “No more loose, shapeless clothes, no more stooping and hunching of shoulders to conceal and deny one’s body” (141). However, Zahra’s sophisticated dressing does not imply that she is in control of her sexuality as she is still under her husband’s control, suggesting that she has exchanged one form of patriarchy for another. However, she has more freedom of movement and as the wife of an ambitious officer with the Indian Civil Service, she attends parties, and accompanies her husband on his overseas trips: “She was now playing the part of the perfect modern wife as she had once played the part of a dutiful purdah girl” (140). Through Zahra’s metamorphosis, though superficial, Hosain appears to reinforce how patriarchy is flexible on the demands it makes on women.

When Baba Jan dies, the women of Ashiana who are dependent on the men in the family are anxious about their future since England-returned Hamid is distanced from his family. Fatherless, Laila and Zahra worry about their uncertain future: “Zahra and I felt our girlhood a heavy burden. Our minds had no defences against anxiety; we were uncertain and afraid” (14). Ashiana and its inhabitants experience many changes under the leadership of Hamid and life appears to open out and the burden of girlhood carried by Laila and Zahra lightens up when their new guardian brings with him modernity that he embraced in England. The girls come out of purdah and Laila is allowed to further her education at the university.

Laila’s journey towards autonomy, which was constrained during Baba Jan’s time, would be expected to be smoother under the guardianship of modern Uncle Hamid. On the surface, it appears that the women in Ashiana are more liberated since some constraints are lifted. But as time passes, Laila, whose movements are restricted because she is an unmarried girl, realises that what she has is “controlled freedom” (202) in contrast to her friend Sita who

is fully emancipated. Laila's sense of alienation increases in the new environment: "The conflicting values of the world I lived in with my aunts Abida and Majida and the one I lived in now made me so full of doubts and questions, I retreated more and more within myself" (201). Having lived under both traditional and modern patriarchal contexts, Laila acknowledges that contradictions regarding women's education, sexuality and marriage still exist, and this highlights how patriarchy is flexible, not monolithic.

The traditional patriarch, Baba Jan, is presented in a better light than the modern patriarch, Hamid, especially in his ways that are inclusive. But we are told that Hamid mellows down with age and tries to make amends with Laila by showering Laila's daughter with affection. Not all men are presented as male chauvinists who are discriminating in the novel, and the patriarchal ones are not presented as villainous because their redeeming qualities are mentioned. Young men like Kemal, Asad and Ranjit are presented as good men who are all-embracing and respectful towards women while others like Saleem present a contrasting picture with their religious fundamentalism.

The English education Laila receives alienates her and she is conflicted by her ideas that go against her traditional upbringing. Nevertheless, she is unable to identify with the English. Laila has an uneasy relationship with her former English governess Mrs Martin, who is paternalistic; Laila is uncomfortable when Mrs Martin comments that Laila's father was just like one of them and feels embarrassed when Mrs Martin's calls her Lily, anglicising her name and suggests that Laila was her prodigy. Laila resents the patronising attitude of the British and knows that she will not be accepted by them because of her race. Some of Laila's English and Anglo-Indian classmates view the natives as inferior to the coloniser and have a condescending attitude towards the natives. Laila admits that she is not able to forget her Anglo-Indian schoolmate Sylvia Tucker who had called her a nigger. While the supposed superiority of the British race and English language and their patronising attitudes create uneasy alliances between the colonised and the British, exceptions are found in characters such as Laila's college mate Joan Davies, an Anglo-Indian whose "friendship blunted the sharp points of prejudice" (127).

The Muslims *Taluqdars*, who had enjoyed special privileges given by the British, attempt to hold on to their positions in a sociopolitical landscape that was changing because people were also fighting for equality during the nationalistic struggle against the British for independence. Hosain depicts the positive relations between the modern *Taluqdars*, as

represented by Hamid, and the British and how the landholders attempt to resist changes. This can be seen in how Hamid stands for election and wins the *Taluqdar* seat and the farewell reception that the *Taluqdars* organise for the viceroy.

Through the growing consciousness of Laila, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* appears to suggest that in the late colonial period progress for women in the name of modernity was not real advancement. Jazz records, dancing and watching movies in the cinema were sources of entertainment for the younger generation in this period and Laila, out of purdah, is encouraged by her England-returned cousins to attend social events even as Aunt Saira tries to restrict Laila's movements. In contrast, arranged marriages and denial of medical help for women's health issues continue to be upheld by the older generation. "A rapid yet incomplete break from the traditional past" (184) suggested by Morse explains the coexistence of tradition and modernity portrayed in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Laila is conflicted by the traditional world in which her family lived in the past and the liberatory ideas growing within her in a period that embraced modernity in a non-uniform manner. Laila is angry that Nandi's mother dies when denied urgent medical help and her aunt, Abida, also dies because of a delayed visit to the hospital since her family is hesitant to consult male doctors for female reproductive issues. By highlighting situations in which women are denied medical help that could have save their lives because of the need to protect their modesty, Hosain underscores that progress achieved by embracing modernity was not a reality for women in areas related to their sexuality, marriage, and reproduction in this period.

Antoinette Burton's discussion of the house and home, especially the *zenana*, which were "highly charged ideological categories" (7) in colonial India and the division of space into public and private spheres by male Indian reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to preserve traditions and culture in the domestic realm is useful in understanding the limited changes that came in the way of modernising the domestic sphere. Burton highlights how the public realm was considered "masculine, secular and materialist" and the domestic sphere which was considered "feminine, private and spiritual" had to also stand in for the Indian nation (8). However, when male Indian reformers and nationalists felt pressured to improve the conditions of women because the state of women was seen as reflecting the ability of male nationalists for self-rule, the domestic space could not escape modernisation. Modernisation, that was to be contained in the public sphere so as not to corrupt the domestic realm, whose function was to protect traditions, was then extended to the private sphere, showing the interrelated nature of the private and public spheres.

Arguing that Hosain uses “domestic space” to “record the contradictions of living as Indian women in the context of colonial modernity” (5), Burton asserts that modernity, both in the form of British civilisation and reform projects by Indian nationalists, did not improve the backward conditions of women in the zenana. She suggests that *Sunlight on a Broken Column*’s lack of teleology and Laila’s growth that does not culminate in her becoming “a modern secular citizen” (16) indicate that projects’ aimed at modernising the domestic did not completely improve women’s conditions and bring about true progress. While I agree with Burton that modernity brought into the domestic space does not give women true freedom but instead creates contradictions within them, I see Laila’s growth as delayed maturation that happens in her exile rather than growth that had been disrupted permanently by the failure of modernity.

Modernity’s failure to fully liberate women in the domestic sphere can be linked to Hosain’s depiction of modern patriarchy as flexible and manipulative through the figure of Hamid, whose modern ways are a result of his encounter with British modernity in England. Hamid limits the freedom of the women in Ashiana although married women enjoy more freedom of movement, as can be seen in how Saira stops observing purdah after marriage. However, Saira is still dominated by Hamid and faces restrictions in terms of exerting individual agency and decision-making. Laila sees Aunt Saira and her friends as puppets who are modern and sophisticated in dressing but lacking substance and true agency. Though Hamid allows Laila to further her studies by entering the university, he disapproves Laila choosing her own husband, especially because Ameer is beneath their social class. These instances reveal that as long as females do not challenge modern patriarchy, they can enjoy the limited privileges accorded to them as modern Muslim women in an elite household.

Jill Didur is right to suggest that women were not given true freedom to make decisions or assert their individuality because efforts by reform movements to change Muslim women’s identities were not based on “emancipatory politics” (95). Didur highlights the false dichotomy of the domestic versus the public realm to show how restrictions imposed on women in the domestic sphere are revised to suit patriarchal needs and interests in a world that was changing rapidly (103)¹⁴. The flexibility of modern patriarchy is brought out in the novel in instances

¹⁴ Jill Didur presents the genealogy of the reconstruction of Muslim identity during the colonial period. Acknowledging that Muslims were not concerned with defining themselves in religious terms in the pre-colonial period, she traces how the Muslim identity evolved under colonisation. She highlights the similarity between the transformations that took place in the Muslim community in the late nineteenth century with the social reforms that took place in the Hindu Bengal community in the early and mid-nineteenth century whereby an

related to women's education. Majida who is proud that Zahra has turned out to be the model of Muslim womanhood points out that "at the Muslim school she (Zahra) had learned a little English, which is what young men want now" (24). When Hamid informs the family that Laila can continue her education by going to college, Saira adds on that "young men want their wives to be educated enough to meet their friends and to entertain" (110). These instances show that the reason behind providing women with education was to cater to the changing needs of patriarchy and not so much to empower women.

In the case of Laila, I assert that Laila's English education empowers her, enabling her to stand up for what she believes in and exert her agency. Susheila Nasta's assertion that "modernity, however dislocating and disempowering some of its appropriative effects on the colonial psyche, could also be a self-determined force for liberation" (33) is relevant since Laila's act of choosing her own marriage partner and moving away from traditional and modern patriarchal contexts are a result of her modern ideas. However, Laila's act renders her an outcast since she is seen as having breached the code of honour related to Muslim women's purity. Abel et al. stress that sexual relationships were unacceptable of a female and the punishment they faced for such a transgression was the loss of social life: "Even one such affair, no matter how exalting, would assure a woman's expulsion from society" (8). In the case of Laila's school mate who elopes with her lover who abandons her eventually, it is loss of life itself since she commits suicide when her family and women's organisation refuse to help her upon her return. Thus, unlike the male hero of the classical Bildungsroman who is expected to experience at least two sexual encounters, one debasing and one exalting, in the process of achieving emotional maturity (Buckley 18), females engaging in sexual initiation are stigmatised and ostracised.

Erica Hoagland stresses that in a collective culture an individual must fulfil his/her responsibilities to the community for continuous membership: "Choices should not be made to feed individual desires but rather to serve the community's needs and interests. A member who acts out of self-interest threatens the stability of the community, as well as his/her membership within the community" (41). Laila's insistence on marrying Ameer for love is

artificial division between the domestic and public sphere was created. She notes that in the late nineteenth century, Muslim men were encouraged to acquire English education and take on government jobs, but women were still restricted to religious education and not encouraged to attend government schools. This situation changed in the twentieth century when Muslim women were given opportunities to study outside their home but in gender-segregated institutions. The reason for this change was the demand for more formally educated women from educated elite Muslim men who wanted their wives to be better companions.

seen as being selfish and even Laila's beloved Aunt Abida accuses Laila of disobedience that had tarnished the family and *Taluqdar* community's honour: "You have put yourself above your duty to your family" (312).

Family as the Microcosm of the Nation

In the 1930s and 1940s, the family unit and family relations experienced changes with the advent of modernisation; meanwhile, social reforms undertaken by nationalists and reformers to improve women's condition to show that they were leaders of their own homes and therefore capable of self-governing the nation, brought about shifts in gender relations. In the section that follows, I examine how the modernisation and sociopolitical transformations alter gender relations and family dynamics, creating cracks in the joint family system.

The joint family system that was led by Baba Jan, the head of the first generation, not only included his late son Ahmed's daughter, Laila, his unmarried daughter Abida, his widowed daughter Majida and her child Zahra but also orphaned poor relatives, Asad and Zahid. A horde of other women, nurses, and maidservants live in Ashiana, helping the women and girls in the family. But the modern patriarch of the second generation, Hamid, who is individualistic, frowns upon such an inclusive system when he takes over his father's place as the eldest son of the family. Having spent many years in England, "he is more a Sahib than the English" (22) and "his relations no longer expected him to conform to traditional patterns" (86). Hamid does not waste time in streamlining the occupants of Ashiana. Abida, who is unmarried because her father "found no one good enough for her" (22), is conveniently married off as a second wife to a widower and packed off to her husband's home soon after Zahra's marriage. Abida, who is different from Majida or Saira, is portrayed as an educated woman who is capable of running Baba Jan's estate successfully when he falls ill. But her late marriage reinforces how aristocratic Muslim women are under the control of the men in her family and have no autonomy. Zahid is sent to a hostel while Asad who refuses to stay remain in Lucknow goes off to Delhi. Ashiana is overhauled, not in terms of furnishing and decoration alone but also its occupants.

In the new environment of Ashiana, Laila feels distanced from Hamid and Saira who are busy with "public service" and "social engagements" (123): "I felt I lived in two worlds - an observer in an outside world and solitary in my own" (124). With the departure of Abida, Laila feels more isolated, though this separation eventually makes it easier for Laila to shed

her baggage of familial bond and assert her choice of marriage partner and leave Ashiana¹⁵. Laila does not get the opportunity to reconcile with Abida, who had been a mother figure to her, and she regrets the circumstances in which way they had parted when Abida openly expressed her displeasure for marrying Ameer. While the separation from Abida helps Laila to assert herself, this lack of a closure or chance to make amends with Abida can be seen as another reason for Laila's delay in maturation. In Chapters Two, Five and Six, I highlight how the authors underscore the importance of coming to terms with difficult mother-daughter relations for the daughter to move ahead in her journey to attain an authentic self.

The third generation, Laila's England-returned cousins, Kemal and Saleem, are more vocal in expressing their opinions and this does not promote peace in Ashiana; furthermore, they are not keen in appreciating or retaining feudal privileges, much to Hamid's displeasure and this furthers the intergeneration conflict between father and sons. With growing divisions between Hindus and Muslims in the late colonial period, and the lack of trust between various political parties to compromise and move forward in their fight for independence from the British, the question of supporting Congress for a United India or Muslim League for a separate country for Muslims, Pakistan, creates much disharmony in the family. The interlinked nature of the public and private spheres is highlighted when the impact of political strives in the public arena are felt on the domestic sphere when family members pledge their support for different political parties. What is interesting is that Hosain uses the family in the domestic sphere, experiencing divisions and eventual breakdown, as a microcosm of the nation, undergoing changes in a landscape ridden by political turmoil and chaos.

The change in gender relations also sees women entering the public sphere to take part in nationalistic struggles. While Laila does not engage in political activities, other women like Nita Chatterjee are seen as passionately engaged in politics, taking part in protests. While the novel does not include historical personages, many references are made to Gandhi, and his non-violent protests and prominence is given to the major political parties and their agendas in the period leading up to independence. The coloniser's violent response to the nationalistic movement that was gaining momentum is presented through characters who get injured or die;

¹⁵Esther Labovitz describes 'shedding' as a feature of the female Bildungsroman whereby the protagonist gets rid of any baggage that helps to facilitate her growth process (253). Baggage can be in the form of family bonds or feelings of guilt, hatred or fear that may hinder or delay the development of the female protagonist.

Asad and Nita are injured while taking part in a non-violent protest and while Asad survives Nita loses her life.

Daniel Morse attributes “pressures of modernisation” and specifically the different ways in which family members “respond to the call of Indian National Congress” to the “breakup of the traditional multigenerational home” (178). Hamid and his sons argue over maintaining *Taluqdar* privileges; while Saleem supports Muslim League, Kemal pledges his allegiance to Congress. Laila agrees with Kemal who supports Congress but does not take a stand, and this further alienates her from her family members who express their views passionately. Even though Hamid wins his first election under the Congress umbrella to maintain his *Taluqdar* privileges, over the years he witnesses the slow decline of feudal powers and his family members growing apart from him. The decline and eventual fall of the feudal economy in the late colonial period is reflective of the transformations from an agrarian society to a modern, industrialised society.

Hamid dies before Partition and the family is dispersed after Partition as Saleem moves to Pakistan with his wife Nadira while Kemal remains in India with his mother Saira. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*'s portrayal of the breakdown of the feudal joint family system and the displacement of its members parallels the Partition of the nation into two-nation states, India and Pakistan and the mass migration of millions across the newly created border, amidst chaos and violence. I believe that Daniel Morse's argument that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* “centers on the home as a means of representing larger national events” (153) can be extended to assert that by portraying the domestic as the microcosm of the nation, Hosain reinforces the link between the public and private spheres which are separated by artificial barriers and how the public sphere invades into the private sphere affecting the lives of families.

Besides using the happenings in the family to reflect the politically charged nation, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* also uses a wide array of characters associated with the family to portray the impact of the escalating tensions in the public sphere. The large cross-section of characters from different backgrounds brings out the interconnected lives of the people and the collectivist nature of society while at the same time highlighting the contrast between characters and their differences in ideologies and political affiliations. Even though Laila does not begin the narrative like Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* who says that she is going to narrate her own story and the stories of women in her life, Laila's use of the first-person perspective that gives the novel an autobiographical mode, reflects a collective autobiography rather than

an individual one. It includes the stories of women in the feudal joint family and their servants, other women in the feudal community, friends and people from other religion and community connected to the protagonists. Although the focus is on the stories of women, stories of men from the joint family and friends from other communities are not excluded.

Laila's Journey and Development Trajectory

In this section, I discuss how Attia Hosain uses a combination of the linear trajectory of the feminist Bildungsroman and the circular arc of the novel of awakening to present Laila's self-discovery journey. I examine the reasons behind Laila's delayed maturity, her political inaction, and the impact of Partition on her and those associated with her. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*'s portrayal of Laila's growth in a linear fashion followed by a fractured narrative of Laila's delayed maturity, affirms Rita Felski's view that models of development typical of the feminist Bildungsroman and novel of awakening are not mutually exclusive (128). Laila's growth is presented chronologically in the first three parts of the novel but instead of a "continuous development from childhood to maturity" of the apprentice type of female growth pattern (Abel. at. el. 11), the narrative begins when Laila is an adolescent of fourteen going on fifteen in 1932. However, important moments in her childhood, especially those concerning her relationship with her deceased parents are presented through flashbacks. Rather than a detailed portrayal of childhood as observed by Jerome Buckley in *British Bildungsromane* with male heroes, the emphasis is on the transformation from girlhood to womanhood.

Rita Felski argues that travel is an essential component in the Bildungsroman and "only by moving out into the world" from the private sphere that the protagonist can become fully aware of her circumscribed life and attain freedom (135). Laila embarks on several journeys, both physical and psychological that influence her growth. Some of the significant journeys she makes in the first three parts of the novel are journeys out of limiting Ashiana in Lucknow to the family's country house in Hasanpur, moving out of purdah under the guardianship of Hamid and the trip to the hills during summer where she pursues her relationship with Ameer. Coming out of purdah is a metaphorical journey, like crossing over an invisible, psychological barrier. It provides Laila some freedom to attend university, exchange ideas with her school and college friends and England-returned cousins and pursue her relationship with Ameer.

In the first three parts of the novel, it is not often that the distance between the younger protagonist and the matured narrator, a typical feature of the Bildungsroman, is observable in Laila's first-person narration of her story and the stories of her extended family, friends, and

servants. At the start of Part Three, Laila who is almost nineteen, reflects on how her perception of Hasanpur had changed, how “poverty and squalor, disease and the waste of human beings” (173) that were oblivious to her before began to make her feel guilty. The matured narrator states that “everything in those days of my years ended with a question mark” to emphasise that as her “circumscribed world opened out slowly” her questioning mind grew. At the end of Part Three, when Laila’s relationship with Ameer is discovered by her family, the matured narrator uses the future past tense to hint at her future status as an outcast: “In the morning the sun would come and waken me in this house as it had done since I became a conscious being. Yet I had already left this home forever” (267).

In Part Four, Laila who is thirty-five, reflects on the past and acknowledges how her understanding and interpretation of events were different when she was younger and how they have changed over time. Fourteen years have elapsed when this last part begins, following the abrupt ending of Part Three when Laila leaves Ashiana in 1938 after her marriage to Ameer. It is 1952, five years after India’s Partition, and Laila returns from her self-exile to be reunited with Asad. Their meeting place is Ashiana, her childhood home, since Laila wants to have one last look at Ashiana, which is in ruins, before it is sold off. Ashiana is more than just an ancestral house in the novel; it is a symbol of the feudal way of life. Thus, its disintegration reflects the dismantling of the feudal system just as the title *Sunlight on a Broken Column* taken from T S Eliot’s *The Hollow Man* refers to the broken structures of the ancestral house that has not been maintained.

As Laila tours Ashiana, moving from room to room, we are presented with a series of flashbacks that are reminiscent of the past, highlighting key moments of Laila’s girlhood in Ashiana. Important events that shape Laila’s life after her departure from Ashiana are summarised and presented out of sequence as Laila takes a walk down memory lane. The reader learns of Laila’s dissatisfaction with her married life with Ameer, her self-exile after his death and the impact of Partition on her, her extended family, and her friends. The significant journeys undertaken by Laila in her later life are inward journeys. Through literal journeys away from society, Laila reflects on her decisions and events that transformed her life and this can be seen as awakenings that facilitate her attainment of maturity. Abel et al. associate inward journeys and their resulting awakenings with delayed growth and deferred maturation that takes place after marriage and childbirth. Thus, the “painful soul searching” (*Season 17*) that the male hero undergoes as he accumulates experiences in the public sphere is carried out by Laila in isolation, away from society.

When Laila moves from Ashiana, which symbolises confinement, to Ameer's rented house in the hills, she leaves behind traditional and modern patriarchies: "I was happy to have a home of my very own, to live in it as I pleased without dictation" (314). However, this enabling environment takes a turn when Ameer refuses financial support from Laila, insisting on being the sole breadwinner, socially conditioned to act out the masculine role of provider. Ameer joins the army to provide better for his family since his work as a university professor does not provide sufficient income. When he is deployed to the Middle East, Laila moves to a small cottage that she buys for herself, calling it "a refuge for my loneliness" (316). Laila's decision to stay on her own instead of returning to Ashiana, reinforces her desire not to be subjected to patriarchal domination and this allows her to grow and become independent. Laila's exile reflects Felski's precondition that a separation from a "male-defined environment" (124) or "traditional heterosexual relation" (131) was required to gain self-knowledge, even though the separation is not initiated by Laila.

The romantic idealism with which Laila had viewed her love relationship with Ameer collapses as Laila becomes disillusioned with her marriage. Her disappointment with her marriage extends to disillusionment with life itself when Ameer is imprisoned and gets killed while attempting to escape and she withdraws into solitude. Laila thinks about how Sita had helped her manage her loss during her self-imposed exile: "In those days of my silence she used to talk to me of herself as she had never done. She sensed that I needed to be distracted from the unending, inaudible self-communication that made it impossible for me to talk to others" (296). Laila compares her life with "an endless tunnel with no exit" and reflects on how she was saved by her child and Asad:

But the child brought me back from mere motions of living to life; she and Asad. He was still in prison, but his letters conveyed his faith in living without being didactic. They led me out of self-pity, through the negation of despair, into a recognition of struggle and positive acceptance. He (Asad) did not say I was selfish to withdraw into solitude, but I knew he wished it otherwise (317)

Thus, Laila's departure from Ashiana to the hills with many dreams of a happy life with Ameer, her move to her own cottage where she experiences "an infinity of waiting" (316) for Ameer to return from the Middle East and her withdrawal into solitude as a widow bring about awakenings within her, as her youthful idealism gives way to maturity after experiences of disappointment and loss. Laila's self-exile ends when she returns to Ashiana to meet Asad, the place she began her life, making it a full circle.

Partition, the turning point in India's history, comes with trauma that is irrepresentable and authors manage this difficulty by experimenting with new narrative strategies or even creating hybrid genres. In the case of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Laila updates the readers with stories of how her family, friends and others associated with her were impacted by the Partition and its aftermath in the last part of the novel which resumes after a break of fourteen years. The collective memory of the traumatic event is told out of sequence, creating a disjuncture between the first three parts that were presented in a linear and chronological fashion. On the other hand, *Difficult Daughters* discussed in the next chapter, embraces features of the testimonial novel that disrupts the narrative flow to present the first-hand report of Amritsar residents who had witnessed the chaos and killings that ensued with the division of the country.

The last part of the novel that lacks chronology and is disjointed from the earlier three sections that saw a linear progression has been criticised by some scholars as a weakness of the narrative structure. Daniel Morse who attempts to establish *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as a hybrid of a historical novel and modernist Bildungsroman, attributes Hosain's use of modernist techniques in combination with realism for the fractured narrative. Observing the dramatic change in narrative pace and style between the first three parts and the concluding fourth part, Ananya Kabir suggests that the difficulty of rendering Partition is the reason for the shift from realist to modernist technique (186). In the same vein, I suggest that the novel's sudden deviation from the linear structure adopted earlier is the result of trauma narrated at the level of story infiltrating into form and structure of the novel and the inadequacy of the realist mode to cope with it.

Biodun Jeyifo, who analyses Ben Okri's novels, highlights the link between the sociopolitical context in which novels are produced and the form and structure of the narratives, suggesting that the theme of "social disjuncture" of the period in which the novels are set find their way "into the very form and structure of these novels" (cited in Quayson, *Strategic* 148). Viewed in the light of Jeyifo's argument that content pervades form and structure of the novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*'s disrupted trajectory and abrupt move from a linear to fragmented narrative can be seen as Hosain's attempt to narrate the unspeakable by personalising the consequences of Partition. Even though the last part does not focus on the actual violence of Partition, the repercussions of the division of the country on Laila, her family, her friends and many others of different religion, class and gender who are in some way connected to Laila or her family are presented poignantly, giving the narrative the feel of a

collective autobiography. Hosain has acknowledged the difficulty she faced in writing about Partition in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*; Hosain was dissatisfied with the manuscript that she handed to the agent and later regretted deleting off large portions of the novel as suggested by her editor (Khan 13-4). Thus, it might be useful to approach *Sunlight on a Broken Column* “as an early and courageous attempt to discover a narrative poetics by which to open up the unresolved discontinuities of a painful past through the filters of memory, which can both double and fracture, restrict as well as liberate, perception” as suggested by Susheila Nasta (40).

Laila’s lack of passion towards any course and her resultant political inaction is another area of contestation of critics who question Laila’s development and maturity. Laila’s inaction is contrasted with her friends, Nira and Nadira, who are politically active. Watching the Satyagrahis in action, Laila had aspired to take part in peaceful demonstrations to fight for the country’s independence when she grows up, but she does not act on her desire. While Laila agrees with Kemal who sides Congress, she does not voice out her support. Even when forced to take sides, Laila refuses and the pro Muslim Pakistan Nadira accuses her of believing in nothing. Hamish Dalley discusses the two types of character that George Lukacs identifies in the nineteenth century classic historical novels. He elaborates how the first type, “historical social types”, are characters who represent “extreme opposing social forces” while the second type, “the middle of the road hero” embodies neutrality and passivity (60). As suggested by Danile Morse, Laila can be aligned with characters in historical novels who remain neutral, refusing to support extreme views (169).

What stops Laila from entering the public realm and making a commitment? Susheila Nasta attributes Laila’s inaction to her “eclecticism of broad education” and “the circumscriptions of her location” (43). It appears that the alienation caused by her wide reading and her limiting environment create a psychological barrier around her that stop her from making a commitment. Nasta suggests that Laila’s refusal to take sides and offer her support for one political party even when cornered by her peers reflects Hosain’s reticence to “political labels or partisan positions” because of her view that abuses of power existed regardless of nation, gender, or religion (34). Nasta does not necessarily see Laila’s inaction as a weakness:

Although Laila seldom identifies herself wholly with any one perspective, presenting herself as an observer who mediates and listens to a number of different voices, it is her ability to weave together the entire fabric of a multiple history of interlocking social, cultural and political relationships spanning the varied locations of her character’s lives, which gives the novel a force beyond that of a bildungsroman (42)

While Morse and Nasta provide convincing reasons for Laila's political inaction, I believe that Laila's insider /outsider status plays an important part. To begin with, Laila's bookish nature isolates her from others; her status as an orphan and her uneasy attachment to Ashiana render her an outsider and this alienation increases under the guardianship of Hamid and Saira. Laila acknowledges that coming out of purdah gave her more freedom but also stresses that the psychological barriers she had created around herself were not so easy to transcend: "After my grandfather's death more windows had opened, a little wider perhaps, but the world still lay outside while I created my round myself" (173).

Although Laila avoids political action, she stands up for her Muslim school mate who is condemned for eloping with a Hindu boy and protects Nandi when Mohsin unfairly beats her for lying and immoral behaviour. Unlike Zahra, who enjoys her class privilege and lacks empathy for servants of lower class, Laila's strong social conscience prompts her to challenge inequality. While Laila had been in exile in the hills, we learn that Zahra has been politically active in Pakistan, being "a member of every government-approved committee for social service and women's welfare" (302). Quoting Jed Esty's modernist anti-development plot, Daniel Morse suggests that Laila's growth is "frozen" while "the world around her is riven with change" (184). In a similar vein, Antoinette Burton asserts that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* stresses the impossibility of colonial modernity for women like Laila since her growth does not culminate in her becoming "a modern secular citizen" from a "communal subject" (16). But these readings miss out Laila's development that results from her exiles. I assert that, rather than incomplete or frozen growth, what Laila experiences is delayed development that is typical of a female Bildungsroman whereby maturity is attained after marriage and crisis in life, in the form of awakening resulting from inward journeys. Nasreena Markar's observation that Laila embarks on "a new life for herself through a lengthy and painful process of self-reflection" (239) is relevant here.

Critics such as Abel et al., Rita Felski and Esther Labovitz have demonstrated how female quest can be procrastinated and prolonged into middle-age, unlike the progressive growth of the male protagonist in the classical Bildungsroman. Labovitz attributes the lack of mentors and role-models to the delayed development of females. She suggests that the male protagonist completes his journey as a young man since he has a mentor to guide him while the female's journey is prolonged into middle age due to lack of proper guidance (24). The male hero's growth is organic and complete, and maturity is attained gradually as growth progresses stage by stage. Franco Moretti highlights the important role that the social

institution, Society of the Tower, in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-96) plays in Wilhelm's growth (21). As for Laila, she is unable to identify suitable mentors or role-models to emulate and therefore lacks "the mediating structure of the female community" (*Beyond* 139). Even as Laila looks up to Aunt Abida as a mother figure and her alienation increases when separated from her, Laila knows that Aunt Abida's traditional ways are different from her way of thinking. On the other hand, Zahra has many things in common with Saira and connects easily with her, suggesting that she has found a role model in Saira.

Critics such as Antoinette Burton and Jill Didur cast doubts on the genre of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as a Bildungsroman because it is not teleological. Daniel Morse responds to Burton's critique, pointing out that the novel's lack of teleology is a modernist intervention to highlight how patriarchy and various forms of inequality interrupt the protagonist's gradual development and attainment of maturity. Categorising Bildungsromane based on their plots, Franco Moretti asserts that German and British Bildungsromane follow the classification principle which emphasises "teleological rhetoric", whereby the ending is definitive and "meaning of events lies in their finality" (7). Moretti highlights that self-development achieved in the form of a completed apprenticeship must be sealed, usually with marriage, to strengthen "one's *sense of belonging* to a wider community" (19). Moretti contrasts this with French and Russian Bildungsromane that reject teleology and favour open endings since their plots are organised according to the transformation principle: "Individual autonomy and social integration are thus no longer two aspects of a single course, as in the classical Bildungsroman, but incompatible choices" (80). Like the other postcolonial Bildungsromane considered in this study and most postcolonial Bildungsromane in general, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* aligns itself with the transformation principle. By rejecting the classification principle associated with teleologic rhetoric and highlighting the difficulties a female protagonist faces achieving self-knowledge and reintegrating with society, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* functions as a critique of the volatile pre and post-independence periods, where growing up as an Indian woman was complicated.

In the traditional Bildungsroman that is teleological, the male hero attains maturity and assimilates with the dominant society as a young adult, and this marks the end of his apprenticeship. In her study that examines the hybrid Bildung of migrant South Asian protagonists, Anupama Jain suggests that viewing maturation as an ongoing process rather than the attainment of a final goal is more suitable "for novels in which characters mature even after they have technically reached adulthood" (50). Anupama Jain highlights how the female

characters examined do not just assimilate into American society but rather reach some form of accommodation with the host society. She proposes the use of the term accommodation rather than assimilation since the protagonists who have accomplished the goals that they had set out for themselves, act according to what they think is right rather than totally give in to normative ideology (50-51).

Even though Anupama Jain's discussion is in the context of Bildungsroman of becoming American, they are applicable to most of the selected postcolonial Bildungsromane since the narratives end with adult protagonists having achieved some goals and ready to move on to the next stage in their lives and even re-enter society albeit on their own terms. In Laila's case, she returns from her self-exile to have a life with Asad, who has been instrumental in helping her to come to terms with her loss and this ending can be viewed with cautious optimism. Laila's return does not guarantee a successful reconciliation with society but Laila, as a mature woman of thirty five, is ready to move on to the next phase of her life, after a closure with the past which is signified by her final nostalgic walk around Ashiana that triggers both happy and sad memories: "My most private emotions were contained by this house, as much a part of its structure as its every brick and beam. Its memories condensed my life in a summary" (272).

Laila achieves maturity after marriage and motherhood and the process takes a toll on her. As suggested by Labovitz, females who are obstructed by gender and social inequalities, need to struggle doubly, and learn from life itself (246). Nevertheless, Laila's delayed maturity, her return from self-exile and her plan to move forward by considering Asad as her future partner reinforce that self-formation is possible even though it can be delayed, and Hosain achieves this by her use of the social realist mode in the novel. Laila's difficult development from girlhood to womanhood as she fights for her personal freedom parallels the nation's struggle for independence from the British amidst increasing rifts in the factions that made up the nationalist movement. Morse who argues that Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and Venu Chitale's *In Transit* are hybrid novels (historical novel and modernist Bildungsroman) suggests that their protagonists, unlike the characters of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, are not linked to historical characters but are nevertheless impacted by history in a narrative that presents the nation and the domestic realm. As such, Laila too is "handcuffed to history" (Morse 155) since her coming of age can be viewed in relation to the birth of twin nations after a prolonged struggle for independence. The combination of personal and national development in the period of transition from pre to post Partition can also be viewed in the light of Mikhail

Bakhtin's theory of the emergence of man, whereby man who is in the border between two epochs, emerges in real historical time (*Speech 23*).

The main argument of this thesis is that postcolonial Bildungsromane reflect the changes the colonial and postcolonial nations undergo in their efforts to establish themselves as independent nations and their decolonising struggles to forge their identity as successful postcolonial nations. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how *Sunlight on a Broken Column* captures the historical and sociopolitical transformations during the pre and post-independence periods of India, highlighting how they impact the development of the main protagonists from the feudal Muslim family. I have shown how *Sunlight on a Broken Column* adds value to the genre of Bildungsroman by presenting the story of Laila's struggle for personal emancipation in the backdrop India's fight for independence from the British, expanding it to include doubling, in the form of Laila's cousin Zahra and incorporating multiple perspectives of other women associated with Laila such as her aunts, her friends and her servants. I have drawn attention to Attia Hosain representation of Laila's joint family as the microcosm of the nation, highlighting how the disharmony experienced in the family and the eventual dispersal of the family members reflect events unfolding in the public sphere during the period leading to independence and Partition of the country.

I have highlighted that Laila's development trajectory mainly follows the female growth pattern typical of a feminist Bildungsroman that adapts the linear narrative structure while combining growth that results from inward voyage that is typical of the novel of awakening. Tracing Laila's childhood and girlhood, shaped by religious beliefs and traditions and customs of the feudal Muslim household, I have highlighted how English education, an aspect of colonial modernity, empowers Laila to think independently and assert her individuality despite the cultural alienation it causes. I have argued that Hosain embraces features of the historical novel and autobiography to present the lifestyle of the Muslim feudal community in the late colonial period and bring out the transformation the feudal system undergoes. The novel's inclusion of stories of multiple characters, especially women, I have suggested brings out the interconnected nature of the lives of the citizens in a collectivist culture. I have pointed out that as a result of the novel's multiplicity of perspectives, the autobiographical mode used is more collectivist than individualistic. Even though Laila's coming-of-age narrative lacks teleology that is associated with the traditional Bildungsroman since the novel has an open ending, Laila's proposed union with Asad upon her return from self-exile can be viewed with cautious optimism. I have suggested that the ending that is

hopeful underscores that self-formation of females is possible even though it can be delayed and how Hosain's use of the social realist mode in the novel helps to bring this out. In the next chapter, I discuss *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur which also focuses on the impact of political events and sociocultural changes in the pre and post-independence periods of India on the domestic sphere and how this influences three generations of women. While English education alienates Laila and causes anxiety in her extended family, in *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati, from the second generation, acquires further education which causes anxiety in her parents, who link her rebellious behaviour with her education.

Chapter Two

Difficult Daughters - The Battle Not To Be My Mother

Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* was published in 1998, some seven years after she began work on it. The novel is set mainly in Punjab, northern India, in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore (which was part of undivided Punjab province before the Partition of India in 1947). It covers a period of about fifty years, beginning in the 1930s and stretching till the 1980s, but the focus is on the period between 1935 and 1947. In her interviews, Manju Kapur has shared that several years were spent on conducting research on India's past in the 1930s and 1940s in order to render the social and political milieu of the pre-independence period and Partition of India realistically. Manju Kapur also talks about the difficulty she faced in getting the novel published and the number of revisions the book had to undergo before it was finally published by Faber and Faber. Despite the delays faced, *Difficult Daughters* has been a great success for Manju Kapur, bagging the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Eurasia Section)¹. It has also been translated into European languages such as Spanish besides Indian languages such as Marathi.

Virmati, the main protagonist of *Difficult Daughters*, grows up in a traditional Punjabi Hindu family in Amritsar in colonial India during the tumultuous pre-independence period. Virmati's life story as a rebellious young woman who fought for her personal freedom and space is reconstructed by her daughter, Ida, in her effort to understand her late mother. The upper middle-class Arya Samaj² joint family that Virmati belongs to is headed by her grandfather. Virmati's father and his brother are expected to continue the affluent family's jewellery and trading businesses while the daughters-in-law are expected to fill the house with children in this orthodox family. As the eldest daughter of a family of eleven children, Virmati

¹ Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar in 1948 to an Arya Samaj family. After the success of *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur had gone on to write five more novels and edit an anthology titled *Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves* which includes an essay on her own writing. *Married Woman* (2002), set in the backdrop of the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, and *The Immigrant* (2008), that narrates the story of Nina who marries a Canadian immigrant, are Manju Kapur's widely discussed novels other than *Difficult Daughters*.

² In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many social reform movements advocated female education to improve the condition of women. Arya Samaj movement was a Hindu reform movement that was founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. It promoted monotheism by discouraging idolatry worship. Education of women was an important agenda for Arya Samaj movement since it used education to counter social taboos and problematic social traditions such as child marriage and ill treatment of widows.

takes on the nurturing role that is encouraged of female children, becoming a surrogate mother to her younger siblings since her mother, Kasturi is overwhelmed by her familial duties and motherhood. Kasturi attempts to socialise Virmati to accept her role as a traditional woman and train her in domestic chores for her future married life just as her own mother had done especially since an arranged marriage has been planned for Virmati with Indrajeet, a canal engineer from an Arya Samaj family. When Virmati meets her cousin Shakuntala, who is a confident career woman, she becomes aware that it is possible to something other than a wife, so she aspires to study in Lahore and become a teacher. However, Virmati's plans are disrupted when she becomes entangled with her neighbour, Professor Harish, who is already married; Virmati is punished and confined by her family when her relationship with Harish is discovered. When Virmati finally goes to Lahore to study, hoping to make a fresh start, Harish hunts her down and begins a full-fledged affair with her. While Harish enjoys the best of both worlds, Virmati chases after him to marry her, especially after she undergoes a secret abortion. Although Virmati wants to emulate her cousin, Shakuntala and her roommate, Swarna Lata, women who are independent and politically active, she lacks a genuine interest in politics and is too distracted by her illicit relationship. Five years of waiting and Harish marries Virmati but her life is miserable because she is ostracised by her own family and hated by Harish's first family and has to fight for her space in her matrimonial home with Harish's first wife Ganga. Virmati lives a bitter life even though she succeeds in having Harish to herself when Ganga and her children are packed off to Kanpur for safety reasons during the pre-Partition period which witnessed communal clashes and riots. Virmati is reconciled with her family, and she gives birth to her daughter, Ida, during this period when India attains its independence and is partitioned into two nation states. The relationship between Virmati and Ida is problematic and Virmati refuses to talk about her past in her lifetime and hence Ida tries to learn about her mother after her death. Unlike Virmati, Ida seems freer after leaving her marriage with Prabhakar, who had forced her to undergo an abortion, but is nevertheless concerned about her marginalised status as a divorcee without children.

The present time in the narrative of *Difficult Daughters* is the 1980s and Virmati's daughter, Ida, frames the novel with her presence in the opening and the epilogue and her first-person interjections are found intermittently five times in the novel. Ida attempts to find out why her late mother was "silent, brisk and bad-tempered" (2) by talking to her mother's extended family and friends and visiting places where her mother had spent her time. The bulk of the novel is presented using a third person omniscient narrator, going back to the 1930s and

1940s to present Virmati's childhood, girlhood, and young adulthood and even further back to 1904 to present Virmati's mother, Kasturi's growing years briefly. However, the focus is on presenting Virmati's late teenage years and early twenties from 1935 to 1947 when she is conflicted by her desire to attain freedom through education, her family's pressure on her to settle for an arranged marriage and her obsession with wanting to marry her lover, the married professor. Thus, the narrative painstakingly presents Virmati's meandering life story, how she breaks off her relationship with Harish several times only to resume it when he forces himself back into her life and her long wait to be married to him. This lethargy of repetitive cycle of short periods of autonomy that alternate with domination and exploitation is a case of the content of the novel impacting the structure and length of the novel. The going back and forth in time disrupts a linear narrative structure, reinforcing the complex and problematic nature of Virmati's journey. The novel is two hundred and eighty pages long, but the font size is considerably small and the spacing between lines is short, indicating that the novel is much longer than what has been fitted into the compact 1998 paperback edition used in this study.

Even though women like Shakuntala and Swarna Lata are presented as being educated, liberated, and having freedom of movement because of colonial modernity and educational reforms that advocated female education in that period, Manju Kapur highlights that in the 1930s and early 1940s women were still controlled in their movement and travel by orthodox families. While segregation of the sexes is not observed, women travelling unchaperoned is unacceptable in this period. This can be seen in the case of Virmati who is accompanied by a servant to her school and how her mother accompanies her during her first trip to Lahore. In the 1930s and 1940s, the nationalistic struggle for independence from the British gained momentum even as tension between the different religious and political groups continue to exist. Several national crises took place in the forties such as the Bengal famine from 1943 to 1944 and inflation and increased cost of living and food prices resulting from India's support of the British during World War II that affected the colony's economy. When the talk of a separate country for Muslims gained force in the early forties, the rift between Muslims and Hindus widened and communal riots and killings began taking place in various states from August 1946 till independence and Partition in August 1947. Bengal and Punjab were the most affected provinces because of the high percentage of Muslims who lived there. In *Difficult Daughters*, independence struggle, and the impending Partition form the immediate setting while World War II looms in the distant backdrop.

Difficult Daughters has been described as a Partition novel, domestic novel, family memoir, family saga, feminist novel, semi-autobiographical novel and historical novel. While some critics mention the Bildungsroman genre when discussing Virmati's coming-of-age story, the references tend to be cursory with no acknowledgement of the author's postcolonising of the genre. For example, Elisabetta Marino states that *Difficult Daughters* is a female Bildungsroman since it "describes Virmati's progress from childhood to adulthood" (16) but does not delve into Manju Kapur's use of the genre's conventions. Elisabetta Marino acknowledges postcolonial writers' use of the genre to allegorise the development of the nation in the protagonist's growth and moves on to foreground the parallels between Virmati's life that is full of struggles and the nation's fight for independence. In this chapter, I read *Difficult Daughters* as a feminist Bildungsroman that also exhibits features of the historical novel, family memoir, the testimonial novel and the epistolary novel.

Although written in the period categorised as the post 1980s period or post Rushdie period, where postmodernist novels were in fashion and the use of magic realism was popular, *Difficult Daughters* published in 1998 uses the social realist mode. Despite the perception that realist form is limiting and outdated some postcolonial writers still retain a realist form which is complex and may sometimes include disjunctures. Ulka Anjaria argues that authors use realism to discuss complex political subjectivities who attempt to reconceive themselves and their nation as they evolve (*Realism* 28). Although Anjaria's texts selected for discussion were mainly published from the 1930s to the 1950s, I suggest that her observation is relevant to texts published in the later part of twentieth century. I propose that in *Difficult Daughters* the social realist mode is significant in recreating the sociocultural context of the novel's setting and historical events that are important in shaping subjectivities. The realist form used brings out the new Indian woman, embodied in the figures of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, as female subjectivities who are able reimagine themselves as educated working women who are liberated and politically active but also traditional.

I had argued in the Introduction that women writers appropriating the Bildungsroman genre strive to portray the problematic coming-of-age stories of female protagonists and other women associated with them in a colonial or postcolonial world that was transitioning. In this chapter, I examine how Manju Kapur links the family history of three generations of women with national history of India that unfolds in the form of nationalistic struggles, Partition, and its chaotic aftermath, using the family as a microcosm of the nation. Although the focus of the novel is on Virmati from the second generation, the inclusion of Virmati's mother, Kasturi, and

Virmati's daughter, Ida, to present the lives of women from three successive generations can be seen in relation to how novels portraying female growth "revise the conception of protagonist" (Abel et. al., 12) by using more than one hero, tripling in this case, instead of the single hero that is typical of novels tracing male development. I suggest that while the tripling reinforces the interconnected nature of the women from three generations, inclusion of other women associated with the main characters such as Shakuntala and Swarn Lata add to the multiplicity of women's stories and voices in the novel³.

In the process of revising the traditional Bildungsroman to present the coming-of-age story of Virmati, the main protagonist from the second generation and the lives of three generations of women, Kasturi, Virmati and Ida, along with the stories of their extended family and friends, Manju Kapur engages in conversation with the historical novel, the family memoir, and the testimonial novel, creating a unique postcolonial Bildungsroman. The novel begins in the 1930s and ends in the 1980s but the focus is from 1935 to 1947, the late colonial period leading up to independence and Partition of India. The events in the public sphere leading to independence form the backdrop at the start of the novel when Virmati's meandering life takes center stage but as the narrative progresses, historical and sociopolitical transformations take on more significance and the novel assumes the features of a historical novel. Riots and unrest preceding Partition and the chaotic aftermath of Partition are given prominence to highlight how they impact the state of Punjab, specifically the city of Amritsar. I argue that by incorporating features of the historical novel and the family memoir, Manju Kapur brings out the intersection of family history of three generations of women and national history, in the form of historical and political events that take place during that period, to reinforce how the two histories shape the lives of women.

Ida, of the third generation, recreates the lives of three generations of women when she embarks on a mission to learn more about her deceased mother's life. Manju Kapur incorporates the autobiographical mode by allowing Ida to frame the narrative with her first-person perspective and intermittent interjections as she constructs her family memoir,

³ Unlike Attia Hosain who goes beyond elite Muslim characters to include female Hindu characters such as Laila's close friend, Sita, and servants from the working class who are an integral part of the elite women's lives, to provide different perspectives of growing up in a tumultuous period, Manju Kapur's main characters are all Hindu and belong to the upper middle class. Martos Hueso suggests that the lack of a "broader social sphere" (164) is a weakness of *Difficult Daughters*. However, in her interview with Alex Tickell, Manju Kapur elaborates on how she tries to represent historical changes in her narratives: "As a novelist, I take a small section of society and develop narratives around it. In order to do this well and convincingly, I often find it necessary to give the history of the various families, as well as the social and political contexts" (347).

consisting of three generations of women. Virmati, whose subjectivity is shaped by the combination of her family history and national history, especially during the period leading up to Indian independence, is unable to rise above the insurmountable challenges she faces to attain self-actualisation despite her initial success at achieving autonomy. It is ironic that she spends the rest of her life being a wife and mother, identities that are closely connected to gendered roles and responsibilities since she had aspired to be defined by her education and career like her cousin Shakuntala.

As was seen in the previous chapter, quite often when postcolonial writers incorporate the autobiographical mode into the Bildungsroman, it is more collectivist than individualistic since they not only portray the story of the main protagonists but also their extended family and other women associated with them. Unlike Virmati, her cousin Shakuntala and her roommate and friend, Swarna Lata, represent the new Indian woman, a woman who makes use of the modernising changes brought about by social reforms to empower herself to become an educated, career woman who is also politically involved. I suggest that Shakuntala and Swarna Lata's success is a result of their ability to effectively negotiate with traditional and modern patriarchies, unlike Virmati who gives up after a series non-conforming acts and escapism. Manju Kapur appears to advocate a form of feminism that involves negotiation rather than blatant rebellion or avoidance in dealing with patriarchy. As such, I argue that Manju Kapur presents the new Indian woman as one who is able to use her subjectivity and agency to enter public space, which is considered masculine, through her higher education, career and political activism by successfully negotiating with patriarchy.

The inclusion of stories of three generations of women and their extended families and friends is not surprising since Bildungsroman by women writers tend to incorporate multiple stories of women. However, what is unexpected in the novel is the presence of a section that can be linked to the testimonial novel. The ending of the novel contains a report like section, that seems out of place, presenting the impact of Partition violence on Amritsar, one of the cities in Punjab that was badly affected by the division of the country. Through this first-hand report, the residents of Amritsar, comprising Virmati's siblings, cousins, and friends, share their experiences and what they had witnessed in their hometown during Partition. This sharing is very much like the oral testimonio that is given by victims of trauma. In the last chapter, we saw how Attia Hosain's difficulty in presenting the unnarratable consequences of Partition impacts the narrative structure causing a disjuncture between the first three parts and the last

part. Manju Kapur, on the other hand, resorts to presenting the indescribable aftermath of Partition chaos and trauma in Amritsar using the confessional form of the testimonio.

Braiding of Family History and National History

In the following section, I examine how one generation of women influences the next generation of women, particularly how family history combines with national history to impact Virmati's life, her family, and her marriage, which in turn has an effect on her daughter, Ida's development. While I acknowledge that Virmati's struggles in her life and her problematic family and marital situations parallel the nation's fight for its independence amidst rising tensions and communal riots, rather than reading Virmati's life as allegorising the nation, I see them as illuminating one another. I begin by addressing the influence of Virmati's family history on her development and the decisions she makes before discussing the impact of the sociopolitical situation of the country and dramatic events that lead to independence and Partition of the country on Virmati's life. I also include a discussion on Manju Kapur's use of the features of the testimonial novel to highlight the impact of Partition on Punjab, specifically how it affected the people of Amritsar.

Personal History

Critics who focus on Manju Kapur's depiction of independence and Partition of India in *Difficult Daughters* tend to highlight the allegorical reading that the novel lends itself to, listing out the ways in which Virmati's struggle for independence and fight for her own space parallels the country's fight for independence from the British and how the divided house symbolises the divided nation. For instance, pointing out that the novel's original title was 'Partition', Martos Hueso argues that Manju Kapur's main aim was to "establish a tight parallelism" (16) between Virmati's fight for her personal freedom and India's struggle for independence rather than a mere portrayal of difficult family relations. It is interesting that Martos Hueso links Virmati's silence about her life in Lahore when questioned by Ida to the silence related to Partition trauma and compares Ida's reconstruction of Virmati's life by visiting Amritsar and Lahore and talking to people who knew her with the documentation of "oral histories of Partition" (17).

Martos Hueso suggests that in Indian novels in English, Indian history is "narrativised as a family history" or Indian history and family history are part of "a multi-layered narrative where the two of them converge" (156). She argues that *Difficult Daughters* uses the domestic

sphere to recreate the history of the nation, like other Partition novels that use the “allegory of the divided household” (158) or link female protagonist with the nation using the mother India trope. While Martos Hueso conducts an allegorical reading that is invited by the parallelism, I am more concerned with how Virmati’s complicated family history combines with national history to shape Virmati’s growth.

I am of the view that just as Virmati’s family history impacts her early development, the social and political situations of that period have repercussions on Virmati, her family and other characters associated with her. After the initial focus on Virmati’s personal life as a young adult caught between her family, her lover, and her education, from 1943 onwards, after Virmati’s marriage, the focus shifts to political issues faced by the country during its fight for independence from the British, in the midst of escalating tension between the different religious groups. I suggest that it is the combination of family history and national history that results in Virmati becoming the woman that she is at the end of the novel. In a brief discussion of *Difficult Daughters*, Priyamvada Gopal succinctly points out that Manju Kapur highlights how family and national histories combine to shape “subjectivities in the present” (148). To illustrate her point, she suggests that Ida revisits Virmati’s early life from childhood through adolescence to adulthood in the pre-independence period to bring out the connection between herself and her mother. Gopal relates Ida’s narration of her mother’s past life as an attempt to explore and understand her own make-up as if to respond to the question “To whom do I owe the woman I have become?” (148) that Audre Lorde asks in her autobiographical novel *Zami*. Ida’s attempts to document her family history not only reconstructs Virmati’s life, highlighting how Virmati’s family, especially her mother, Kasturi, and sociopolitical circumstances influenced her development but also brings about a better understanding of Ida’s own life through her reflections.

Manju Kapur’s backstory to the narrative of *Difficult Daughters* involving three generations of women is illuminating since it reinforces the influence of familial relations in one’s development. In several of her interviews, Manju Kapur has acknowledged the autobiographical resonance in *Difficult Daughters* and how she had been a difficult daughter herself and how her own mother had been an inspiration for the character of Virmati. Manju Kapur has shared that the initial focus of *Difficult Daughters* was the life of a forty-year old divorced woman living alone in contemporary society and how this focus shifted to the stories of that woman’s mother and grandmother when she began to consider the kind of influence that they might have had on her life: “As I wrote about this woman, I felt I needed to know

more about her parental history so I delved into her mother's story, and then her grandmother's, and those got longer and longer, until the mother's life took over. Because I needed to build this [narrative structure] on something familiar, I chose to pin these past histories on my mother and my grandmother" (Tickell 342-3).

Reena Mitra attributes the "love-hate relationship between mother and daughter" to the mother's use of "checks and restraints" (74) to control the daughter, highlighting how this creates tension for Virmati whose "duty is greater" (58) since she is expected to set a good example to her five younger sisters. Reena Mitra labels Virmati's act of trying to control her daughter as "incongruous" (79) since Virmati herself had been a difficult daughter. It is true that Kasturi's control of Virmati creates tension which sometimes escalates to verbal and even physical abuse, as in the time when Virmati's relationship with Harish is discovered. While it may seem incongruous that a mother who had rebelled against restrictions during her youth would want to limit the daughter in the same the way, it needs to be acknowledged that history repeats itself in the way Virmati brings up her daughter; when Virmati eventually takes on the status of a wife, she gradually acquiesces to patriarchal demands. As such, Kasturi-Virmati relationship that is problematic, even though Kasturi's childhood and adolescence in the early 1900s show Kasturi's initial rebellion and Ida's lifelong difficult relationship with Virmati are all interconnected since each woman from the three generations has been a difficult daughter in her youth especially to her mother. However, when she has her own daughter, she repeats her mother's controlling acts, although she swears not to be like her mother, creating another difficult daughter in the process. Manzoor Wani observes that "every new generation seeks to defy its predecessors, and fight against anxiety of influence, Virmati challenged Kasturi's ideology, Ida could not accept Virmati's" (177). His suggestion that *Difficult Daughters* "weaves an inextricable interdependence of fates" (178) links the conflict between mothers and daughters with rebellion of daughters and the generation gap between the older and younger generations. The novel also seems to hint that when women grow older, they collude with patriarchy because of the values that had been indoctrinated in them over the years.

Using a gender lens to read *Difficult Daughters* reveals how women's identities are tied to their roles and responsibilities and how women are metonymically linked to domesticity and how this contrasts with men's identity and their role as the breadwinner which are linked to the outer world and public sphere. When women move away from prescribed roles that keep them within the domestic realm, they are seen as disobedient and difficult daughters. With the exception of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* that depicts women in the feudal family, who are

dependent on their servants for domestic support, domestic chores play a vital role in defining women in all the other novels considered in this study and the kitchen becomes a politically charged space in these novels. Although the feudal Muslim women in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* do not engage in household chores, one feminine activity that Zahra engages in is sewing. In all the other novels, women's sense of self is closely tied to their nurturing role and their responsibilities in the domestic arena and as such, women in these texts continuously engage themselves in cooking, cleaning, serving, washing and sewing since they have learnt that it is these duties that define them as women.

Mothers take it upon themselves to socialise their daughters on gendered roles and responsibilities and impart the importance of marriage, children, and mastering kitchen work through intergenerational teaching. Kasturi's attempts to be independent are nipped in the bud and she is successfully socialised to take on a submissive role. In her five years of formal schooling in the early 1900s Kasturi learns "reading, writing, balancing household accounts and sewing" and is always reminded that "marriage was her destiny" (62) and that asking questions or asserting herself would not be tolerated. After graduation from school at twelve, Kasturi's mother drills her at home with home economics skills of cooking, stitching and needlework. Kasturi's training by her mother detailed here underscores the link between women's identity and domesticity and marriage. Just as her own mother had trained her to ensure that she would please her in-laws, Kasturi tries to prepare Virmati for her future married life. As the eldest daughter in the family, Virmati's life is planned, and she is expected to get married at the age of eighteen when she completes her FA. Kasturi expects Virmati to marry and have children, like what she has been doing, filling the house with children to fulfil her in-laws' expectations⁴.

Virmati's family's plans, however, are disrupted when Virmati meets her unmarried cousin, Shakuntala, who has a MSc in Chemistry and teaches in Lahore, and realises it is "possible to be something other than a wife" (19). While the prospect of marriage after her degree sounded exciting to a thirteen-year-old Virmati who has been socially conditioned that

⁴ When Kasturi conceives for the eleventh time she desperately wishes for a miscarriage and even attempts to abort the foetus with the help of her mid-wife. Her exclamation "I will die if I have another child" (8) is resonant of the character Good News in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), who commits suicide by hanging on the fan while full term since she is unable to bear the "arithmetical progression of babies" (*Shame* 251) she conceives because her husband forbids her from using birth control. Some critics such as Martos Hueso have linked Kasturi's fecundity with the trope of Mother India (159) in their allegorical reading of *Difficult Daughters*, just as how Good News is linked to populous Pakistan in allegorical readings. Rather than relating Kasturi with the trope of Mother India, I link her fertility to the teachings of the Arya Samaj movement which emphasises the reproductive capacity of women. Dayananda Saraswati's teachings reinforced that motherhood was the sole purpose of women and in normal marriages women were expected to produce ten children (Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid 27)

marriage was the ultimate goal in a girl's life, Virmati who is seventeen now begins to view it differently after meeting Shakuntala. Even though Virmati does not explicitly say that she wants to be different from her mother, unlike Ida who begins the novel with her confrontational statement, "The only thing I had wanted was not to be like mother" (1), Virmati spontaneously tells Shakuntala "I want to be like you" when Shakuntala shares how she and her group of friends in Lahore "travel, entertain ourselves, in the evenings, follow each other's work, read papers, attend seminars" (17). It is obvious that Virmati's fascination with Shakuntala's independent and glamorous life sows the "seeds of aspirations" (19) in her and she vows to be more serious about her education: "Maybe here was the clue to her unhappiness. It was useless looking for answers inside the house. One had to look outside. To education, freedom, and the bright lights of Lahore" (17).

Even though Virmati makes conscious efforts to be different from her mother and move away from the drudgery and confinement of domestic life, Kasturi's excessive concern for Virmati's marriage sub-consciously pushes Virmati to consider marriage as the greatest milestone for a woman and this explains Virmati's obsession with chasing Harish for a commitment. As a second wife to Harish who dominates her, Virmati moves from one form of patriarchy to another, becoming entrenched in gender-based norms and is unable to see how her efforts to control Ida set her off in the opposite direction, making her a rebel. While Reena Mitra is right in pointing out that Kasturi, Virmati and Ida's predicament is "a braided synthesis of the complex social context, family attitudes and the relationship with the man in each one's life" (79), what appears to be missing in her reading is the impact that one generation of women has on the next generation and how years of social conditioning on gender roles and responsibilities are difficult to discard.

Unlike Virmati, the first of eleven children, Ida, an only child, feels suffocated by her mother who began "tightening her reigns" (279) as she grew older. Virmati's high expectations of Ida to excel academically and please her father always, result in Ida feeling that she could never be good enough even though she tried her best to be a model daughter. Ida recollects Virmati's attempts to bring her up as a daughter who conformed to gender expectations: "When I grew up I was very careful to tailor my needs to what I knew I could get. That is my female inheritance. That is what she tried to give me. Adjust, compromise, adapt" (256). Virmati, who had defied patriarchy in her time, rebelling against Kasturi who was bent on preparing her for marriage and motherhood and thwart her aspiration for further studies, engages in acts that curtail Ida's freedom.

Kasturi's socialisation of Virmati has a long-lasting effect on Virmati and the impact of the indoctrination of patriarchal values through intergenerational teaching is observed even in women who are passionate about their feminist views when they experience regression in their married lives, as will be seen in chapters Five and Six that discuss Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* respectively. Virmati repeats history in the way she tries to bring up Ida, but Ida of the third generation breaks the cycle. Ida is stereotyped by her relatives as a non-conformist like a mother because of her divorce but I suggest that Ida's divorce can be related to her attempt to lead a life devoid of patriarchal domination rather than compromise like her mother.

Virmati is reconciled with her family after years of ostracisation due to exigencies of the situation since Partition chaos and violence make it impossible for the heavily pregnant Virmati to be left without the support of family. Virmati-Ida relationship, on the other hand, does not ameliorate in Virmati's lifetime, prompting Ida to exorcise Virmati's ghost by trying to understand Virmati's life after her death. The novel seems to suggest that the influence of one's mother on one's identity formation and growth cannot be denied no matter how hard one tries to resist. Kasturi's obsession with marriage for her daughter influences Virmati who is unable to shake off the social conditioning that a woman's heaven is her own home with her husband and children. Thus, Virmati's journey towards self-actualisation is thwarted and she never blossoms to her full potential, wilting away after sporadic episodes of assertive behaviour.

National History

As mentioned earlier, the depiction of the politically charged landscape takes over the narrative in the later part of the novel and we are presented with how transformations in the public sphere in the form of political events unfolding in the country enter the domestic sphere, impacting Virmati, her family and her married life with Harish. During the first three years of her marriage from 1943 - 1946, Virmati undergoes several traumatic experiences, namely, her father's death in a communal riot followed by her grandfather's demise, ostracisation by her family, a miscarriage, and constant fights with Ganga. Some of the events are directly linked to events unfolding in the public sphere and even parallel them. Although the war ended in 1945, India's economy continued to suffer, causing an inflation resulting from India's support of Britain in World War II. Communal riots and killing become more rampant in the year leading to independence with Bengal and Punjab bearing the brunt.

Observing the important link between historical novels and the realist form, Hamish Dalley suggests that postcolonial criticism tends to undermine the realist form, favouring anti-realist techniques, in its re-evaluation of the significance of realism and how this downplays the important role that realism plays in historical novels in relation to postcolonial authors' commitment to historical "plausibility" (52). In *Difficult Daughters*, although historical personages are not included, the politically charged atmosphere of the late colonial period is accentuated with constant references to Ghandi's non-violent protests and demonstrations against the British and the dynamic atmosphere in Lahore, especially in the university campus where students are engaged in political activism. Furthermore, a palpable sense of history is felt with the use of the social realist mode that underscores the mounting tension, anxiety and fear in Amritsar and Lahore as the date of Partition of India nears.

Virmati's complete ostracisation by her family and her final reunion with her family are a result of political events played out in the public sphere that impact the domestic sphere. Virmati, shunned by her family when she becomes Harish's second wife, is ostracised by her family when her father Suraj Prakash is killed in a communal riot. It is December 1943, the pre-independence period when the tension between Hindus and Muslims was beginning to escalate with the talk of Pakistan, a separate country for the Muslims. Suraj Prakash does become a broken man after Virmati's secret marriage, but his death is a result of the injury he sustains during an episode of communal violence. However, Kasturi blames Virmati for her father's death.

How the events in the public sphere determine the actions and life-changing decisions of the characters is underlined when the novel shifts its attention to the mounting tensions between religious groups and eruption of riots in response to the impending Partition of the nation. Virmati, who pursues her MA in Lahore, using it as an escape route from the thorny bigamous household in Amritsar, is forced to return home when Lahore experiences political unrest. The Great Calcutta killing that happens in Bengal in August 1946 has Virmati fearing for the safety of her own state Punjab⁵: "Bengal and Punjab, the two states that the Hindus and the Muslims were going to fight over. If this happened in Bengal, could Punjab be far behind?" (265). When the tensed socio-political situation experienced in other cities spreads to Amritsar, and imminent threats are felt at home, Harish sends his family to Kanpur for safety reasons.

⁵ Referred to as the twin cities and sister cities, Amritsar and Lahore, separated by thirty-one miles, were the cultural and commercial hub of undivided Punjab. The cities were well connected, and residents shuttled between them for study, work and trade. With Partition, Lahore was awarded to Pakistan, much to the disappointment of the Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore.

When Virmati returns to Moti Cottage, devoid of Ganga and her children, she is finally able to claim a space for herself as the only wife living with Harish. Observing how the individual history of Virmati is subsumed by national history towards the end of the novel, Reena Mithra rightly points out how Ganga's departure to Kanpur that enables Virmati to reclaim her space in Moti Cottage is a result of "exigencies of the historical situation" (80). Thus, situations of political unrest in Punjab open avenues for Virmati to have her own space in her marital home and "start her life as a housewife" (265) and Harish's separation from Ganga parallels the division of the country.

While the communal riot that kills her father and the resulting grief that kills her grandfather seal the scission between Virmati and her family, it is the violent aftermath of Partition that finally reunites Virmati with her family. The communal tension between the various factions is at its highest when thousands of Hindus and Sikhs attempt to flee the newly formed Pakistan while the Muslims make their way to the newly formed Pakistan. Towards the end of the novel, Manju Kapur presents the repercussions of India's Partition and its impact on the state of Punjab, specifically, the city of Amritsar⁶: "Burning, burning, Amritsar was burning. Every night, for days and days, the sky was red, we could smell the smoke all the time" (269). It is during this horrific and chaotic post-Partition period that Kasturi reconciles with Virmati, sending for when there is fear of an imminent attack in their neighbourhood: "The times demanded from Kasturi that she carry resentment no further. Virmati shifted to her mother's house, where she helped with the cooking along with other women, because the need of the hour was to feed the scores of people who passed through their house fleeing from mobs in Pakistan. No one mentioned the past. The present was too drastic for such luxury" (274). Fortunately for Virmati, Ganga is unable to return to Amritsar even though she tries very hard. When Harish is posted to Delhi and moves there with Virmati, it becomes more difficult for Ganga to return to Harish's life, giving Virmati the space that she had yearned for.

Besides the impact of Partition on Virmati's life, we are also presented with how Virmati's family members and friends coped with the events leading to Partition, the trauma of Partition and its aftermath. This is depicted in Chapter Twenty-Six, close to the end of the novel, which embraces the feature of the testimonio. In the Introduction I had mentioned that Fredric Jameson views the testimonio as a new narrative form created in the third world by reworking the Western genres of autobiography and Bildungsroman which are individualistic,

⁶ Amritsar, with its high population of Muslims, is considered to be one of the worst affected cities in Punjab by the division of the country whereby thousands of buildings were destroyed by fire.

so that collective experiences of people could be shared. The testimonio is a literary tradition that is usually associated with Latin American literature. John Beverly defines the testimonio as “a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience (12-13).

Chapter Twenty-Six of *Difficult Daughters* briefly narrates the riots and killings that take place in the province of Punjab when Punjab Assembly is dissolved before zooming in to describe the happenings in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore. The happenings are presented through Virmati’s friends and family members consisting of her siblings, brother-in-law and cousin who take turns to share their experiences; their sharing takes the form of oral testimony that is usually linked to the speech of trauma victims. Even though it is individuals who are sharing their experiences, it reflects the collective experience of the trauma of Partition of the people of Punjab, specifically the residents of Amritsar who were closely linked to Lahore. For instance, Virmati’s sister, Indumati, shares what she had witnessed during the aftermath of Partition when Hindus were returning to Amritsar which remained part of India while Muslims were making their way to the newly formed Pakistan:

In Amritsar we went wild. Wild with enthusiastic welcomes for those who made it to safety, wild with grief for the loss of a sister city that was steeped in blood. The Mussulmans chopped our people’s heads off, raped our women, cut off their breasts, all of which they claimed was in retaliation for what the Hindus were doing to them.We were all together in those days. The whole city was an open house.....We never forgot those days, but never spoke of them either, because what was there to say? (270).

Even though this chapter disrupts the flow of the narrative, standing out in its report-like structure, it serves the purpose of presenting the collective traumatic experience of the people of Amritsar.

Fredric Jameson quotes from *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (1983), which is considered the “ur-text” of testimonio, to reinforce that although the testimonio is a first-person account of trauma undergone by the subject, it reflects communal experience: “I’d like to stress that it is not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people....The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people” (as qtd. in Jameson 185). In the last chapter, we saw how Part Four of *Sunlight on Broken Column* that is narrated out of sequence

disrupts the linear narrative adopted in the first three parts brings out the impact of Partition on Laila, her family, friends and others associated with her through Laila's reminiscence of the past. Manju Kapur, on the other hand, resorts to narrating the indescribable through personal testimonies of seven characters who talk about the impact of Partition on their family and friends, the atrocities and killings they had witnessed and how Amritsar became a border town with refugee camps serving the thousands who returned from the newly formed Pakistan.

While the narration of Virmati's story ends with the Partition of India, having covered some twelve significant years of her life, Ida's life that begins in 1947 is only presented in the beginning of the novel, in the epilogue and in five interjections in the novel. Ida's birth in 1947 around the time of India's independence and Partition invites another national allegorical reading especially since her name is short of two alphabets for the word India. Harish chooses the name Ida after rejecting Virmati's suggestion to name the child Barathi, which is the feminine version of Bharat, a Sanskrit term by which India was known historically. If Virmati's personal quest for freedom paralleled the colony's struggle for self-government, Ida's complicated life could be seen as paralleling the postcolonial nation's endeavour to decolonise itself from long-lasting colonial legacies.

Ida's visit to Amritsar after Virmati's death gives a glimpse of life in Punjab in a post-independent India in the 1980s. Manju Kapur's picturisation of Amritsar in this period as "a small city, with big bombings and killings" (48) draws attention to how it is home to occasional outburst of clashes. What stands out here is how the violence echoes Partition chaos and killings, reinforcing how past political history continues to impinge on the present. This link is aptly captured by Rajender Kaur who suggests that incidents in Amritsar reflect the general unrest in contemporary India and symbolise "the failure of the nationalist project, and of the arbitrary division of the country on religious lines" (14). In *Night Dancer* discussed in Chapter Five and *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in Chapter Six, we also see how the past, especially British colonial legacies with their divide and rule policy and how arbitrary boundary drawn for administrative convenience continue to contribute to occasional ethnic riots and violence in contemporary Nigeria.

Ida, from the third generation, narrates in the first-person, not only framing the novel but also engages with her interjections, giving the Bildungsroman an autobiographical quality. Some critics have described Virmati as a subaltern because Ida is the one who exhibits voice and agency with her first-person perspective. It is true that Ida is more assertive than Virmati

but Virmati rebels and speaks up, but it is a case of not being heard by her family members. As such, to categorise Virmati as a subaltern negates all the efforts that she makes to achieve self-actualisation and the intermittent periods of freedom that she enjoys.

Ida's agency can be seen in her act of documenting her family history by reconstructing her mother's life story. Ida's painful exercise of trying to understand her mother better and free herself from her mother's dominance becomes a crucial step in attaining maturity. Reconciling with the mother or at least coming to terms with the difficult mother-daughter relation is considered a necessary step for the daughter to move forward in her life. At the end of the novel, Ida is confident that she can live her life without being threatened by her mother's ghost. Furthermore, by divorcing her husband, Ida also rejects her gendered role as a subordinate female and separates herself from an environment that is defined by male-norms. Even though troubled by her 'husbandless and childless' (279) status, she attempts to move on with her life by consciously erasing her mother's influence on her.

The novel closes with Ida having understood her mother's life and having successfully composed the family memoir. Having completed the task that she had set out for herself, Ida is ready to move to the next stage in her life. Ida's reflexivity and her acceptance of her past indicate that she could lead a happier life, suggesting that the Bildungsroman genre's foundational premise of possibility of self-formation is not overturned. Furthermore, this ending also suggests that Ida may reintegrate into society in future albeit in her own terms or may reach some sort of "accommodation" with her society, to use Anupama Jain's words, as opposed to Virmati whose reintegration into society makes her unhappy and embittered.

Virmati's Quest for Self-Identity and Search for Her Own Space

In this section, I examine Virmati's opportunities for growth and obstacles she must overcome in her search for freedom by considering how various axes such as gender, tradition, class, religion, ethnicity, family, colonialism, and nation intersect and influence Virmati's development. I pay particular attention to how Virmati's further education, employment, her illicit relationship with Harish and her subsequent status as a second wife influence her quest for self-discovery and fulfilment. I examine the various journeys that Virmati undertakes and how the different spaces she inhabits denote different ideologies and discuss why Virmati fails to exploit her education and career opportunities to achieve autonomy.

Virmati's Education

Virmati is one of the few fortunate women who have access not only to basic education but also to further education in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and it is the result of social reforms that advocated female education. While Virmati's Arya Samaj joint family is orthodox, it is progressive enough to provide sufficient education to girls, though in a confined manner. We are told that Virmati's grand uncle was a devoted follower of the teachings of the Arya Samaj founder and Virmati's father obtained his education in an Arya Samaj gurukul.

Examining Kasturi's childhood and her stand on female education allows one to appreciate the reasons behind Virmati's family's anxiety towards Virmati's further education. When Virmati fails her FA examination and attributes it to the home environment that was not conducive, Kasturi dismisses Virmati's complaint about failing: "It hardly made a difference to the real business of her life, which was getting married and looking after her home" (22). Believing that "it is the duty of every girl to get married" (15), Kasturi arranges for Virmati's marriage. When Virmati refused to follow the path that Kasturi had selected for her and insisted on further education in Lahore, after going off in a tangent with her illicit relationship with Harish, Kasturi "grabbed her by the hair and banged her head against the wall", hoping it would "knock some sense" (59) into Virmati.

Kasturi's idea of education for girls is practical, in that, it makes them more marketable for marriage. Although times are changing Virmati's education becomes a contentious subject in the family since Kasturi has fixed notions about female education because of her own social conditioning from childhood. Kasturi begins her education in a mission school in 1904 but is pulled out of school when caught praying to a picture of Christ, emulating her Bengali teacher who had converted⁷. But Kasturi's uncle intervenes and even begins an Arya Samaj school for girls and enrolls Kasturi, promising her that her education will bring her the best groom. Kasturi's family monitors her closely for any signs of aspiration for emancipation as she acquires her education. After graduation from school at twelve, Kasturi's mother drills her at home with home economics skills and "her clandestine activity was reading" (63) and she conducted it at night to avoid being labelled selfish. When Suraj Prakash, an educated and

⁷ Ketu Katrak notes that colonial education in India used the "divide and rule policy" (112) especially along the religious lines. She highlights that the British maintained neutrality in their mission education in India because they were cautious about interfering in the religious practices of the natives and forcing them to convert to Christianity (113). She points out that the first time the British introduced English Literature into the curriculum was in India. They used it to subtly reinforce that Western knowledge and English education were superior to knowledge acquired through mother tongue languages (104).

affluent man, agrees to marry Kasturi because of her education and more people began to show interest in the education of girls, Kasturi's uncle is proud: "He was aware that the cause for which he had done so much, education in Sultanpur, was talked over in many homes after Suraj Prakash had made his visit and won his bride" (61). The story of Kasturi's girlhood presented in this manner enlightens how Kasturi's ideologies are shaped in relation to her successful socialisation to accept her role as a traditional woman who has just enough education to run her family effectively.

Since educated daughters are expected to settle into arranged marriages and only use their education for the benefit of their future families, any act of disobedience or self-assertion of a daughter is attributed to education. Kasturi expresses strong views on how education has affected Shakuntala negatively and is beginning to influence Virmati. "What kind of a learning was it that deprived her of her reason?" (60), Kasturi asks when Virmati refuses to go ahead with her arranged marriage. In contrast to Kasturi who is harsh towards Virmati in conducting her duty as a patriarchal agent, Virmati's grandfather and father are presented as kind men who are never openly harsh with Virmati. These men are credited for their pioneering efforts in promoting female education. However, what needs to be noted here is that the intention behind female education is not emancipation. It is more for the benefit of the family since an educated woman is expected to be a better wife and mother. So, when a female uses her education for her personal development and self-actualisation, she is seen as acting selfishly. As such, Virmati's father also attributes Virmati's disobedience to her education: "After she had been educated, she had gone her own way, changed from the caring, responsible girl she had always been, to a stranger, deaf to reason, threats or pleading" (235-6). Thus, when Virmati tries to use her education to become an autonomous being, she is seen as acting unreasonably and this causes anxiety in her parents. Furthermore, unlike Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, Virmati is unable to negotiate with her parents on her needs and aspirations and this increases the intergenerational conflict.

When Virmati is locked in the godown by her family that questions her years of education, Harish writes to her proclaiming that "one of the benefits of education is that it teaches us to think for ourselves" (102). However, this does not seem to be the case with Virmati. To begin with, Virmati is not the most industrious of students since she engages in rote learning, struggles to pass examinations, and admits to not being clever like Shakuntala. Furthermore, her home environment is not conducive since she plays second mother to her younger siblings. However, seeing Shakuntala with a successful career, Virmati tries harder

and passes her FA examination in her second attempt. Thus, Virmati values education not for its own sake but as a vehicle that can take her to Lahore and provide her freedom. After her initial rebellion, resistance, and assertion, Virmati becomes compliant, accepting her lot even though embittered in the process. Education does not help her to become a thinking individual who can seek her own freedom and live life according to her own terms. Pleasing Harish becomes paramount, and she relies on Harish as her guide for everything in her life. Harish is the one who chooses Philosophy as her course for her MA, and she pursues it without much enthusiasm. Instead of enabling her to be something other than a wife, education disempowers⁸ her as she uses it to escape from an arranged marriage initially and the difficult predicament of a second wife later. In contrast, we saw in the last chapter how Laila becomes empowered by her English education and vast reading, becoming a thinking individual who has her own views and opinions and who chooses her own marriage partner, even though she is alienated from her family as a result.

As discussed in Chapter One, even if the intention behind female education was not to empower women, it was an opportunity that women could use to seek self-fulfilment even as it required ample negotiations with patriarchy or its agents who were anxious about its emancipatory potentials. But Virmati fails to exploit education fully to attain freedom by emulating role models who were easily available in the form of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata. I suggest that it is Virmati's obsession with marriage that becomes a barrier to her attainment of freedom. Her obsession is the result of her mother's socialisation of her and society's view of unmarried women as incomplete beings. Society's expectations of women educated or otherwise, to be married by a certain age and the need to sanction man-woman relationship with marriage so that it is not considered illicit, drive Virmati to pursue the evasive Harish to make a formal commitment. Jaspal Kaur asks a profound question: "If social, economic and structural changes do not occur, what good is an education for the oppressed?" (26). This question prompts one to consider the following scenario: If it had not been ingrained by her family and society that marriage is of utmost importance in a female's life, would Virmati have

⁸ Ketu Katrak discusses how female education is paradoxical since it empowers and liberates females as well as alienates adolescent protagonists, causing anxiety in their families. Katrak uses protagonists such as Laila of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (discussed in Chapter One), Lalitha of *Two Virgins* (discussed in Chapter Three) and Tambudzai and Nyasha of *Nervous Conditions* when examining the impact of English education on women in the novels by third world women writers (121-2). It cannot be denied that Virmati's higher education causes great anxiety in her family but her inability to fully exploit education to liberate herself explains Katrak's exclusion of Virmati of *Difficult Daughters* in her discussion.

been successful in severing ties with Harish, who was exploiting her, and focus on liberating herself? The answer would be yes. Thus, the influence of family and society in persuading women to accept marriage as their ultimate choice in life cannot be overstated.

Besides marriage, the novel draws attention to how motherhood is glorified, especially how the birth of male children elevates the status of women. This can be seen in the benefits that Kasturi enjoys and the high status she is accorded in the joint family for filling the house with children, much to her sister-in-law's envy. Ganga, who is distressed by Harish's second marriage to Virmati, feels smug and victorious when she gives birth to a son, believing her position in the bigamous household has been strengthened. Virmati's mother-in-law who tended to ignore Virmati begins to show much care and concern when Virmati is expecting because she was carrying the family's heir. Through these scenes Manju Kapur reveals the importance given to motherhood in a patriarchal society and how women are rewarded for their reproductive capacity.

The social conditioning that a woman is considered incomplete until she marries, and bears children also reverberates in Ida's life. While Ida is assertive and appears much freer than her mother or grandmother had ever been, she too appears to suffer from the anxiety of being a divorcee without children. Viewed as incomplete and pitiful by her family and society, a tinge of self-pity can be observed in Ida's actions and words: "I was nothing, husbandless, childless. I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society" (279). So, the question that the novel seems to put forward is that if society does not change, it is possible for women to have total freedom?

Journey Motif and Space

In the next section, I examine Manju Kapur's use of the journey motif and how she denotes different spaces with different ideologies in the novel. The first journey that Virmati makes from her confining home in Amritsar to a cottage in the mountains in Dalhousie, when she accompanies her mother to recuperate from her eleventh pregnancy, is a significant one because it brings about an awakening to Virmati's limitations. Virmati is seventeen and her awakening through her cousin Shakuntala, a potential role model, can be seen in relation to the first of the four stages that a female protagonist undergoes in her journey to attain freedom as proposed by Ogaga Okuyade⁹.

⁹ Ogaga Okuyade observes a four-stage journey towards self-discovery in his analysis of female Bildungsroman by Nigerian writers. The first stage is the stage of awakening, "when the character becomes aware that her condition of life is a limitation to her aspiration to a better life". Next, with the help of a female community,

Virmati's first journey from Amritsar to Lahore at the age of nineteen to do her teacher training can be compared to the first journey that the male protagonist of the traditional Bildungsroman undertakes to learn about the ways of the world, usually moving from a provincial town to a city, as suggested by Jerome Buckley (17-18). It can also be viewed as moving out of from the static domestic sphere that is typified by the drudgery of household chores to the dynamic public sphere in the outer world, full of potential for Virmati to begin her quest for self-determination. By moving from Amritsar to Lahore, Virmati fulfils the precondition of moving from the private to the public sphere that Rita Felski asserts as necessary for any kind of self-discovery (127). However, Lahore, the place that Virmati aspired to go to discover herself after witnessing Shakuntala's transformation to a glamorous and independent woman by the city, now becomes a place where Virmati can escape from her family's pressures to accept an arranged marriage and recover from the heartbreak of her scandalous relationship with Harish. Even as Virmati uses education as a form of escapism from difficult situations she faces in Amritsar, she does experience some freedom in Lahore, away from her controlling family and domineering Harish. In Lahore, Virmati burns all of Harish's letters and is determined "to live within a moral code" (113).

This small degree of independence that Virmati acquires, however, is only temporary since Harish hunts her down and initiates a physical relationship with her that imprisons her for the rest of her life. Lahore was a dream and a potential for Virmati to blossom, but she wastes her stay there daydreaming about Harish, while other women like her Swarna Lata are involved in political activism. Virmati's studies are affected when she finds herself in a precarious situation, left to manage an unexpected pregnancy on her own and experience the trauma of a secret abortion during this period.

When Virmati works as a principal in a girls' school in Nahan, Sirmaur, where she is respected for her service, Virmati is busy, happy, free, and financially independent. Christopher Rollason rightly points out that the only time Virmati "achieves the greatest degree

"she gains self-awareness". In the third stage, she "explores her femininity and redefines her identity". Lastly, she "achieves maturity and independence" (145). Okuyade calls to attention how Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Unoma Azuah's *Sky-high Flames* (2005) follow these four-stages in their portrayal of Kambili and Ofunne's journeys towards self-discovery respectively. The awakening that Virmati experiences in Dalhousie is similar to Kambili's awakening in Nsukka in her aunt's house. This first trip that Kambili makes to Nsukka, opens her eyes to the possibility of a life of freedom when she observes her widowed but self-sufficient Aunt Ifeoma and her cousin, Amaka, happy and contented, a vast difference to the fearful life that she and her brother Jaja led under her controlling and violent father in Enugu.

of control over her life” (2) is when she is in Nahan. Rollason stresses how “she attains a near-exemplary level of female autonomy” (2), living in her own house in Nahan. But it must be acknowledged that Virmati continued to communicate with Harish through letters and “felt a sharp pang of longing for the Professor” occasionally and saw her stay in Nahan as “a period of waiting rather than the beginning of a career” (184). When Harish begins to visit Virmati in Nahan despite her protests, it has a disastrous effect on Virmati’s career. A disgraced Virmati is forced to resign from her respectable job when Harish’s clandestine night visit to her house comes to light. Rollason blames Virmati’s inability to remain autonomous to her mistaken belief that “she needs a man” (2). While it cannot be denied that Virmati makes several questionable decisions that alter her life for the worse, I see this failure as a result of Harish forcing himself onto Virmati, using her weakness to manipulate her, with no consideration for her respectable career, even though he himself is an academician. Uma Parameswaran is right to point out that Harish’s behaviour would be termed “sexual harassment” in the contemporary world (393). Virmati refuses vehemently to allow Harish into the house until he told her upright where she stood, but eventually succumbs to the sexual power he has over her: “This was the first time they had spent the whole night together.....Virmati lived that night as though there was no tomorrow.....Intermittently waking, she felt her year at Nahan melt away into nothingness” (190). Quite unexpectedly, several passages like this describing the erotic relationship between Virmati and Harish appear in the novel, evoking elements of popular romance fiction. This was noted in relation to the love relationship between Laila and Ameer in the last chapter. The presence of features of romance fiction will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four that deal with adolescent girls with burgeoning sexuality, engaging in fantasies of fulfilling romantic relationships.

Virmati shuttles between Amritsar and Lahore when she is sent to Lahore to do her MA. When Virmati becomes Harish’s second wife and lives in Moti Cottage, Harish tries to enjoy the best of both worlds, an excellent housekeeper in Ganga and a young and passionate lover in Virmati but the rivalry between the co-wives escalates, making the situation unbearable. Furthermore, Virmati becomes “silent and withdrawn” after losing her father and grandfather and experiencing a miscarriage and Harish decides to send Virmati to Lahore for further education to “improve her” (247). Virmati once again uses education to escape from the unbearable situation, refusing to return to Amritsar during holidays, preferring Harish to visit her even though Harish complains about maintaining two households during a period of inflation. Although Virmati is not as happy as she was in Lahore when she did her BT, she is

still relieved to be away from her rival, Ganga, and Moti Cottage that has a depressing effect on her. Virmati is happier staying in her friend, Leela's house in Lahore and spending time with Leela's daughters rather than return to Amritsar for her summer holidays.

Rajender Kaur, who focusses on Manju Kapur's representation of the psycho-geography of Punjab, foregrounds the importance the novel gives to "the politics of space" (2) and points out how Amritsar and Lahore symbolise opposite things. She associates Lahore with the freedom it provides Virmati, away from the confining environment in the domestic sphere in her natal and marital homes: "Repeatedly referred to as the "fabled city" in the text, Lahore with its bustling bazaars, many institutions of higher learning, its imposing monuments and architecture, and its famed gardens, is presented as a cosmopolitan literary city, the cultural heart of Punjab, in contrast to the more bucolic Amritsar, cloistered with the weight of custom and tradition" (10). Virmati's happier moments in life are when she is in Lahore and her refusal to talk about Lahore when Ida probes her indicates Virmati's regret in failing to liberate herself using the opportunities that were available in Lahore.

It is evident that the journeys Virmati makes away from her natal and marital homes provide her freedom but only temporarily. Thus, I attribute Virmati's failure to maintain her autonomy to a lack of a sustained environment devoid of male-domination which can be linked to Rita Felski's argument that "the novel of self-discovery proceeds from the recognition of women's estrangement within a male-defined environment" (124). Unlike Laila in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, discussed in the last chapter, who attains self-knowledge and an autonomous selfhood while spending much time in solitude in the hills, bringing up her daughter as a lone widow, Virmati's liberated self only appears in brief episodes because of Harish's incessant interferences that disrupt her period of separation from a patriarchal environment.

Didactic and Erotic Relationship with Harish

Reena Mitra attributes family and society for Virmati's predicament while Christopher Rollason blames Virmati's family and her husband Harish for the "psychological annihilation of Virmati" (4) besides Virmati's own erratic choices. However, both Mitra and Rollason overlook the influence of erotic love on Virmati's journey towards self-determination. In this section, I examine Virmati's relationship with Harish, to show how the erotic love he inspires in Virmati when he is not didactic, becomes a major obstacle to Virmati's dream of leading an independent life, making her obsessed with marriage and eventually when Harish marries her,

how her status as second wife leads to further ostracisation and stigmatisation by her own family and her in-laws, making Virmati alienated and miserable.

Maria Hueso observes that “desire looms in *Difficult Daughters* charged with all its erotic connotations” and “when Harish and Virmati’s relationship is not didactic, it is overtly sexual” (162). Before discussing the effect of Virmati’s erotic love for Harish, I briefly discuss Harish’s paternalistic attitude towards Virmati and how he influences Virmati who begins to share his admiration of things English. Initially, he lends her English books, then teaches her formally as her professor and later teaches her informally when she becomes his lover and second wife. He teaches her English language, literature and even history when he updates her on World War 11 in his letters. Harish’s conquering of Virmati’s body, mind and heart and his paternalistic attitude towards Virmati reflect the coloniser’s act of civilising the natives. Nadia Ahmad sees Harish as representing a collusion between patriarchy and colonialism, arguing that Harish represents the patriarchal system that exploits Virmati through the mode of colonialism with the use of English language, literature, and English culture (211). Manju Kapur, who makes brief references to the colonisation of Punjab by the British in the nineteenth century, brings out the impact of colonisation on the natives mainly through the character of Harish, the Oxford-returned professor. As a mimic man, Harish represents colonialism as he imparts English education in India, having acquired further education in England and by adopting the ways and culture of the English.

Harish comes across as being romantic in an exaggerated manner, especially in the letters he writes to Virmati that are full of endearments when Virmati is locked in the godown by her family after she refuses to go ahead with the arranged marriage. Elleke Boehmer, rightly points out that Harish “sees Virmati as his Romantic ‘other soul’ and Pygmalion-like tries to remake her in his image” (213). The whole of Chapter Fourteen (twenty-three pages) that is devoted to present the communication between Virmati and Harish through letters is seen as a disjuncture to the flow of the narrative by some critics. However, the sudden introduction of the epistolary novel feature serves a purpose even though it seems out of place, just as the incorporation of the testimonial novel that disrupts the narrative structure serves to bring out the collective trauma of Punjab residents especially the Amritsar community, as discussed earlier. Harish’s style of writing is long-winded, exaggerated, euphemistic and even sounds like waffling at times and it contrasts sharply with Virmati’s writing that is to the point and Virmati’s fiancé’s writing that is rather formal and businesslike. Thus, the letters with their

different use of English language establish the contrasting personalities of Harish, Virmati and her fiancé.

I view the erotic love that Virmati has for Harish as her character flaw, since Harish uses it to manipulate her, melting away all her resolutions to lead an independent life, destroying the self-development that she achieves in his absence. Highlighting “the patterns of subordination and domination” deeply ingrained in heterosexual relations, Rita Felski argues that there must be a separation from such a traditional relation for a female to achieve some form of self-determination (131). Felski asserts that unlike the male hero in the classical Bildungsroman who grows by engaging in love relationships, passionate love relationships can cripple the female protagonist’s efforts to seek an autonomous entity: “Erotic passion, by its very intensity, can sabotage the protagonist’s struggle to strengthen an often precarious sense of independent identity” (131).

In addition to her weakness that is exploited by Harish, I attribute Virmati’s believe that she needs a marriage, rather than the believe that “she needs a man” (2) as suggested by Rollason, to her lapse in autonomy. “In my family there is only marriage for girls” (151) Virmati responds to Swarna Lata who advises her not to wait around for Harish to make a commitment. Virmati’s fixation with marriage increases especially after her abortion in Lahore, as her need to obtain social sanction for her secret and illegitimate relationship with Harish intensifies. Society’s expectation of women to be married by a certain age also adds pressure as the other teachers in Nahan continue to ask Virmati about her marriage, surprised that someone as beautiful and educated as her should remain single.

After five years of waiting, Virmati finally marries Harish and looks forward to “a blissful marriage” where “her husband would be everything to her” (207) but the marriage does not bring Virmati any sense of triumph because she is ostracised by her own family and hated by everyone in Harish’s home. It is ironic when Harish’s mother, Kishori Devi, blames Virmati, justifying to herself that her son was a good person: “How was it his fault if he was caught in the trap of some shameless young Punjabi?” (210). Harish is seen as the victim by his mother, notwithstanding that the circumstance in which Harish is coerced into marriage was orchestrated by Harish’s poet friend, who believed that he was reuniting a pair of lovers.

Although the main opposition from both families to Harish-Virmati marriage is Harish’s status as a married man, the discomfort arising from the inter-ethnic and inter-class aspects of the marriage are hinted. Harish’s family comes from United Provinces (Uttar

Pradesh now) but the ethnic group his family belongs to is not specified, although it is hinted that they may be Brahmins since his mother recites “Sanskrit slokas” (243). Kishori Devi’s displeasure with the inter-ethnic aspect of the marriage surfaces when she smears Virmati by using her Punjabi ethnicity. When Parvati pleads with Kasturi to stop abusing Virmati when she visits the family, Kasturi chases Virmati saying “Let her go to her cheap, dishonoured home! Could we ever stop her? Go” (221). Even though Kasturi was obsessed with getting Virmati a husband, she does not condone this marriage because it is a love marriage and Harish does not belong to their Arya Samaj group or their upper middle-class strata besides the fact that he is a married man.

Pushpa Lata who discusses in detail Virmati’s life as second wife to Harish rightly points out that “after associating with him, she is left with no ordinary options that are socially acceptable; life becomes a perpetual struggle as she becomes a second wife” (199). Virmati, feels ostracised and marginalised and is confined to the dressing area which is converted to her bedroom¹⁰. Although initially guilty about having been unfair to Harish’s family by marrying him, she considers Ganga as her rival later and starts to fight for her own space and rights. Ganga, who takes care of Harish’s every need from feeding him to washing his clothes, is territorial and refuses Virmati entry into the kitchen to cook her own meals: “If Virmati had the bed, Ganga was going to have the house. Even Harish said, ‘Poor thing, you have me, let her have the kitchen.’ Virmati looked at the domain of her kingdom and was forced to be content” (230).

This debate on kitchen versus bedroom exposes two significant aspects; firstly, how Indian women attempt to win their husbands through food and secondly, how cooking and domesticity are linked to their identity as women. Ganga uses her domestic expertise to wield power over the second wife and retain some hold over her husband. In *Difficult Daughters*, activities such as cooking, chopping and grinding are not fillers to show the monotony of

¹⁰ In African novels depicting co-wives, the protagonist is usually the one who is affected when the husband takes another younger wife but in *Difficult Daughters* the protagonist is the one who becomes a second wife. For example, in *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta, the protagonist Nnu Ego has a difficult time getting adjusted to sharing her husband, Nnaife, when he inherits, according to Igbo customs, one of his brother’s wives when his brother dies. Nnu Ego hates Adaku, the junior wife, seeing her “as one of those shameless modern women” (124). In the small house that is cramped, Nnu Ego is forced to witness Nnaife enjoying his conjugal rights behind the curtained bed and Adaku’s exaggerated sounds of pleasure. In Moti Cottage where there is a shortage of space, the dressing room is where Harish and Virmati conduct their conjugal life. But unlike Adaku, Virmati is forced to subdue her sounds during lovemaking as Harish keeps reminding her to be quiet because the rest of the family sleeps within earshot.

kitchen work; they are activities that define women. The kitchen in *Difficult Daughters* comes across as such a lively and vibrant place and women are obsessed with cooking, not just Ganga but also Kasturi and Virmati's sisters. Manju Kapur's description of the kitchen brings out the sounds of chopping, cutting and blending, the aroma of spices and ghee and the taste of mouth-watering food prepared from scratch, appealing to the different senses.

Cooking allows Ganga to empower herself and secure her territory besides providing her a sense of identity and comfort. She derives comfort and reassurance from it and this is evident in how she nonchalantly continues with her cooking, even after learning that Virmati may be attempting suicide. Kuhu Chanana, who examines the representation of female sexuality in the works of Namita Gokhale, Krishna Sobti and Ismat Chughtai, makes a brief but interesting comment on the conflict between Virmati and Ganga: "Cooking food and feeding the husband as a substitute for sex, and viewing the kitchen as a substitute for the bedroom and hence a tool for empowerment, find their manifestations in the works of many female writers, such as *Difficult Daughters*" (167). Thus, Ganga's territorial hold over the kitchen and her acts of sabotage to stop Virmati's access to the kitchen reinforce her attempts to hold on to her status of wife and empower herself.

Kuhu Chanana's observation of the epiphanic moment that Parvati, the protagonist of Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story*, experiences is illuminating: "When the traditional panacea fails to cure the frustrations caused by sexual-starvation, she realizes that the over-glorification of motherhood and tutored pleasures of managing the house are nothing but oppressing tools to regulate and control the all-consuming feminine sexuality" (166). What stands out in Parvati's description of her enlightenment is how women naively believe that domesticity and being a wife and mother gives them meaning and happiness, unaware of how they are patriarchy's means of controlling them. In *Night Dancer*, discussed in Chapter Five, Rapu secures her place in Mike's house through her culinary expertise, and this is in contrast to Ezi who refuses to be identified with domesticity. Similarly, Enitan of *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in Chapter Six rebels against becoming a kitchen martyr. Ezi and Enitan's rejection of normative femininity impacts their marriage; Rapu takes over Ezi's duties and eventually Ezi's role as wife while Enitan's displeasure at being forced to cook, creates dissatisfaction in her relationship with Mike.

After seducing Virmati, Harish leads her on by sowing the idea that the concept of co-wives¹¹ was a socially accepted tradition, only to prolong the illicit relationship by giving her excuses whenever she cornered him to marry her. Virmati fails to realise that by not making a commitment Harish was enjoying the best of both worlds and even after committing, he still wanted the best of both worlds, Virmati in bed and Ganga in kitchen. Thus, Virmati's marriage to Harish can be viewed as a move from the traditional patriarchy of her natal family to the modern patriarchy of her marital family. Virmati attempts to manage her life as a second wife to Harish through "adjustment and compromise" and when they do not work, she tries "non-cooperation" (259) and finally acquiesces, accepting her situation. Surprisingly, Virmati does not try to negotiate to get her way, something that might have worked out better; she also does not teach Ida to negotiate since Ida complains that her mother advised her to "adjust, compromise, adapt" (256). In the next section, I will discuss how Virmati's cousin and roommate, rely on negotiations with patriarchy on their road to achieving authentic selves.

Emergence of A New Indian Woman

I had reinforced earlier that the autobiographic mode used in the novel is more collective than personal since it portrays the stories of three generations of women, their extended family and friends. In this section, I examine the characters of Virmati's cousin Shakuntala and Virmati's roommate and friend Swarna Lata, women who are successful in becoming educated, career women who are independent and politically active. According to Christopher Rollason, Shakuntala and Swarna Lata are "emblematic of the educated, politicised and emancipated woman" (4).

Shakuntala is unmarried, much to her mother's disappointment, but is a confident and dynamic young woman who teaches in a college in Lahore. She is also politically active, taking part in Gandhi's non-violent protests against the British. As mentioned earlier, Virmati becomes so fascinated with Shakuntala's independent lifestyle that she aspires to become like her. Tired of her mother's nagging about her marriage, Shakuntala shares with Virmati her frustrations: "These people don't really understand, Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else" (17). What is brought out in

¹¹ Bigamy was not illegal in India until the Hindu Marriage Act 1955. In the past, kings and rich landlords had practiced polygyny and had many wives and concubines. As for the commoner, bigamous relationships were usually resorted to when the first wife was unable to produce an heir.

Shakuntala's exasperation is that although women have moved out of the domestic sphere and entered the public sphere through education and career and were involved in nationalistic struggle, they are still pressured to conform to traditional expectations of femininity. It is interesting that Manju Kapur chooses the name Shakuntala for Virmati's cousin, recalling the assertive character Shakuntala¹² in the epic Mahabharata, who courageously fights for the rights of her son from King Dushyanta. Shakuntala in Manju Kapur's novel remains unmarried and returns to Amritsar after Partition when it is impossible to live in Lahore anymore. In the next chapter that discusses *Two Virgins*, Kamala Markandaya refers to the movie *Shakuntala*, but it is in the context of evoking dutiful wives who embody traditional Indian womanhood and the debate on society's stand on illegitimate children.

Swarna Lata, Virmati's roommate in Lahore when Virmati pursues her BT, is another accomplished young woman who is active in the academic circle as well as in the political field. While pursuing her MA in Lahore, Swarna Lata also becomes involved in fighting for women's rights. Virmati admires Swarna Lata's assertive behaviour exemplified in the choices she makes and is awed by her talent and passion when Swarna Lata makes a speech at the Punjab Women's Student Conference.

The term 'new Indian woman' is used by scholars to describe modern, educated, and liberated Indian women. Lisa Lau who discusses the new Indian woman in the works of contemporary Indian women writers, paying particular attention to Shashi Deshpande's novels, refers to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's argument that the image of the new Indian woman is gleaned from "the urban, educated, middle-class career woman" (159). I suggest that through the figures of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, Manju Kapur highlights the emergence of the new Indian woman, underscoring that woman benefitted from social reforms that aimed to improve the status of women by advocating female education. Priyamvada Gopal observes that *Difficult Daughters* presents the impact of social reforms and modernity on Hindu women in the pre-independence years when Hindu families were searching for "a new Hindu identity in relation to nation-building and modernity" (148). During the nationalistic fight for independence the leaders were pressured to improve the condition of women to prove to the coloniser that they were ready for self-government.

¹² Shakuntala is the young wife of King Dushyanta who patiently waits for the king to accept her and her son when abandoned by the king in the forest. Shakuntala successfully fights for the rights of her son when the king refuses to acknowledge her and her son when she confronts him many years later.

In Chapter One I had discussed that patriarchy was not monolithic and fixed but flexible and how different ideas of ideal Indian womanhood existed in different periods. During nationalistic struggle women were allowed to become educated and modern even though they were still expected to be traditional. Manju Kapur attributes the success of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata becoming modern liberated women to their ability to negotiate effectively with patriarchy and contrasts it with Virmati's extreme strategies of non-conformity and escapism or avoidance. Shakuntala negotiates with patriarchal constraints and continues with her teaching career and political activism by effectively managing her mother's anxiety about her future as an unmarried woman. Swarna Lata, negotiates with her family to give her two more years to pursue her postgraduate studies in Lahore when they start planning for her marriage after her BA. Swarna Lata uses her time in Lahore to not only to engage in student-centred activities and take part in conferences but also to become politically involved. As such, *Difficult Daughters* seems to suggest that further education and employment can liberate women and help them lead an independent life if they are single-minded in their pursuit and negotiate effectively with patriarchy. In contrast, *Night Dancer* discussed in Chapter Five, explores the consequences of engaging in radical feminism rather than negotiation through the character of Ezi. On the other hand, *Everything Good Will Come*, discussed in Chapter Six, presents Enitan and Sheri modifying their feminist stance by learning from another; Enitan who has the tendency to confront, learns that negotiation works better at times while Sheri who negotiates and even manipulates, learns to be more assertive.

News about Swarna Lata's impending marriage, however, appears to suggest that marriage is inevitable and cannot be escaped even if a woman is successful since the pressure exerted by family and society cannot be resisted forever. Swarna Lata sends Virmati a note to inform her of her marriage, obliging Virmati with an explanation for her decision to marry. Swarna Lata's explanation prompts the question if the note was a form of self-justification: "He had accepted all her conditions. She was going to be allowed to continue her other activities.....She owed it to her parents to marry. They had let her have her way in everything else" (188). Swarna Lata's consent reinforces the double bind of women in that period, to be educated and modern but then remain traditional by not rejecting marriage. Swarna Lata continues her political activism after her marriage, and this can be seen in her involvement in the protest against "the Draft Hindu Code Bill" (252) which proposes to exclude women from inheriting family wealth. Swarna Lata's engagement with political activism even after marriage is similar to the character of Grace Ameh discussed in Chapter Six; Grace Ameh

is a journalist and political activist who fearlessly fights for the release of political prisoners who are detained without trial during Sani Abacha's rule in the 1990s, with the full support of her family.

Shakuntala and Swarnalatha are seen as occupying the world of men through their career and activism; by moving out from the domestic realm to the public space and occupying masculine space, these women collapse the artificial boundaries between public and private spheres. Their success reinforces the possibility of self-formation and self-actualisation for women and Manju Kapur's use of the social realist mode establishes how they use their subjectivities and agencies to reimagine themselves as politically active Indian women.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Manju Kapur revises the traditional Bildungsroman conventions to portray the trajectory of Virmati's growth in the backdrop India's independence struggles and the Partition of the country. Even though opportunities for self-actualisation are available to Virmati in the form of education, employment, and role models to emulate, Virmati's quest for self-discovery is thwarted and she never achieves her full potential. Her problematic relationship with her mother and her illicit relationship with her married professor are major stumbling blocks that hinder her efforts at self-determination. I have argued that the reverberations of social and political events unfolding in the public sphere during pre and post-Partition periods influence familial and gender relations in the domestic sphere and impact Virmati's life.

Virmati dies an embittered woman, never having achieved the freedom she dreamt of, and Ida reconstructs Virmati's life by documenting the family history. In contrast to the idealist male Bildungsroman that ends with the successful socialisation of the hero that is sealed with his marriage, *Difficult Daughters* ends with Ida, a divorcee, resolving to lead a life free of her mother's ghost, after journeying into her mother's past to understand her mother. While it is not the most optimistic ending, I believe it still provides a glimmer of hope on the possibility of female freedom through reflexive acts and conscious efforts to shed undesirable family influence and Ida, in the end, may achieve her desire not to be like her mother. I have pointed how *Difficult Daughters* engages in dialogue with several other genres, namely, the family memoir, the historical novel, the testimonio and the epistolary novel. I have argued that by embracing features of the family memoir and the historical novel, Manju Kapur highlights how family history intersects with national history, shaping the lives of women in a social and political milieu that was undergoing changes.

I have drawn attention to how the Bildungsroman not only presents the stories of the protagonists from three generations but also the stories of other women associated with them to show how their lives are intertwined and how they influence one another. I have highlighted that the inclusion of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, who succeed in becoming modern, educated, and liberated career women who are politically active, reinforces how women can achieve agency and create new subjectivities for themselves. I have argued that the success of new Indian women like Shakuntala and Swarna Lata is a result of their ability to effectively negotiate with patriarchy to achieve their dreams, unlike Virmati who resorts to rebelling or escaping before settling for strategies such as adjusting, compromising and adapting. I have also pointed out how Manju Kapur's use of a complex social realist mode is effective in recreating historical and political events and the sociocultural milieu that impact the characters and in demonstrating how complex political subjectivities are created. While this chapter looked at how female education can be a double-edged sword, disempowering in the case of Virmati but emancipating for Shakuntala and Swarna Lata, the next chapter, *Two Virgins* explores the paradoxical empowerment of English education. Even though it is the sixties, English education is still viewed with suspicion in the village setting of *Two Virgins*, and this is resonant of how Laila's English education in the thirties that was seen as a threat by patriarchy in Chapter One.

Chapter Three

***Two Virgins* - Adolescent Sexuality and Society, the Beastly Tamer**

Kamala Markandaya (1924 - 2004) was a prolific writer who wrote for about three decades from the 1950s to the 1980s. Her eighth novel *Two Virgins*, published in 1973, is set mainly in an unnamed South Indian village undergoing transformation with the advent of modernisation and briefly in an unnamed city that offers more options of livelihood despite its modern values that are perceived as corruptive. While exact years are not mentioned, it can be deduced that it is the post-independence period in the late 1960s. Despite the novel's resistance to historicisation by not naming the locations or indicating the period in which it is set, Markandaya's portrayal of the condition of the village, some two decades after independence from the British in 1947, reinforces the long-lasting impact of colonisation, the trauma of Partition and the socio-political chaos, and economic upheavals on the developing nation-state. The sixties were a period of rapid urbanisation whereby villagers, in the face of poverty and unemployment, moved to towns and cities in search of better job opportunities, creating overcrowded urban areas that lacked proper infrastructure¹.

Two Virgins depicts the development of adolescent sisters, Lalitha, and Saroja, belonging to a middle-class joint family in a village that consists of Appa, Amma and Aunt Alamelu, Amma's widowed older sister. Lalitha, the centre of attraction because of her beauty, is Appa's favourite while Saroja who considers herself plain, enjoys the simple pleasures of village life. Saroja's brothers live and work in a town nearby because of lack of opportunities in the village. Modernising changes invade the private sphere of the home, unsettling family dynamics and gender relations during this period that experienced rapid urbanisation. Tensions escalate when Aunt Alamelu, an upholder of tradition, clashes with the more progressive Appa who supports Lalitha's modern views acquired from her English education and Western-educated mentors, her principal, Miss Mendoza and movie director, Gupta. Dissatisfied with village life and enticed by the city's glamour and liberal mores, Lalitha attempts to achieve her

¹ In *Trends and Implications of Urbanisation in India during the 20th Century*, Ashish Bose points out that "the decade 1941-51 recoded the highest ever rate of urbanization" (353) attributing it to refugee migration during and aftermath of Partition. He highlights that the 1951-61 decade saw a slow rate of urbanisation despite the rapid industrialisation in that period while the decade of 1961-71 experienced rapid urbanisation, with migration of population from "smaller to larger towns and cities" (353). Furthermore, he underscores how the rapid increase in population from 1951-91 led to unemployment issues in the country.

dream of becoming an actress by running away to the city. However, when she returns home impregnated by Gupta, she is coerced into an abortion, learning that traditional society, even as it expects women to be beautiful, fair, and desirable, shuns women who exercise their sexuality. After her abortion, Lalitha once again runs away from her family, refusing to return to the village. On the contrary, timid and God-fearing Saroja, appreciates peasant values and enjoys the traditional life in the village that is closely connected to nature. She is keen to explore her burgeoning sexuality and act on her attraction towards Devraj, Gupta's assistant. However, having witnessed Lalitha's abortion and learning vicariously from it, Saroja decides to conform to traditional society's expectations of unmarried girls to remain chaste and not risk her dreams of marriage and children.

Unlike *Sunlight on a Broken Column* or *Difficult Daughters* discussed in the previous chapters where political events unfolding in the public sphere have a strong influence on the protagonists and their families, the focus of *Two Virgins* is on sociocultural transformations and economic crisis that the postcolonial nation experiences. As such, the novel attempts to capture the modernising changes that swept through the country after its independence, how they impacted villages and how urban migration, and intrusion of city values escalated the conflict between tradition and modernity. While political events do not take centre stage, references are made to the country's historical past, especially the repercussions of British colonisation and the Partition of India. These comments link the current condition of the postcolonial citizens with colonial legacies and the failure of the developing nation-state to become a modern and industrial nation according to Nehruvian model of planned development.

Tradition versus modernity² is a recurrent theme in Markandaya's novels and critics tend to focus on the clash between the two opposing worlds of tradition and modernity set up in the novel and how various characters in the novel symbolise the two divergent ways of life. For instance, in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Markandaya explicitly critiques the damaging impact of modernisation and industrialisation on the rural environment, as represented by the establishment of a tannery in the village. However, in *Two Virgins*, Markandaya does not seem to advocate tradition over modernity or even suggest a balance between the two by embracing

² In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and *The Coffin Dams* (1969) Markandaya examines the impact of modernisation on the values of simple rural life. Her debut novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, that depicts the difficult life of Rukamani and her family, peasants who are affected by poverty in the wake of industrialisation, is the most popular of the ten novels that she had published from 1954 to 1982. Her eleventh novel, *Bombay Tiger* (2008), was published posthumously by her daughter.

positive aspects of both. Instead, her focus appears to be with portraying the shifts in gender and familial relationships that modernity brings about and how they complicate the lives of the protagonists in a country that is attempting to progress. Markandaya draws attention to how different characters accept or challenge various traditions, modern values and stereotypes associated with them and the repercussions of their choices, especially the impact it has on their relationship with their family and society. In a period when society confronted modernising changes, constant disagreements on the need to move forward or hold on to age-old traditions, unsettles the joint family setup that the sisters belong to, making the world around them more complex to navigate. In the novel, modernity is associated with progress, rejection of superstitions and oppressive traditions that maintain social hierarchies, freedom of movement of women, free interaction between the opposite sexes and education and career opportunities for females.

In discussing the various interventions made by postcolonial authors to the traditional Bildungsroman form, Erica Hoagland suggests that doubling of protagonists in postcolonial Bildungsroman as opposed to the single male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman, not only provides multiplicity of voices but also problematises the perception that individuals from the same background undergo similar experiences in their development process:

While the individual protagonist of the traditional Bildungsroman was typically offered as the representative of his “fellows,” the postcolonial Bildungsroman may offer more than one protagonist in the text, an act which acknowledges the multiplicity of identities in the postcolonial world. Rather than rendering the postcolonial protagonist down to “types,” this maneuver also offers the reader more than one perspective or identity by and through which to engage the text. The presence of two protagonists, rather than one, complicates viewing the process of Bildung as a uniform experience for individuals from the same culture, tribe, or even family. (59)

Although the sisters share the same background, and their lives are intertwined since Lalitha, as the older sister, has an influence on the younger and impressionable Saroja, I suggest that their Bildung process unfolds very differently because the conflict between tradition and modernity impacts them in opposing ways. I propose that religion and upbringing intersect in different ways with tradition and modernity such that one sibling embraces modern liberal values, challenging religious beliefs and traditions while the other is protected from outside influence by her strong belief in religion. Through the character of Lalitha, who gives in to her sexual desire that results in an unwanted pregnancy, Markandaya highlights how females engaging in sexual relationships prior to marriage are punished and stigmatised by society, a

sharp contrast with the male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman who is expected to experience sexual initiation as part of his journey towards maturity.

Unlike Lalitha, God-fearing Saroja, who appreciates tradition and admires the qualities of peasants while open to some form of progress through modernisation, is sheltered by her core faith which helps her to exercise self-control, especially after learning vicariously the consequence of “unbridled lust” (154) in a rigid patriarchal rural society. Saroja’s rejection of sexual advances from Devraj in the city and Chingleput in the village is an act of self-regulation in relation to society’s normalisation of sexual relationship within a heterosexual marriage. It can be compared with the male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman who compromises his ideals to be reintegrated into society upon his return from his adventures. The difference, of course, is that the mature male hero willingly gives up some of his freedom, as observed by Franco Moretti: “As a ‘free individual’, not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as *one’s own*. One must *internalize* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the later. This fusion is what we usually call ‘consent’ or ‘legitimation’” (16). Saroja, on the other hand, embittered and not totally unscathed, is angry with society that would not accommodate illegitimate babies and decides to put on hold the impulse to explore her sexuality. Having learnt from Lalitha’s traumatic abortion the consequence of deviating from sexual chastity expected of unmarried girls, Saroja stops herself from acting on her newly awakened sexuality.

Most of *Two Virgins* is narrated in the third person point of view while occasional use of the second person perspective is found in the earlier parts. However, in Parts Five and Six, Markandaya often switches to the second person point of view. Unlike *Sunlight on a Broken Column* where Laila presents her story in the first person or *Difficult Daughters* where Ida’s first-person interjections frame Virmati’s story presented in the third person, *Two Virgins* is closer to a typical Bildungsroman in its use of a third person perspective. Internal focalisation through the younger and naïve Saroja and the use of free indirect discourse allow access to Saroja’s growing consciousness, conveying her view of the adult world with its contradictions. Through the consciousness of Saroja, who is blind to caste, class, religious and sexual discriminations that others around her engage in, Markandaya underscores how society’s contradictions and prejudices, especially those in relation to female sexuality, complicate the process of identity formation during adolescence.

While the third person point of view provides an external perspective and the choice of Saroja as the focaliser lends the coming-of-age story an objectivity, the use of second person point of view, especially in the last two parts, brings one close to the heart of action, evoking reader involvement and a sense of immediacy. The evocation of Saroja's thoughts through free indirect discourse encourages empathetic identification with her. In contrast, free indirect discourse passages related to the speeches of ambivalent characters such as Amma are presented ironically, serving a satirical function. However, one of the limitations of the use of the third person perspective focalised through Saroja is that direct access to Lalitha's feelings is rare.

In revising the traditional Bildungsroman to present the coming of age of the sisters and the stories of women associated with them, Markandaya engages in dialogues with two other genres, the idyllic village novel and quest-romance. Markandaya's portrayal of the tranquil rural life that privileges traditions and the dynamic city life that represents modernity translates into the novel's structure that sees a very slow rise in action culminating in dramatic confrontations in the last section. Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that time and space are closely linked, and their inseparability shapes the contexts of the fictional world created in texts. He uses the term chronotope to refer to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (*The Dialogic* 84). Markandaya's portrayal of the village with its repetitive, cyclical, and uneventful life evokes Bakhtin's chronotope of the provincial town while the depiction of the city, epitomised by movement and chaotic flux, where life's turning points occur for the sisters, corresponds with Bakhtin's chronotope of the threshold. Besides these two minor chronotopes that are evoked in the novel, Saroja's perception of the village as an idealised place with its natural landscape and a close knitted community, brings forth the image of an idyllic chronotope that Bakhtin associates with the genre of idyllic novel.

Using myths and rituals to analyse literature, Northrop Frye discusses four myths in relation to the hero who is superhuman, linking them to the four seasons. He highlights the three stages involved in the structure of Romance: "The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero" (*Anatomy* 187). In addition, Northrop Frye also discusses the quest myth, suggesting that the quest-romance hero goes in search of discovering the truth about his external reality and

delivering himself from the anxieties and inner conflicts caused by that reality (*Anatomy* 193). In addition to using the conventions of the Bildungsroman to portray Saroja's journey from childhood to adulthood, I suggest that Markandaya adopts some features of the quest-romance to present the journey that Saroja undertakes to understand her social reality, fully comprehend human sexuality and learn what society is and the role it plays in regulating human sexuality. Although Frye's examination of quest-romance is in relation to male heroes since females are portrayed as supporting the quest of the male hero rather than engaging in their own quests, I propose that Saroja's quest can be viewed in relation to the spiritual quest of the male hero that Frye discusses.

Scholars have observed the controversy related to the reception of *Two Virgins*, especially in the eighties, whereby some critics condemned it as the weakest novel to have been written by Markandaya; however, others had appreciated it for its sensitive portrayal of the coming-of-age stories of the adolescent sisters (Premila Paul, Kshanike Minoli Salgado, R N Rai). Kshanike Minoli Salgado's explanation that the critics were responding to different elements in the novel, namely, the features of the popular romance novel and the serious Bildungsroman, is illuminating. Considering *Two Virgins* as a serious Bildungsroman, I acknowledge the novel's adherence to the Bildungsroman genre but more importantly investigate how it registers its departure from traditional conventions to portray the double Bildung of the sisters, highlighting the complexity of growing up under the influence of neocolonialism. While *Two Virgins* adheres to the linearity that is typical of a traditional Bildungsroman narrative in its six-part structure that is chronological, it differs from a feminist Bildungsroman in the duration it covers. It zooms in to the adolescent lives of the sisters, focussing mainly on their loss of sexual innocence, highlighting the thin line between innocence and knowledge. Markandaya also modifies the journey motif of the Bildungsroman, which is crucial to attaining maturity, giving it a twist as she dramatises the contrasting impact the trip to the city has on Lalitha and Saroja's attainment of maturity.

I begin this chapter by discussing Markandaya's portrayal of the sociocultural transformations sweeping through post-independent India in the sixties and the economic crisis experienced in this period, focusing on how modernising changes impacted the villages, specifically how they infiltrated into the domestic sphere, unsettling the traditional joint family system, influencing familial and gender relations. In the last two chapters, I examined how Attia Hosain and Manju Kapur engaged in conversations with the historical novel and adopted the autobiographical mode to bring out the impact of historical and sociopolitical

transformations on the main protagonists, their families, and their communities during the pre and post-independence periods in India. In this chapter, I analyse Markandaya's incorporation of features of the idyllic village novel to depict traditional village life that is closely connected to nature and her dialogue with the quest-romance to present Saroja's maturing process that culminates in the city. I pay particular attention to Markandaya's use of chronotopes that evokes Bakhtin's chronotopes of the provincial town and threshold to illuminate the contrasting temporalities between the village and the city.

By focusing on mundane village life with its cyclical time and contrasting it with the city with the use of chronotopes, I assert, Markandaya reveals the power structure behind the construction and perpetuation of ideal Indian womanhood and how this concept influenced women, especially the middle class. I suggest that, in addition, the emphasis on the village allows Markandaya to critique postcolonial India in the sixties for its uneven development, sociocultural and economic issues, and various inequalities that impacted the citizens, especially the marginalised groups. Specifically, I examine how Markandaya links these issues to the condition of women³ which deteriorated in the decades after independence although women were promised equality and better status when they fought alongside their men during nationalist struggles for independence from the British. I argue that Markandaya's revision of the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman and her incorporation of the elements of the idyllic village novel and the quest-romance allow *Two Virgins* to not only portray the contrasting growth patterns of a pair of adolescent sisters in the backdrop of modernising changes but also to effectively critique post-independent India for its failure to live up to its promise of an equitable life for all its citizens. While the adolescent sisters' difficult journeys to self-knowledge foreground Markandaya's feminist dimensions, the text's political purpose of highlighting the disillusionment with post-independent India is achieved through its social realist critique of the village.

³ *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* (1974), commissioned by the state, reviewed the status of women in post-independent India. One of the objectives of the report was to assess the situation of women, especially those in rural areas since urban women had benefitted from development programmes that were rolled out by the state. The report revealed the deplorable state of women, highlighting the sociocultural conditions of their lives and the lack of educational and economic opportunities and legal rights available to them. Mary E. John, who traces the history of women's movement in India, considers *Towards Equality* report as the seminal text of feminists in that period, describing how they were disappointed when their "hope for an egalitarian Free India and the creation of a welfare state" was shattered by the findings (*Signposts* 108).

The social realist mode adopted in the novel works effectively in satirising the postcolonial nation especially when events and situations are viewed through the lens of young and naïve Saroja. This satirical quality of the narrative, I suggest, is enhanced when Saroja's thoughts are juxtaposed with free indirect discourse, exposing the inequalities in the postcolonial society and revealing women's repression resulting from patriarchal control of their sexuality. It is interesting that the novel includes scenes on the making of a documentary film about the village with the aim of portraying peasant life realistically and a debate on the values of social realist movies as opposed mythical films or epics. These references to the use of realism in films can be seen in relation to works of literature and Markandaya's own novel that uses the realist form to depict the life of Indians in the post-independent period, particularly the villagers. I suggest that the discussions on realism and the real in the novel are not by coincidence; they reinforce that the novel is self-conscious about its claim of portraying village life realistically, highlighting the mediated nature of the realist form.

Traditional Rural Life Versus Modern City Life

In this section, I examine Markandaya's use of features of the idyllic village novel and her employment of chronotopes to portray the disparate rural and urban temporalities. I discuss Markandaya's critique of India in the sixties, especially the sociocultural and economic issues faced and the impact of modernising changes on family and gender relations. I analyse Markandaya's use of the cyclical everyday time of the village to highlight how traditions and religious beliefs buttress and perpetuate various inequalities, paying particular attention to everyday practices that promote ideal Indian womanhood. Lastly, I examine the contrasting picture Markandaya paints of the city as a busy and dynamic place, characterised by movement and action.

The unnamed village⁴ is mainly portrayed leisurely as a serene environment full of greenery, uncorrupted by outside forces and Markandaya's representation of the village in this

⁴ Markandaya has been critiqued for not specifying the setting of some of her novels. Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that Markandaya "consciously avoids naming the location", attributing the vagueness to an attempt at universality, quoting Brian Eliot who labels "anti-namers" as "incorrigible romantics" (54). Observing that Markandaya deliberately conceals the specific geographical locations of her novels, Susheela Rao identifies them to be mostly South Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It appears to me that Markandaya's reluctance to reveal her setting is an attempt at keeping a low profile, especially at the start of her writing career, rather than to romanticise or universalise. Born as Kamala Purnaiya in an elite South Indian Brahmin family in Mysore (Karnataka now), she became Kamala Taylor when she migrated to England and married an Englishman. She wrote under the pseudonym Kamala Markandaya in England and scholars have noted that she was a very private person who hardly gave interviews. Besides the village, the city is also unnamed but the use of Tamil words such as 'sambrani' and 'kasayam' and the reference to "shirt of Madras checks" (165) indicate that the city could be Madras (Chennai now), the capital of Tamil Nadu.

manner evokes the image of the idyllic village. This is especially so when seen through the eyes of Saroja who enjoys the slow pace of village life that is fused with nature and values the interactions and connectedness between the villagers. Saroja who looks forward to visiting the city, enjoys the bus journey and her initial days in the city. But soon enough her perception of the city changes. “Stay if you want to, no one can stop you” Lalitha suggests but Saroja “couldn’t think of anything worse than to stay in the city” (186). The trauma of Lalitha’s abortion adds to the negative vibes Saroja experiences in the city.

Saroja’s objectionable view of the city sharply contrasts with her idealisation of the village since she detests the crowd, the clutter, the lack of greenery and the anonymity of the city. The image of the village as an idyllic space with simple pleasures, soothing green pastures and peasant values are brought out when Saroja yearns for the familiarity of the village:

She wanted to go home. At home there were fields to rest your eyes on, colours that changed with the seasons.....You knew every pathway. No one could ever be lost, not even by trying.....You always knew where you were. You knew who you were. The city took it all away from you. You were one in a hundred, in a thousand, you were no longer you, you might have been an amoeba.....You knew what you were doing on earth, all right, but it grew blurred here in the city” (188).

Barely two weeks in the city and Saroja looks forward to “the immutable pattern of her life to resume in place of the chaotic flux induced by the city” (185). It is only during her return journey that Saroja starts to feel rejuvenated, and this reinforces her idealisation of the village: “Her core, which was numb, was beginning to feel, the icy encrustations were flaking away and whirling off into space, the process accelerated as they drew away from the city” (190). Saroja’s negative experiences in the city result in her appreciating the village and its values more.

Rural temporality is shaped by the rhythms of the natural environment that are iterative such as the drought that is followed by the monsoon season. Markandaya’s presentation of time and its passage in terms of seasons that come and go, rather than resorting to specifics, reinforces the cyclical time in the village. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the provincial town in Flaubert’s work, highlighting how time in such towns was “commonplace philistine cyclical everyday time” (248). Markandaya’s description of the village life evokes the chronotope of the provincial town where repetition is the order of the day: “such towns are the locus for cyclical everyday time. Here there are no events, only ‘doings’ that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person’s entire life” (*Dialogic* 247-8). In this

unspecified period of cyclical existence, Saroja is very young, indicating a pre-pubescent stage. Stories of Chingleput and Manikkam's family, characters who appear to be permanent fixtures in the village setting, are presented: "Saroja liked listening to Chingleput in the morning.....In the evenings she watched Manikkam rounding up his three cows to milk them" (2). Furthermore, the Sikh hawker brings his wares once or twice a year, the monkeys visit when the trees are fruiting, Alamelu packs her belonging and leaves after a fight with Appa but returns home by nightfall without fail and even Appa and Amma's sex life falls into a rhythm of ugly fights followed by passionate lovemaking. Seen through Saroja's eyes, the village evokes the idyllic chronotope and comes across as a place of belonging which remains constant, a place where one can enjoy the simple pleasures of life and appreciate the natural landscape and positive aspects of peasantry.

While repetitive activities in the village reinforce that nothing out of the ordinary ever happens in the village, Miss Mendoza's visit at the end of Part One foreshadows the changes to come as seeds of aspiration on potential careers are planted in Lalitha. Part Two presents the filming of the village documentary starring Lalitha and this is an out-of-the-ordinary happening that breaks the temporality of the uneventful village life where "there are no "meetings", no "partings"" (*Dialogic* 248). More actions are spurred when Lalitha proactively pursues her dream of becoming a film star by running away to the city. Lalitha appears to be a post-pubertal girl about fifteen or sixteen while Saroja is around twelve or thirteen and we are reminded that Saroja has grown from the young girl described in Part One, indicating that she is a newly pubescent girl. The events that take place from Part Two till Part Six cover a period of about a year. By zooming in to the events that take place in this short period of time, Markandaya establishes that the attainment of maturity of the sisters is closely linked to their loss of sexual innocence during their adolescent phase.

Even though the village is painted as an idyllic environment largely, passing references are made to its limitations, the poverty of its residents caused by natural disasters, the inequities present, the impact of ill-suited projects undertaken by the British during colonial reign and modernity that was beginning to encroach. Hindu religious practices such as temple worship, special prayers, fulfilment of vows and superstitious beliefs blend seamlessly into the sociocultural environment of the village. In addition, class, and caste systems⁵ are shown to

⁵ Caste system was prevalent in the sixties and was openly practiced in villages where boundaries were set in interactions with people from other castes. As for the situation in cities during the sixties, Nalini Natarajan points out that "caste was an issue repressed in national public life although it was seriously practiced by all but

be deeply entrenched in the traditional village society. Markandaya's account of the quotidian life in the village underscores how religion and traditions buttress various inequalities in the rural community and divulges how stereotypes based on class, caste and religious differences create disharmony in the post colony that set out to be a Nehruvian secular nation-state and adhere to the teachings of Gandhi who preached against discrimination.

Amma and Alamelu who are caste and class-conscious are critical of other religious groups such as the Muslims and Christians and this reveals how caste and religion are fundamental organising units of the village community. Alamelu warns Saroja not to mingle closely with Manikkam's children: "Remember they are the milkman's children, they are not our class of people" (42). Amma looks down upon Miss Mendoza for being a Christian convert, calling her a "three rupee convert" (24) while Alamelu stereotypes Christians as having unclean habits, contrary to Saroja's observation of Miss Mendoza. Amma's hatred towards the Muslims whom she calls "flesh eaters" (59) seems to be because her family is vegetarian.

Examining the relationship between women and the Indian state, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan spells out the ambitious agenda of the newly independent nation state: "The newly decolonised Indian state embarked on a journey of rapid modernisation that included, apart from infrastructural material development, major social reform missions: literacy, the eradication of social "evils", propaganda of secularism and a "national" spirit to override regionalism and faction" (*Scandal* 6). However, the reality even some twenty years after independence is very different from what had been envisaged earlier since poverty, unemployment and overpopulation were pressing issues⁶. Sunder Rajan suggests that despite social reforms that aimed to improve women's conditions, social evils were not eradicated because of the "state-society conceptual divide" (7). Besides unresolved social issues, progress has been slow and development uneven as evident in the lack of infrastructure in the rural areas.

the most anglicised sections" (*Signposts* 155). K S Narayana Rao suggests that Markandaya does not provide any clue on Saroja's family's caste because of its sensitive nature in secular India (48). But Markandaya mentions the Kallar caste in reference to how the rich employed Kallars as nightwatchmen. The indication that the family could be vegetarian and Appa's smattering knowledge of Sanskrit suggest that the family may be Brahmin or another upper caste.

⁶ When Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister in 1966, it was a difficult period for the Congress party since it had taken over a nation that was riddled with economic issues. The economic reforms introduced by the government were not effective in reducing poverty. Mary E John refers to Sudipta Kaviraj to describe the political crisis experienced when Indira Gandhi's government began to move away from Nehruvian model of politics, engaging in "empty rhetoric of poverty alleviation" and favouring "centralised forms of government rules" (*Signposts* 106)

The village in the novel lacks basic facilities like an efficient transport system, disposal system or even access to uninterrupted supply of clean water since taps run dry quite often and the hassle of drawing water from wells is required.

The debate on who is responsible for cleaning the polluted river not only brings to light environmental issues in the village, but the discriminations experienced by the lower caste and class. “Rangu’s River” (6) is a convenient place for residents to throw ashes of the dead, a custom practiced by Hindus, since they do not have to travel far to the famous rivers. However, the river is contaminated with all sorts of rubbish and when a carcass of a donkey is thrown in, it gets unbearable:

Appa said What a country, not even an efficient disposal system. Then he wrestled with himself and took the blame, because he could not have brought himself to deal with the corpse. Then he halved it, blamed the British, who had not even organized a sanitary system in two hundred years of rule, and blamed people like himself who were so squeamish they could not do it. Amma said the pariahs should do it, it was their job, they were used to handling filth, but nowadays they were getting above themselves. Appa said Remember what Gandhiji taught, they are the children of God, why should they do all the unpleasant jobs, but Aunt Alamelu cried out It is their karma, their fate, Brother! Which rendered him speechless (29).

The untouchables, forced to continue with the tradition of engaging in unpleasant work like cleaning sewage and public toilets for their livelihood, are further disadvantaged by the inadequacies of the village. Amma not only uses the derogatory term ‘pariah’ but also shows her displeasure at the lower caste for aspiring to alter the status quo through social mobility.

Appa’s reference to Gandhi during this debate in the domestic setting adds a political dimension to the scene, highlighting how aspirations of nationalist leaders for a united and equal India have failed and how the nation state was riven with various inadequacies and inequalities. Appa, a former freedom fighter, is fond of censuring the British for their ill-suited projects in India. While Appa blames the British and then halves it, Alamelu does not waver in her firm religious belief that the bigotry against the lower caste was a result of their karma. While acknowledging the long-lasting impact of colonial legacies, Sunder Rajan rightfully pinpoints that blaming the current evils in the country on colonialism stops problems from being investigated and solved (*Real* 7). This scene effectively highlights how the eradication of social evils has been hindered by the continuation of traditions that reinforce inequality. Markandaya stresses that engaging in the game of blame or holding on to regressive traditions is not the way to solve the problems faced by the nation-state that set out to achieve progress, promising its citizens equal rights. By focusing on the plight of the untouchables, Markandaya

brings out how various axes such as caste, religion, patriarchy, capitalism, state, and colonialism combine to oppress the downtrodden groups.

When Appa emphasises the need for unity in post-independent India since “all India is one now, and they must learn to live as one”, Alamelu reminds Appa, who always condemns the British, that “the iniquity of our own people” (7) should not be forgotten, quoting an incident where Sikhs killed Hindus in the train during Partition chaos. By highlighting the reverberations of Partition history, Markandaya pinpoints that a shared traumatic past may bring individuals, family, or community closer but not everyone moves forward in a similar way, making it difficult to achieve the harmony that was envisaged. The older generation that harbours grudges from the past, stereotypes others based on their religion, ethnicity, class, and caste and this nurtures artificial hostility in the younger generation. Sunder Rajan pinpoints that besides gender inequality, developing countries were also riven with extreme inequities among the various classes, castes, and communities (*Real* 6). In the case of postcolonial India, the contrast between nationalism as an ideology that advocated secularism and the reality of the situation in the nation-state which is wrecked by disharmony because of prejudices and social hierarchies is evident in *Two Virgins*. The scenes discussed paint the deplorable condition of the nation-state where discriminations based on caste, religion, and class continue even though characters such as Appa remind the perpetrators of Gandhi’s teachings. Markandaya’s concerns about the sociocultural and economic conditions of the village are effectively brought out through dialogues and debates that involve Appa who is vocal.

Appa who advocates progress is presented as liberal, giving his daughters, especially Lalitha much freedom. This contrasts with Amma and Alamelu who are presented as patriarchal agents policing the activities of the girls in their efforts to socialise the girls to embrace traditional Indian womanhood. While Lalitha enjoys a good relationship with Appa, she is always at logger heads with Amma and Alamelu who are critical of her behaviour that attempts to push the boundary of acceptable feminine behaviour. While Amma and Alamelu are exclusive in their class and caste conscious behaviour, Appa is inclusive and all-embracing. Appa is also presented as a kind-hearted man who helps the poor by taking on the role of the unofficial money lender in the village. Markandaya’s inclusion of ‘good’ men like Appa in her novel is rather refreshing compared to stereotypical portrayal of men as patriarchal and misogynist.

Next, I investigate how the promotion of ideal Indian womanhood in the village naturalises women's secondary status. Leela Dube discusses how rituals and ceremonies, and family and kinship practices indoctrinate young girls that their goal in life is to become a wife and mother, in that sequence. She illustrates how a prolonged unmarried state after puberty is considered undesirable and how married women with husbands are perceived as auspicious while widows are seen as unfortunate (15). A woman's identity is validated not only through her status as wife but also as mother. Women who bear children acquire legitimisation and their status is further elevated when they bear male heirs. In the novel, Amma undertakes several *vrathas* (special prayers) before she is blessed with children, while Alamelu lacks status because she does not have a husband, and her lack of children pins her down further. In the case of Miss Mendoza, she is looked down upon because she is single. Markandaya underscores the discrimination faced by women in a patriarchal village society that refuses to accord status to unmarried, widowed, and married women without children in its attempt to glorify and promote marriage and motherhood. Saroja's preoccupation with having children indicates that she has internalised the importance of marriage and motherhood. While Saroja's interest may be related to the intuitive connection that she has with her neighbour's babies and even animals, it nevertheless suggests that she has internalised the value of nurturing as a feminine virtue.

Using a gender lens to read the text brings out how ideal Indian womanhood is promoted in the village through Pativratas (devoted and virtuous wives), who exemplify feminine virtues of patience, purity, loyalty, devotion, selfless love, and self-sacrifice. The circulation of stories of Pativratas foregrounds the tough life of a woman and her need to brace herself to carry on with life, equipped with her feminine qualities. According to Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, the concept of ideal womanhood can be traced back to colonial times when the middle class developed "ideologies of 'Hindu' and 'Indian' womanhood in contradistinction to the actual patriarchal norms prevalent among the other classes and in opposition to the 'western' woman" (*Recasting* 9). *Two Virgins* draws attention to how this old concept is kept alive by constant references to virtues that are exemplified in the mythical Pativratas. Reinforcing the difference between real and aspired womanhood, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid reiterate that "womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired, not an actual cultural continuity" (*Recasting* 17). The obsession with the image of Pativratas in the village underscores patriarchal society's desire to imbibe women with feminine virtues.

Movies screened in the village cinema recast models of Pativratas for young girls to emulate. Saroja recalls watching “*Rama and Sita* twice, and *Draupadi* twice, and *Shakuntala* once” (96), all featuring Pativratas from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. While Alamelu loves to launch into the story of *Shakuntala* and Amma opines that “it was a fine film, you couldn’t ask for better” Lalitha believes otherwise when she describes Gupta’s forte: “He makes good films, said Lalitha patiently. He has no time for old-fashioned long-winded epics, she said, he is only interested in making artistic pictures, pictures of social realism” (96). Here, Lalitha dismisses *Shakuntala* not only on the basis that it is outdated but also because it is mythical since it is based on a story from Mahabharata, in contrast to Gupta’s realistic films. Markandaya reiterates here how Indian womanhood based on Hindu mythical concepts and characters are naturalised as normal in the long run, highlighting that Lalitha’s discrediting of the epic films is also her rejection of Pativratas as ideal women to be emulated.

In addition, Lalitha’s championing of social realist films, asserting that they are modern and real, unlike epic films that are mythical, invites a discussion on the use of the realist form in the text itself. The realism that Markandaya uses is complex and self-conscious in that it reminds the reader that the text is mediated and not a mirror of the real or a simple mimesis of the real. Another point of intrigue is Markandaya’s choice of *Shakuntala* as the film to be debated on. In *Difficult Daughters* discussed in the last chapter, I suggested that Manju Kapur chooses the name *Shakuntala* for Virmati’s cousin in order to link her to the character of the courageous and assertive *Shakuntala* in Mahabharata. In *Two Virgins*, Kamala Markandaya’s selection of the movie *Shakuntala* appears to be in relation to the status of illegitimate children in society. In Mahabharata, both *Shakuntala* and her son are presented as having questionable parentage. *Shakuntala* is the love child of sage Vishvamitra and apsaras Menaka, technically an illegitimate child. When King Dushyanta, who promises *Sakunthala* that she would be queen and her son would be future king, refuses to recognise *Sakunthala* and acknowledge his son, *Shakuntala* fights for the rights of her son. Reference to this movie, thus, foreshadows discussions on society’s take on children out of wedlock when Lalitha is impregnated by Gupta.

When encouraged to emulate the qualities of Pativratas women begin to accept their own suffering as natural. When Alamelu says, “women were born to suffer” (132), she naturalises women’s suffering and even blames her own ill fate for it, unlike Appa or the brothers who blame society for social evils. Women facing discriminations in relation to their body and sexuality are made to accept their secondary status in society when gender inequality is traced back to biology and nature. Manikkam’s wife, trapped in the never-ending cycle of

childbearing and poverty⁷, trivialises her pain and suffering from her miscarriage when she reassures Saroja that it was an integral part of being a woman: “It’s nothing , she said to Saroja, nothing you shouldn’t see, you are a woman too, aren’t you, one of the tribe.....It’s just a little blood....A woman gets used to it. All women. Heaven knows they ought, the amount that flows from them” (114). Even the frivolous Lalitha seems to have accepted that a woman’s fate is a difficult one, after the ordeal of a forced abortion. When Saroja refuses to listen to the gory details of how the foetus was sucked out, Lalitha warns Saroja: “Why not, said Lalitha, you’re a woman, aren’t you? You aren’t going to slide through life untouched, you don’t think?” (179). The above examples show how the asserted representation of womanhood through feminine stereotypes becomes naturalised and starts to influence women’s self-representation.

The cyclical everyday time of the village that perpetuates inequalities is contrasted with dynamic time in the city where life is fast paced. Bakhtin points out that “the viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space” in the provincial town is often used to contrast “temporal sequences that are more charged with energy and event” (248). The city is always bustling with activities, its occupants always on the move, rushing to get to their destination. Representing progress, the city is presented as a land of economic opportunities with possibilities of social mobility, as opposed to the village that is entrenched with social and economic inequities. Saroja’s brothers had uprooted themselves to towns because in the village there was “no outlet whatsoever for their energies and talents” (93). While migration to towns and cities has its benefits, the issues resulting from rapid urbanisation are also highlighted. As mentioned earlier, the sixties saw a high rate of migration to bigger cities resulting in overcrowding in urban areas⁸. The novel portrays the city as crowded with limited space and roads that are congested with traffic and streets and markets that are jostling with people. Urban society is also presented as sophisticated and complex in contrast to the village folk who are depicted as simple. Urban environment transforms individuals as seen in Saroja’s brothers who appear tough and hardened; Lalitha too appears to have aged when she returns to the village after several months in the city.

⁷ It appears that through Manikam’s wife’s increasing number of children amidst her hardship, Markandaya is hinting on the issue of overpopulation that was escalating in the sixties leading to forced sterilisation in the seventies to control the increasing population.

⁸ Analysing the trends of urbanisation in India, Ashish Bose notes that “the 1961-71 decade witnessed a shift in the distribution of urban population from smaller to larger towns and cities” and “the number of class 1 cities (100,000 people and over) increased from 113 to 148” in this decade (354).

The trauma that Lalitha and Saroja experience in the bustling city are turning points in their lives since they cross the threshold of adolescence to adulthood. The crisis moment they experience is “highly charged with emotion and value” (*Dialogic* 248), evoking the chronotope of threshold. Lalitha’s agony of an illegal abortion and Saroja’s nervous breakdown are “connected with the breaking point of a life” (*Dialogic* 248). Bakhtin acknowledges the metaphorical meaning of the term threshold and its link to “the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or an indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold)” (248) to reinforce key moments of decision that lead to turning points in lives. Despite the traumatic abortion, Lalitha decides to remain in the city and “face the world on her own” (186). Having lost their sexual innocence and crossed the border that separated adolescence and adulthood, the decision that the sisters make to stay in the city or return to the village becomes “the decision that changes a life” (*Dialogic* 248).

Lalitha: A Case of Being Sexually Empowered but Socially Ostracised

In this section, I examine the determinants that are at work in the way Lalitha’s *Bildung* unfolds, emphasising how modernising changes infiltrating the village unsettle her traditional upbringing and influence her to break away from the repetitive village life that she finds oppressive. Using a gender lens, I trace how Lalitha, who initially conforms to and exploits normative Indian femininity, begins to transgress patriarchal boundaries and discuss the repercussions of her rebellion. I discuss how banality of village life creates a longing within Lalitha for the exciting life promised by the city, turning it into a narrative force that moves the plot forward.

Obvious determinants of Lalitha’s character and attitudes are her English education, the influence of her mentors Miss Mendoza and Gupta and the lure of city-life with its liberal mores. Subtler factors that contribute to Lalitha’s personality are her traditional upbringing in the joint family where she is favoured by Appa because she is “pretty and pert” (9) and the influence of Christianity that loosens her grip on her core faith, Hinduism. Unlike timid and fearful Saroja who is sheltered from outside influence by her firm belief in Hinduism, Lalitha loses this protection when she challenges Hinduism and its beliefs and practices that appear incongruent to her, even implying that they were corruptive when compared with Christian practices. For instance, Hindu belief in rebirth is iterated in the village, but Lalitha attempts to correct Saroja: “Miss Mendoza said souls did not enter other bodies. They went straight up to heaven, or down into hell, or were cooped up in purgatory which was an in-between place for doing penance” (28).

Observing Markandaya's emphasis on Christianity in *Two Virgins*, K S Narayana Rao suggests that Markandaya provides a "truthful representation of contemporary Indian society" (48) through interactions between Hindus and Christians who have misconceptions about one another's beliefs. While Rao may be right in pointing out that Markandaya depicts a multi-religious Indian society, each with its own prejudices, Markandaya's portrayal of Christianity as an ambivalent modernising influence on Lalitha cannot be undermined. Exposure to Christianity⁹ through Miss Mendoza influences Lalitha's thinking and unsettles her Hindu identity.

Leela Dube suggests that normative femininity is discursively constructed in the Indian context through "a continuous, complex, and occasionally contradictory process" (13). She illustrates how patriarchy, with its list of dos and don'ts, moulds young girls from the onset of puberty to conform to a model of beauty and femininity that reflects Hindu womanhood. Dube highlights how post-pubertal girls are expected to exhibit modest behaviour by speaking softly, taking short strides, maintaining downcast eyes in public and avoiding any behaviour that denotes masculinity (16). Lalitha considered a "child of grace" (74), pretty and desirable but modest and shy, adheres to the restrictions imposed on young girls' motility and deportment.

Lalitha's female body that is disciplined into a feminine body to conform to Indian womanhood can be seen in the light of Michel Foucault's insight on the production of docile bodies that can be "transformed and improved" (*Discipline* 136). Lalitha's efforts to hone behaviour considered feminine, such as being graceful, can be linked to discipline that exercises "a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body" (*Discipline* 137). Training herself to exhibit demureness and spending hours on beauty regimes and preening herself are rewarding for Lalitha since her narcissistic supply is fulfilled¹⁰. As a model of Indian femininity, she becomes a potential bride who is sought

⁹ Lalitha's challenge of Hindu beliefs could be the result of subtle discrediting of Hinduism and covert promotion of Christian values in the former mission school that she studies in. This can be traced back to colonial education in the pre-independence period that attempted to promote the superiority of white culture and Christianity by disparaging indigenous culture and religion. Ketu Katrak elaborates how "Christianity came along with English education" despite the propaganda that colonial education for natives would be a secular one in India and how Hinduism was disparaged subtly by texts and educators. (117)

¹⁰ Susan Bordo discusses how women's mundane bodily activities play a part in the construction of normative femininity and how women themselves contribute to normalisation. Conforming to this socially constructed

after: “There was no lack of emissaries. The young men’s mothers sent them, and the women came and spoke to Amma and pinched Lalitha’s cheek, and Lalitha was demure, pressed her delicate feet together and cast down her eyes to show off her lashes, which were long and lustrous” (8-9).

Saroja refers to Lalitha’s fluttering of lashes to seek attention as “her eye act” (69) and catches her battering them at Appa: “Saroja deduced it must have become a habit, she had got so accustomed to using her eyes she had become indiscriminate” (95). While this act seems humorous, Markandaya’s intention here is to reinforce the impact of what Judith Butler calls “gender performativity” on women and how it can create women whose movements take on the autopilot mode. Drawing from Michel Foucault, Butler argues that “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*” (178). She suggests that when women repeat culturally coded acts, an illusion of femininity is created and this becomes naturalised, establishing normative femininity: “The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (179). Through trained gestures, movements and behaviours, Lalitha exhibits femininity and is rewarded for it.

Lalitha begins to break the conventional codes that she had obeyed when influenced by modernity. Alamelu censures Lalitha’s behaviour that pushes the boundary of decorum of post-pubertal girls: “She said Lalitha was full of fizz, she resembled the poisonous stuff that Bundi sold, which was a dangerous state for maidens to be in” (55). Foucault views modern power “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate, and which constitute their own organisation” (*History* 92). Opposed to the traditional view of power as being top down or exerted from the outside, Foucault suggests that power is omnipresent. His concept of disciplining power that transforms bodies into ‘docile’ subjects may imply that victimisation cannot be escaped. However, Foucault acknowledges that resistance to omnipresent power exists. While culture and tradition are transmitted in everyday life through the power relations between mothers and daughters, these instances also reveal the obstacles to women’s autonomy and indicate possibility of resistance to feminine socialisation. According to Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance, and

femininity is advantageous to Lalitha since she is rewarded with attention and praise, and this can be seen in relation to how she conforms to the “system of values and rewards” that Bordo elaborates (188).

yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (*History* 95). This suggests that the subject is not fully incapacitated but can react against the power exerted. Lalitha’s conformity to ideal Indian femininity is the result of Amma and Alamelu’s successful socialisation of her and the rewards she enjoys for her submission. However, when Lalitha finds this abidance limiting her movements and her growth, especially her expression of sexuality, she does not hesitate to resist the restrictions imposed on her and even use her subjectivity and agency to move away from her confining environment.

Modernity brings about shifts in gender relations and Lalitha challenges the restrictions placed on her by interacting freely with Gupta, insisting that communication between the opposite sexes was “a mark of civilization” (64), considers an acting career, and exerts her sexual agency. Through these actions, she moves away from ideal Indian femininity, and this creates issues in the family since Appa supports Lalitha while Amma and Alamelu are against Lalitha’s forward behaviour. While Lalitha relates her own conduct to modernity and progress, Alamelu perceives them as licentious, linking Lalitha’s desire to become an actress with becoming a devadasi¹¹. This comparison may seem extreme but when viewed in the light of Leela Dube’s study that highlights how women are expected to avoid any behaviour that hints transgression, Alamelu’s concern for Lalitha and the family’s reputation seems reasonable: “A girl has to be carefully guarded against even a remote semblance to a woman of loose character, a woman of the street, a prostitute, someone who uses her charms to attract men.....glancing ‘furtively’, looking through the corners of one’s eyes do not become a well-bred girl” (16).

Lalitha’s aspiration for an acting career in the city is also an attempt to escape the repetitive village life by breaking the cyclical pattern of confinement of women in the domestic sphere. Describing the village as the “outpost of civilisation” (64), Lalitha feels trapped in the monotony of quotidian life. Markandaya’s ethnographic description of the traditional village community has led some critics to dismiss *Two Virgins* as a documentary of village life (Joseph 49). The focus on routine village life with its banality is seen as a

¹¹ Devadasis are female artistes who dedicated their service to God and belonged to temples. The ancient devadasi system exploited these women because many of them were forced into prostitution to provide sexual favours to powerful men in society. It is interesting that Alamelu uses this term because when Lalitha runs away again at the end of the novel, the question of whether she will survive in the corrupt city or be forced into prostitution is prompted.

weak narrative structure by such critics. However, pointing out that the assumption that banality indicates aesthetic failure needs to be reconsidered, Saikat Majumdar argues that the banal becomes an impetus that pushes the narrative forward in modernist fiction. He asserts that the conflict between the banality of quotidian life and “the promise of transcendence” to a more fulfilling life structures narrative (12). Majumdar relates the banality of everyday life in the periphery of Empire to the experience of modernity in the colonies:

Modernity in the colony, which is well encapsulated in colonial and postcolonial Anglophone fiction, follows the disrupted and uneven globalization of European modernity, an idea to which local modernities are held in a fractured and subordinated relation. This banalization of everyday life provides aesthetic form to this fracture. But this aesthetic also gets radically reinvented as a narrative impulse in Anglophone fiction produced in the colonies (4).

The contrast between the village and the city in the postcolonial Indian state as presented in *Two Virgins* parallels the disparity between the ex-British colony in the margins that represents backwardness and the former metropolitan centre that represents progress.

The quotidian life in the village highlights the structured inadequacies of the rural environment in contrast to the vibrant and modern city where one can use one’s talents and achieve his or her full potential. The possibility of securing an acting career in the city offers the promise of transcendence from the banality and backwardness of village life for Lalitha. However, when the promise of transcendence is deferred (film director Gupta does not follow up on his promise of casting Lalitha in his next movie), Lalitha’s longing for an enriching life in the glamorous city increases. Thus, rather than stall the narrative, banality in *Two Virgins* moves forward the narrative through the tension between banality and boredom of quotidian village life and the yearning for an exciting and fuller life that the city promises. Lalitha’s frustration with the tedium of village life increases and when she is unable to accept further delays in transcending the banality of village life, she runs away to the city to follow up on Gupta’s promise. Lalitha’s running away can be seen as being proactive in attempting to transcend the banal and boring life in the village to experience a fuller life in the city.

By running away, Lalitha also refuses to repeat the problematic life of other women like Alamelu, Nalini’s mother, or Manikkam’s wife in the village. Saroja, whose awareness of society’s control over women increases, notes that widowed Alamelu is forced to face her oppression with no avenues to hyperventilate because of her gender while men like Appa, Anand and Manikkam had boltholes to escape difficult situations. Thus, the repetitive cycle of village life which subordinates women is ready to be broken by Lalitha after Miss

Mendoza's visit; seeds of aspiration are planted in Lalitha when Miss Mendoza tells her "The world is your oyster" (49).

Prior to Miss Mendoza's visit, Lalitha's parents had not considered any career for Lalitha, indicating they expected their daughters to take the conventional path of marriage and motherhood after their education even though the sociocultural situation was changing. Even Lalitha had not thought about careers although she had dismissed any aspiration to become a wife or mother, rejecting them as "a peasant's ambition" (43). While Miss Mendoza brings up the topic, her suggestions are also careers that are gendered since teaching and nursing are considered appropriate for women because traditional society believed that nurturing was a quality that was inherent in females. Lalitha who does not see a role model in the figure of Amma or Alamelu, feels encouraged when Miss Mendoza, a career woman herself, suggests that Lalitha could be anything that she wanted to because of her beauty and talent. However, when Lalitha seriously considers acting as a career, she subverts gender essentialism much to the anxiety of her traditional family.

It is only after acting in the documentary by Gupta and visiting the city to watch the preview that Lalitha seriously considers acting as a career, unlike what is stated in the back cover of the 2010 Penguin edition: "Ambitious and spoilt, she has dreams of being a movie star that are fulfilled when a film-maker casts her in his documentary on village life". The point here is that the aspiration for a career is planted by Miss Mendoza and Lalitha decides on acting as a career after acting in the documentary. Lalitha then begins to perceive an acting career in the city as an opportunity to move away from the banality of village life.

Even though Lalitha rebels against traditional patriarchy in the village, she does not seem to be totally free because her desire to maintain a slim body indicates her enslavement to modern patriarchy, especially after her first trip to the city: "In Saroja's school the girls wanted to be rounded and curvy, like goddesses in pictures, but in Lalitha's they were crazy for slimness, the fashion was to be skinny everywhere except for breasts" (46)¹². Lalitha's self-control with food intake to prevent weight gain can be understood in the light of Sandra Bartky's argument that women subject themselves to various self-disciplining ways to achieve an ideal body size that is dictated by current cultural demand. Bartky elaborates how

¹² The varying body size ideal in the government versus English medium school reminds one of the body size comparisons made between Tambu from the village and England-returned Nyasha in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1998). While Tambu is pleased with her growing body as she surveys her reflection, slim-bodied Nyasha, who suffers from bulimia, teases Tambu about her big rear.

disciplinary practices such as dieting, and exercise are imposed on the body to achieve slenderness which is the prevailing fashion (65). Thus, Lalitha's visit to the glamorous city with its sophisticated dwellers, especially those in the film industry, not only encourages uninhibited interactions with the opposite sex but also results in a shift in her view of ideal femininity, beauty, and body size¹³.

The male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman is free to leave his provincial town to start his apprenticeship in the city, experience life and engage in love relationships as part of growing up and learning the ways of the world. But Lalitha must resort to running away because she will never be permitted to move to the city because of her gender, unlike her brothers who had the blessings of their parents when they left the village for good to settle down in the town. Lalitha becomes sexually empowered when influenced by modernity and city mores but is labelled immoral by society for exerting her sexual agency. Lalitha's coerced abortion can be viewed as patriarchy's invasion of the female body that has transgressed to make it a 'docile' body again. Lalitha refusal to return to the village after the illegal¹⁴ procedure can be seen as resistance against control and refusal to be an obedient daughter. According to Leela Dube, unmarried women prefer to stay in big cities because "the norms are less stringent" there and they can "exist in relative anonymity" (15). By running away again, Lalitha appears to have regained control of her body that had been targeted and punished by patriarchy.

The pinnacle of the protagonist's journey in the traditional Bildungsroman is the attainment of maturity. When Lalitha runs away again, her journey continues instead of culminating. Will she become an actress and achieve transcendence in the city? If no, will she be forced into prostitution because of her young age, especially since the city is portrayed

¹³ See V Swami's study, *Cultural influences on body size ideals: Unpacking the impact of Westernization and modernisation* (2015), that examines the body size ideals in the different cultures and argues that the "thin ideal" is prevalent not only in the Western world but also in non-Western urban areas because of Westernisation and modernisation.

¹⁴ In the 1960s, family planning policies were rolled out to promote a smaller family in the state's effort to control the increasing population. The debate on legalising abortion in India only escalated in the late sixties. Even though abortion was finally legalised in 1971, setting the legal age for abortion at eighteen, there were many restrictions. Furthermore, it catered more to married women who wanted to restrict their family size. (*Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Government of India* (1971), Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act). The delay in legalising abortion and the difficulty of access to abortion for unmarried women can be related to the nation state's use of existing social norms of procreation through heterosexual marriage to discourage women from being sexually active outside marriage in its efforts to promote national Indian culture and tradition.

as an unsafe place with predators? The open ending of the novel does not provide answers to these questions. According to Erica Hoagland, an open ending is typical of a postcolonial Bildungsroman:

The “choice” for the postcolonial Bildungsroman protagonist is often foregrounded by the presence of discrimination, assimilation, and violence, and the compromise which is expected of the postcolonial protagonist is often, though again, not always, two-fold: the first between themselves and their “native” culture/society, and the second between themselves and the “society” which undergirds the traditional Bildungsroman – the white man’s world. The failure to reach a compromise supposedly makes closure impossible in the pages of the minority or postcolonial Bildungsroman” (35).

This leads us to another question: Does Lalitha attain maturity? Her loss of sexual innocence is reflected in her appearance when she returns from the village having lost her virginity: “Saroja considered her sister, thought she looked older, it was a matter of years rather than the months she had been away. Then she thought again, decided it wasn’t a matter of ageing at all but some kind of inner scoring like what had happened to her brothers” (120). Lalitha does become an adult, leaving behind her adolescence. However, whether she attains maturity in the true sense of a Bildungsroman protagonist who leaves behind his or her naivety and romantic ideals to assimilate into society as a practical adult is debatable.

Saroja’s Journey: From Confusion to Clarity and then to Conformity

In this section, I examine how Saroja’s rite of passage from childhood to adulthood takes place when she moves from confusion in the village to clarity in the city and finally to conformity to traditional patriarchy. I discuss how Markandaya’s uses quest-romance features to portray Saroja’s quest to understand herself, her external reality and manage her growing anxieties. I pay particular attention to how mundane activities in the village reinforce a womanhood suitable for middle-class women that is based on sexual respectability and how this confuses Saroja when she notes contradictions between ideal womanhood that is desired and the reality of the situation. I trace Saroja’s growing awareness of society, “the beastly tamer” (155) that controls the sexuality of its members, especially females, and how Saroja’s consciousness impacts the way she responds to her newly awakened sexuality.

Markandaya draws attention to how women’s sexual identities are shaped differently because their experiences are dependent on class, caste, ethnicity, and religion and she brings this out by including women from different backgrounds in the narrative. Mundane activities

in the village concerning women's body and sexuality reinforce female subordination and establish a link between middle-class women and sexual respectability. According to Jyoti Puri, sexual respectability expected of upper and middle-class women is not only grounded on gender and class but also on nationalism (*Desire* 77). She asserts that the postcolonial nation state controlled middle-and upper-class women's sexualities so that they conformed to normative Indian womanhood. Her study illustrates how this concept of sexual respectability, when internalised by women, has the power to control their bodies and sexualities.

Jyoti Puri highlights how women try hard to avoid threats to their body and sexuality in the form of sexual violation so that their sexual respectability is not compromised. When a joke about Nalini's widowed mother being pregnant turns into a malicious rumour, the innocent widow's reputation is maligned. Since marriage and motherhood are the only acceptable forms of sexuality in traditional Indian society, unmarried women are to remain virgins while widows are to live an austere and celibate life. Alamelu uses this incident to reinforce to the girls that women were not only required to be virtuous but also had to ensure their honour was not stained. This scene brings out how women are socially conditioned to safeguard their reputation while also foreshadowing Lalitha's downfall. Even when sexual violation takes place, Jyoti Puri observes, it is not often that it is brought out in the open. Lachu, the village paedophile's molestation of young girls is not escalated because mothers worry about the repercussions it would have on their daughters' sexual respectability and future marriage prospects. The city too is believed to pose threats of sexual violation by predators who take advantage of gullible women.

Since it is deemed inappropriate for upper or middle-class women to talk about sex openly, the topic is a taboo in Saroja's family¹⁵. Lalitha's budding sexuality, her secretive

¹⁵ Initial reception of *Two Virgins* in 1973 and subsequent appraisals show that sex is a taboo subject not only in the middle-class households as presented in the novel but also in texts that were published in that period. Markandaya has been accused of depicting "vulgar forms of sex" (Bande, 105) that the adolescent sisters are exposed to as they deal with their burgeoning sexuality and her work has been labelled "unIndian" (Almeida, and Ezekiel, 32), especially her treatment of sexuality. The explicit handling of the theme of sexuality has pushed some critics consider *Two Virgins* as the weakest of Markandaya's novels. In 1984, *Two Virgins* was taken out of the undergraduate syllabus by the University of Madras, several months after it was prescribed as a text for English Literature, on the basis that sexual elements in the novel were corrupting to young minds. Such extreme reactions only prove that the detractors were responding to one aspect of the novel, the presence of overt sex, a taboo subject, failing to appreciate the novel's overarching theme of sexual identity formation during adolescence and patriarchy's control of female sexuality that oppresses women. It is in the context of portraying Saroja's sex education and her sexual awakening from her own naive perspective that the novel includes scenes about human sexuality. It is interesting to note that the word sex is not used in the entire novel to refer to the physical act of intercourse; the only instance it is used is to refer to gender. Instead, phrases such

behaviour and provocative half answers to Saroja's naïve questions are unhelpful and confuse Saroja. Curious about the mechanics of sex and female sexuality, Saroja thus paid more attention "when she was told not to because she had discovered you learned more that way, and mostly they were the more interesting things" (15). The ethnography of everyday life in the village brings out incidents of cognitive dissonance, highlighting how a character may say or believe in something but that does not guarantee that that is what he or she would do. Oftentimes, Saroja's observation of sexuality in the adult world contradicts with what she is told, and this increases her confusion.

Amma wants her daughters to be modest, but oftentimes her own behaviour is dubious. Saroja is conflicted by Amma's apparent lack of sexual respectability and her defensive retort when chastised by Alamelu for her proximity with the Sikh hawker. Saroja is inclined to believe that Amma's behaviour may have crossed the boundaries of acceptable social conduct because of Amma's body language and flushed face. However, Saroja becomes unsettled when Amma lambasts Alamelu for suspecting her and Appa joins in the fight to support Amma in condemning Alamelu for being suspicious. During the fight, Amma's saree falls off her shoulder revealing her bosom, much to Saroja and Appa's discomfort. Saroja who was amused when Manikkam's wife's body is revealed during her clumsy moments finds it disturbing to see Amma this way because as a middle-class woman, Amma is expected to maintain sexual respectability.

Through Amma's ambivalent sexuality, Markandaya challenges the stereotype that all middle-class women exhibited sexual respectability that was expected of them. Amma's questionable sexual conduct is revealed in other scenes, for instance, when it is hinted that Appa may not have fathered Lalitha because her spectacular appearance cannot be accounted for. The following passage serves several functions. It shows Saroja's internalisation of the virtues of Pativratas. It brings out the discrepancy between what is desired in ideal Indian womanhood as represented by upper- and middle-class women and the reality of the situation. But importantly, the juxtaposition of Saroja's uncritical perspective and the narrator's mocking comments make the passage polyvocal. The irony of Saroja's naïve

as "doing bodily things to each other" (55) are used and they effectively reflect Saroja's naïve speech and thought patterns.

comparison of Amma with Sita of Ramayana is brought out with the use of free indirect discourse (indicated in italics):

“She (Saroja) stared at the pictures on his (Gupta’s) walls. They were different from the ones Amma put up, which were of Radha and Krishna, and Lakshmi, and Rama and Sita. Amma admired Sita, *whom she did not resemble a great deal if you went by all that the sages had written about her*. Sita was purity itself, she was devoted to Rama, her husband and god, would not have lifted her eyes to another. *Amma was free with her looks, she stroked and caressed her own flesh, you could spot the seeds which had sprouted in Lalitha, her ways with her eyes and limbs, though Lalitha had added finesse of her own*: but if Appa had taken to the wilderness (which was difficult to imagine, but Saroja finally succeeded) Amma would have followed him without a second thought” (155).

Unlike Lalitha who judges Amma, implying that Amma’s anger towards Lalitha’s questionable behaviour is a result of seeing her own highly sexed nature reflected in Lalitha, Saroja refuses to consider Lalitha’s insinuation because she unable to view Amma as lacking appropriate sexual behaviour.

When Saroja’s understanding of female sexuality broadens in the city, she realises Amma’s mistake in asserting that only “low class girls of low intelligence” (155) get impregnated before marriage even though Amma justifies Lalitha’s pregnancy and that of other middle-class girls’ are “exceptions that prove the rule” (155). Once again, Markandaya challenges stereotypes, reinforcing that sexual respectability is only a desired aspect of middle-class Indian womanhood. Troubled by her intense physical attraction to Devraj, Saroja worries if she too had been “cast in the wanton mould” but later it dawns on her that “it wasn’t necessary to be cast in Lalitha’s mould or any mould, the urge was implanted deep and indestructibly in every human being” (168). With an increased understanding of the nature of human sexuality, Saroja is on her way to accepting her own sexuality.

Alice Drum categorises *Two Virgins* as a quest tale based on the three-part structure she observes: “the going forth, the adventure, the return” (323). Suggesting that the three divisions correspond to the three stages in Saroja’s symbolic journey, namely the introduction of “the theme of innocence”, the disclosure of “the problems the protagonist faces” and the completion of “the successful transition from childhood into adult society” (324), she argues that that these stages move the plot forward. While these steps are visible in the narrative structure, I reiterate that it is Lalitha’s yearning for transcendence from the banality of village life that moves the plot from Part Two onwards, as argued earlier. Alice Drum places much importance on the trip to the city, equating it with the adventure that brings about Saroja’s

maturity and “victory over fear” (331). Rather than viewing Saroja’s short stay in the city as directly responsible for her entry into adulthood, I consider the city as the place where her sexual education culminates since her development had been a steady one that began in the village and the trip to the city only broadened her outlook on human sexuality. This is not to say that I deny the importance of Saroja’s journey to the city because it is in the city that she finally comes to terms with her own sexuality and learns the consequences of transgressing the codes imposed by society on the decorum of young unmarried Hindu girls. What needs to be noted here is that even though the trauma Saroja experiences in the city becomes a turning point in her life, the changes she undergoes are incremental and gradual and align with the progressive growth of the male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman.

Furthermore, a reading that gives importance only to the actions in the city ignores the concerted effort taken to portray Saroja’s gradual understanding of human sexuality from nuggets of information gleaned from her gurus, her classmate Jaya, her confidante Chingleput and her neighbour, Manikkam’s wife, and hotch-potch details from her observations. Alamelu advises Saroja not to resort to Manikkam’s wife, referring to her as “a dangerous woman” and “an ignorant peasant” (172) but Saroja considers her the best of her gurus: “Manikkam’s wife, who told you, thought nothing of hitching up her clothes to demonstrate in the flesh if you asked” (172).

Initially, the concept of society is unclear to Saroja: “Saroja thought about society and wondered what it was. Appa and Chingleput often blamed it, and now the boys were beginning” (13). But as the narrative progresses, Saroja’s understanding of society increases and concretises at the end, and she acknowledges the limitations society imposes on women in its efforts to control their sexuality. Although Saroja finds Curly, the transgender, affable and harmless, Amma’s homophobic attitude towards Curly informs Saroja that his sexual orientation was considered deviant by society. Saroja is troubled by Lalitha’s impending abortion, but reluctantly accepts that the only normative standard for reproduction was within a heterosexual marriage. Saroja comprehends that society ensured compliance to normative sexuality by refusing to accommodate illegitimate children by denying them space and stigmatising unwed mothers for their transgression.

Markandaya’s depiction of society that enforces normative standards with regards to reproduction aligns with Michel Foucault’s concept of power in modern societies that disciplines and normalises. According to Foucault, “socialisation of procreative behaviour”

(*History* 104) is an institutional practice that compels normal sexuality and controls births. Any procreative behaviour other than reproduction within a heterosexual marriage is considered deviant and unacceptable. When Lalitha explains that there was “no way at all” that the baby could have been kept, Saroja acknowledges the role of society: “It’s society, she heard herself mumbling. It’s the way society is organised, she heard her brothers say. Saroja agreed. After all the years of semi-comprehension she took up her stand solidly alongside them and flayed the system” (180).

It was observed that *Two Virgins* evoked elements of popular romance fiction, especially in its characterisation of Lalitha and Saroja and the romantic idealism the young sisters entertain in connection to relationship between the opposite sexes. Saroja’s tomboyish behaviour, her innocence and her ability to easily connect with others and exercise empathy, makes her a very likable character. In contrast, Lalitha is presented as possessing qualities that are opposite to Saroja in her knowing and manipulative ways. Minoli Salgado identifies the presence of “binary characters” in *Two Virgins* and how naïve Saroja, who represents the ideal heroine, is contrasted with the manipulative and sexually empowered Lalitha, who acts as the “stereotypical foil” (98). Description of Saroja’s infatuation with Devraj, how his presence excites her and her fantasies about romantic relationships with the opposite sex are resonant of the depiction of love relationship of female characters observed in the last two chapters.

Salgado, however, is right that the features of popular romance observed in the novel are at a surface level while the quest-romance features present are more important as they represent the “novel’s ideological thrust” (98). As such, I contend that reading the novel as incorporating features of the quest-romance is more complex than singling out popular romance elements evident in the novel or considering the novel as a quest tale as Alice Drum does. Such a reading is also more productive since it draws attention to Saroja’s determination to make sense of the complex and confusing world around her, especially her desire to untangle the mystery surrounding human sexuality and deal with her own sexual awakening that causes much anxiety within her. Saroja quests to discover more about her social reality, engage in sexual education to uncover information withheld from her, seek clarification on the contradictions observed and alleviate herself from the anxieties caused by her confusion. Saroja’s actions can be seen in relation to the journey that the quest-romance hero undertakes to discover truths about himself and his world. According to Northrop Frye,

the journey that the quest-romance hero undertakes is similar to a spiritual journey in search of a truth (*Anatomy* 193).

Even though it appears that not much discourse time is devoted to the depiction of city life and life-changing events that happen in the city in Parts Five and Six (fifty pages) as opposed to the cyclical village life in the earlier four parts (hundred and forty-two pages), the last two parts experience a deceleration since happenings of about two weeks in the city are described in great detail. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, time in the chronotope of threshold is “essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biological time” (*Dialogic* 248). The traumatic moments in the city that impact Saroja and Lalitha are narrated with an immediacy and the increased usage of the second person perspective brings the reader closer, extending empathetic engagement from Saroja to Lalitha and Appa.

Saroja learns that society acts as the tamer of human sexuality, especially female sexuality, through her firsthand and vicarious experiences and her response to this awareness is conformity to society’s expectations by suppressing her sexual desires and self-regulating her natural impulses. Saroja curbs her sexual impulses by resisting urban seduction in the form of her physical attraction to Devraj and by rejecting Chingleput’s sexual advance when she returns to the village. Saroja’s self-regulation can be linked to Foucault’s insight on power in modern society, whereby individuals police themselves to ensure they are in compliance with what is expected of them by society (*Discipline* 194). While Saroja’s return to the village can be seen as appreciation of tradition and rejection of modernity, more likely reasons are her vicarious learning from Lalitha’s transgression and her dislike of the city as opposed to her idealisation of the village. Saroja’s return to the village also represents her reintegration with society after her quest which is also reflective of the quest-romance hero’s return and social redemption and the assimilation of the Bildungsroman hero after his apprenticeship.

While Saroja may remain a virgin at the end of the novel because she resists in engaging in a physical relationship, she nevertheless loses her sexual innocence because of the knowledge she has gained. The cyclical nature of time is also reinforced in the end of the novel when the narrative which began with Chingleput’s story, completes with a scene involving Chingleput and Saroja. Saroja’s transition from childhood to adulthood that necessitates suppression of sexual desires can be seen as moving away from naïve romantic

ideals to a more practical sensibility. As such, unlike Lalitha, Saroja matures in the true sense of maturity attained by the traditional Bildungsroman protagonist when she compromises her internal impulses to assimilate into society rather than allow society to punish her when she transgresses. Also, her timid and God-fearing nature seems to help her to moderate her behaviour, stopping her from following her heart.

Saroja's emergence as a matured being is seen in how she moves from confusion in the village to clarity in the city and conformity to patriarchal expectations in the backdrop of a world that is transitioning to a new and modern era. Saroja enters adulthood, leaving behind her childhood and adolescence, when her sexual education completes and her experiences in the city expand her knowledge. Upon her return to the village, she feels "she knew too much, she had gone through too much to be afraid of anything" (191). Saroja's gradual growth towards understanding herself, human sexuality, especially the mechanics of sex and the place of female sexuality and her own place in society resembles the spiritual quest of the quest-romance hero to ascertain his own role and place in the wider world. In the end, Saroja's romantic idealism about love and relationship between the opposite sexes also gives way, after witnessing the reality of the situation, especially the status of women in a masculinist world.

In this chapter, I have examined Kamala Markandaya's modification of the Bildungsroman conventions to present the double Bildung of a pair of adolescent sisters in the backdrop of a post-independent India undergoing modernising changes. The conflict between modernity and tradition is a recurrent theme in Markandaya's novels and in *Two Virgins*, I have shown that, rather than champion one over the other or suggest a balance between the two, Markandaya focuses on how the main characters are impacted by their response to modernising changes that infiltrate the traditional way of life. My analysis attempted to show in detail the intersection of various constructs of gender, age, sexuality, caste, class, religion, and nation that influence the development of Lalitha and Saroja and I have suggested that the encounter between tradition and modernity impacted them very differently, especially in the way they respond to their burgeoning sexuality.

I have discussed Markandaya's use of the chronotopes of provincial town and threshold to depict the disparate rural and urban temporalities and Saroja's idealisation of the village that evokes the idyllic chronotope. I have argued that Markandaya embraces the features of the idyllic village novel and the quest-romance to bring out the contrasting

development trajectories of the siblings and critique the condition of the Indian nation-state that was riven with socio-economic issues and inequities in the sixties that impacted the lives of postcolonial subjects. Markandaya's use of cyclical everyday time to portray the ordinary and humdrum life in the village, I have suggested, reveals the power structure behind beliefs, traditions and practices that perpetuate various inequalities and promote ideal Indian womanhood. I have highlighted how Markandaya draws attention to how women's sexual identities are dependent on their class, caste, ethnicity and religion by including women from various backgrounds. Specifically, I have discussed Markandaya's portrayal of the lives of middle-class women that is framed in terms of ideal Indian womanhood and sexual respectability and the consequences of transgressing these expectations. I have asserted that while the emphasis is on depicting the quotidian life in the village and not the dramatic changes occurring in the public sphere, Markandaya's indictment against the postcolonial Indian nation-state's lack of progress and equality even two decades after independence is effectively brought out through the use of the social realist mode. In addition, Appa's debates in the home front take on a political undertone when he refers to the teachings of Gandhi and a satirical undertone when he engages in politics of blame critiquing the British.

While the focus of the novel is on how the burgeoning sexuality of the teenage sisters influences their growth trajectory, I have pointed out that Markandaya widens the lens to include how sexuality of other women like Amma and Manikkam's wife is linked to their class, status, caste, age and background. I have highlighted how Markandaya, in addition to revising Bildungsroman conventions, adopts features of the quest-romance to portray Saroja's journey that culminates in her understanding of the world around her, leaving her at the threshold of adulthood. Meanwhile, Lalitha's flight from her family and traditional patriarchy's control does not provide a closure to her story. I have suggested that by highlighting that Lalitha's journey of self-discovery continues, Markandaya underscores that achieving complete freedom and self-actualisation is an ongoing process for women in the postcolonial world since resisting one's limitations and pushing boundaries alone does not guarantee emancipation.

Chapter Four

The Stillborn - Dreaming on Despite Aborted Aspirations

With the publication of *The Stillborn* in 1984, second-generation Nigerian writer Zaynab Alkali is considered the first Muslim woman writer from northern Nigeria to have written a novel in English. Zaynab Alkali, a Hausa Muslim, won the Association of Nigerian Writers prize in 1985 for this debut novel of hers. The positive reception of *The Stillborn* by Alkali is viewed as recognition of women's voices from the northern region of Nigeria¹. The novel is set in an unnamed village in northern Nigeria which is populated mainly by a Hausa speaking Muslim community. The actions that take place in an unnamed city are briefly narrated. While the period in which the novel is set is not specified, it can be inferred that it is the immediate post-independence period, and a newly independent Nigeria in the 1960s forms the backdrop of the novel. The novel captures the mass migration of people from villages to cities during this period of economic and socio-political transformations.

The Stillborn is the story of three young women, Li, Li's older sister Awa and Li's best friend, Faku, who live in a village in a newly independent Nigeria. Li, the main protagonist, lives with her parents, grandparents and siblings in a joint family compound that is headed by her father, Baba. Baba is a Muslim who attempts to uphold Islam strictly in the family while Li's mother remains a traditionalist. Li's grandfather, Kaka, on the other hand, is a traditionalist who is all-embracing. In this household where the family members profess their allegiance to different faiths and beliefs, Awa embraces Islam willingly while Li finds it restricting her freedom. The narrative begins when Li is a rebellious girl of thirteen and ends when she is a mature adult of thirty-three. Li, Awa and Faku who are full of dreams for a bright future, harbour romantic ideals but their dreams are shattered when they discover their grave mistakes in their choice of husbands. Li's husband, Habu Adams, becomes a changed man when he goes to the city to make a living. Entangled with another woman, he becomes an

¹ Kanchana Ugbabe observes that when *The Stillborn* won the award for the best novel, Zaynab Alkali was hailed as the "lone female voice from the north" (15). Halima Shehu points out that Muslim women in Nigeria are not represented very much in literature and many misconceptions surround the condition of their lives. She also highlights that Igbo and Yoruba women writers from Western and Eastern Nigeria have received much more attention in literary studies when compared to Hausa Muslim women from northern Nigeria (188). Zaynab Alkali's other works include a short-story collection, *The Cobwebs and Other Stories* (1997) and novels *The Virtuous Woman* (1987), *The Descendants* (2005) and *The Initiates* (2007).

alcoholic, refusing to start a life with his teenaged bride of fifteen who is left behind in the village for years. Finally, Li gets to live with Habu in the city for a year before she returns to the village, disillusioned with her married life. Li gives birth to a daughter, Shuwa, but is still ignored by Habu. Unable to tolerate the humiliation in the village as an abandoned wife harassed by suitors and shunned by other women, Li leaves for a nearby town to further her studies to become a teacher. Li returns, armed with a career, taking over the role of “the man of the house” (101) since her brother Sule has run away to Niger. As an accomplished woman who has embraced Islam, Li wishes to return to the city to Habu to give her marriage another chance. Awa, on the other hand, continues to be the pillar that keeps the home intact by looking after her children, parents and grandparents while tolerating her husband, Dan Fiama, who gives in to drinking when he is demoted from headmaster to junior teacher when the mission school is taken over by the government. Unable to achieve her dream of becoming the head of the adult education department in her school, Awa becomes a self-sacrificial figure who is embittered. Faku, a fatherless girl, brought up by her widowed mother who is stigmatised, initially claims that she has no issues with polygyny. However, when she moves to the city of Kano, she becomes a broken woman when neglected by her husband Garba and ill-treated by his senior wife, and it is rumoured that she is driven to prostitution. However, Faku gets a breakthrough and regains her confidence when she undergoes training to become a social worker.

The sixties were a period that experienced many sociocultural transformations in a newly independent Nigeria. Poverty was a pressing problem, especially in the rural areas and migration to cities was on the rise as villagers moved in search of better opportunities². The increasing rate of urbanisation not only affected the manpower situation in the villages which depended mainly on agriculture and farming for their sustenance, but also the rural environment and its traditional values which were encroached by modern and liberal city mores. The novel begins in the early sixties and ends in the early eighties, covering a period of twenty years in the life of Li. The shifts in gender and familial relations in this period resulting from modernising changes are also registered.

² According to Kemi Amina, the rapid urbanisation in Nigeria has led to various issues such as overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and development of slums: “In 1952, 10% of the population lived in urban centres sized 20,000 or above. This increased to 20% and 38% in 1970 and 1993, respectively and it is further increasing” (196).

Popular romance fiction written in Hausa by writers in northern Nigeria was part of the Kano market literature³. According to Novian Whitsitt, these romance novels known as “Littattafan Soyayya (‘books of love’)” were mainly used by Hausa women writers as “an explorative forum for the socially and culturally loaded issues of polygamy, marriages of coercion, *pardah* (the Islamic tradition of seclusion) and accessibility of education for females” (1). What is surprising about this genre of romance fiction is its dual functions of entertainment and didactic intention. These novels entertain the readers with the romance elements of dream and fantasy, adventures of young lovers and relationship between the opposite sexes while at the same time address and advise on social issues of parent-child relationships, polygyny and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Littattafan Soyayya of the Islamic northern Nigeria is different from Western Romance in that it explores issues such as polygyny and female education, but it converges in its preoccupation with the saga of love and marital relationships even as its portrayal is kept within the boundaries of Islamic codes of behaviour. Zaynab Alkali’s novels, although written in English, incorporate many of the features of the Hausa Littattafan Soyayya, especially in their portrayal of relationships between young lovers and married couples in the backdrop of a modernising world and her use of didacticism.

At the start, *The Stillborn* uses a linear narrative structure that is typical of a traditional Bildungsroman. The use of an omniscient narrator in the opening chapters is effective since we are privy to the thoughts of the protagonists and other characters associated with them. In the first five chapters that cover Li’s life from the age of thirteen to fifteen, Li’s childhood experiences, early adolescent life, and her encounter with Habu are narrated in detail along with the lives of Awa and Faku. However, from Chapter Six onwards the narrative is focalised through Li, and we understand that four years have elapsed.

We anticipate the shift from an omniscient narrator to a third person point of view, focalised through Li, to be effective because the village setting has been established, highlighting its spatial divisions and all the important characters from various backgrounds have been introduced and we are ready to turn our full attention to Li’s life story and Awa and

³ Novian Whitsitt points out that Kano market literature that became popular in the seventies and eighties in northern Nigeria is similar to Onitsha market literature of the forties. Muslim women writers wrote romance novels in Hausa and engaged in self-publishing. Even though this literature was published and consumed in other northern cities like Kaduna and Zaria, it was in Kano that it had its biggest market, hence named after the marketplace. Although these romance novels were popular and contributed to a dynamic cottage industry, they did create some controversy because of their focus on courtship and marital relationship but the authors were quick to defend their themes, pointing out their didactic intentions to instil proper behaviour amongst the readers (1).

Faku's stories that run parallel to Li's. However, the use of flashback and flashback within flashback to update the reader on the important events that had transpired in Li's life become rather problematic, at times making it difficult to distinguish the end of a flashback and the return to the present time of the narrative and the reader is left feeling dissatisfied. For example, Chapter Seven presents Li's disappointing and miserable life with Habu in the city for a year with a flashback that acts like a summary. Similarly, Habu's visit to the town, where Li does her teacher training, in his attempts to reconcile with Li and his confession about his life with his second wife in the city are summarised into a single page when Li shares the details with Awa towards the end of the novel. Surprisingly, Grace Eche Okereke commends Alkali's narrative for its "cinematic effect", suggesting that Alkali "glides her creative kaleidoscope across years, focusing on a significant event marking each stage in woman's growth, analysing and describing it in detail with telescopic intensity, and then gliding over others leaving blurred images and gaps, which are later concretized and "sutured" into completeness through flashback" (98). While it is true that the flashbacks help to fill in the missing parts, I maintain that the flashbacks are nevertheless quite brief and act like summaries in the depiction of some of the key events in the protagonists' lives. The shift in the narrative structure from the typical linear narrative structure of a traditional Bildungsroman adopted to a series of flashback and flashback within flashback that are disruptive reflect the problematic growth of the protagonists penetrating the structure of the novel itself.

The city plays a major part in luring men and women from villages and is perceived as a major downfall of men who are corrupted by its values but is hardly picturised in Chapter Seven⁴. However, Alkali's concern with capturing the village in transition at the expense of presenting the city, to highlight how the rural residents and landscape are affected by urbanisation and modernising changes, is illuminating when seen in relation to the "mythic structure" adopted by Nigerian village novels as suggested by Wendy Griswold (714). Griswold observes that Nigerian village novels adhere to a standard formula, consisting of five stages, to portray an imaginary community in Nigerian villages: "Traditional social order", "Disturbance from outside", "Attempted restoration", "Climax" and "Disintegration" (714).

⁴ It was noted in the last chapter that Kamala Markandaya devotes much time in *Two Virgins* to depict the languorous rural life but nevertheless briefly presents urban life at the end of the novel to highlight the contrast between the two lifestyles. However, Zaynab Alkali mainly focuses on the village, providing only a summary of the important events that take place in the city rather than picturise the city. While Kano is the only city that is named, Li's village and the nearby town she goes for her teacher training are unnamed; in the case of *Two Virgins*, it was observed that both the village and city are unnamed. Besides unnamed locations, both novels do not specify the time period in which they are set.

While Alkali does not fully embrace this mystic structure in telling her story, she uses several of these stages to present the impact of migration to cities and modernisation on the village environment and its residents with their complex belief system and multi-religious background.

Although predominantly populated by Hausa Muslims⁵, northern Nigeria is also home to people of other religions. Islam and Christianity coexist in this region with traditionalism or indigenous religions. Technically, Li and her siblings are half traditionalist and half Muslim; Li's family with its members embracing different religions and beliefs can be seen as the microcosm of the nation with its multi-religious societies. Adriaan van Klinken who examines the representation of religion in African literature suggests that Islam is presented as more accommodating than Christianity in a multi-religious context since the relationship between Islam and indigenous religion "tends to be cast in a more harmonious way" (4). However, this relationship is problematised in *The Stillborn*, and the tension between Islam and traditional religion is brought out when Baba calls Mama "a heathen woman" (13) who refuses to embrace Islam seriously and attributes heathenism to the lack of discipline amongst his children, especially Li and Sule. Growing up in this complex family background, Li and Sule find the home environment suffocating and stifling, unlike Awa who embraces Islam willingly and is compliant with the restrictions imposed by Baba.

Alkali was commended for being a pioneering woman writer from northern Nigeria and *The Stillborn* was received well and was praised for presenting the reality of the condition of women in northern Nigeria and for its feminist dimension in condemning patriarchy and religion in oppressing women. Focusing their attention on the spatial confinement and restriction of movement of women and the practice of polygyny in Islam, critics have continued to associate Islam with oppression of women in *The Stillborn*. For example, Chikwenye Okanjo Ogunyemi asserts that Alkali "attacks Islam's oppression of women" (309) through the figure of Baba who restricts the movement of women in his household. In contrast, Shirin Edwin brings a refreshingly different take on the role of religion in *The Stillborn*. She proposes

⁵ More than half the population of Nigeria is Muslim and Nigeria has the largest population of Muslims in Africa, and it is believed that the advent of Islam in northern Nigeria was in the eleventh century (Wikipedia). Yakut Akbay provides a useful overview of the population makeup of Nigeria with its multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. He highlights how the three main ethnic groups, the Hausa, the Yoruba, and the Igbo mainly populate the northern, southwestern, and southeastern parts of Nigeria and how Islam and Christianity, the two main religions, prevail in the northern and southern parts of the country respectively. He also points out that local traditions continue to play an important part in the lives of Nigerians and how polygamy is "commonly practiced in the country" (310).

the use of African-Islamic feminism to examine the text, arguing that Islam empowers women, attributing Li's changed attitude and motivation to pursue higher education and embark on a career as stemming from embracing Islam fully and emulating Awa, who is presented as the epitome of tolerance (195).

Susan Arndt classifies African feminist literature into three models, the reformist, transformative and radical texts, pointing out that majority of the texts fall under the transformative category (33). Representation of men and patriarchy in the text is an important criterion used to classify the texts; a reformist text criticises men, but the criticism is not as sharp and targeted as in the transformative or radical texts. While reformative and transformative texts present men as capable of change, the radical texts view men in a more negative light, doubting their capability to reform (33-34). Seen in the light of the models proposed by Susan Arndt, *The Stillborn* is a reformist text mainly though it exhibits some features that are associated with the transformative text. It is a reformist text because men's behaviour and attitudes that discriminate and oppress women are seen as acts by individuals rather behaviour that is representative of men as a group. Men are also presented as being capable of change as seen in Habu who regrets his ill-treatment of Li and seeks to be reunited with her and this indicates the possibility of men and women working alongside each other to live harmoniously. The novel also critiques women who oppress other women as portrayed in Garba's polygynous household which is characterised by rivalry and enmity between co-wives, and this can be linked to a transformative feminist text. A transformative text highlights women's complicity in the perpetuation of power structures that oppress women but suggests that discriminations by both men and women are not insurmountable. The idea that men and society can reform is reinforced in the happy ending of *The Stillborn* that indicates a reunion between Li and Habu.

In the sections that follow, I examine Alkali's use of the family as a microcosm of the multi-cultural and multi-religious nation to portray the dramatic transformations brought about by modernisation and rapid urbanisation in the early 1960s after Nigeria's independence. Specifically, I analyse the picture that Alkali paints of the village and its environment, the residents, consisting of the Hausa Muslim community largely, as they experience changes brought about by mass migration to the cities and the absorption of liberal city values. I suggest that Alkali focusses on how these changes bring about shifts in gender and familial relations which impact the lives of women and men differently. Adopting a gender lens to read the text reveals what is considered normative femininity and masculinity in the traditional

Hausa community and how these concepts undergo changes when gendered roles and responsibilities evolve with the advent of modernity.

Tradition and religion are important aspects in the daily lives of the Hausa village community and Alkali highlights the role of Islam in the choices that the protagonists make in their lives. I trace the development trajectory of the three protagonists who harbour ambitious dreams with regards to their education, career, and marriage, paying particular attention to the influence of religion while keeping in mind other contributing axes such as tradition, modernity, family, and age. I discuss the novel's incorporation of the stories of other women associated with the protagonists such as Li's mother and grandmother and Li's landlady, Hajiya, to demonstrate the interconnected nature of women and how they influence one another. I analyse Alkali's combined use of the journey motif and dream motif to present the physical as well as metaphorical journeys of the protagonists that move the narrative forward, which otherwise relies heavily on flashbacks. Examining the various stages the protagonists need to go through to achieve freedom and self-fulfilment, I propose that the way in which the protagonists respond to the transforming world around them determines their route to self-actualisation and the degree of success of their self-formation.

I argue that Alkali appropriates the popular Hausa romance fiction, *Littattafan Soyayya*, and the Nigerian village novel to portray a village in transition and illustrate the impact of modernisation and urban values on the village, its landscape, and residents, specifically young women coming of age during that period. I suggest that Alkali's appropriation of the stages of the mystic structure associated with the Nigerian village novel and her incorporation of the features of the *Littattafan Soyayya* allow her to trace the development trajectories of the three female protagonists and underscore how tradition, religion and modernising changes affect their dreams. While the Nigerian village novel structure adopted provides a bigger picture of the village and its residents in transition, the romance novel features embraced present the personal lives of the young female protagonists up close, depicting their desires, ambitions, and their fantasies about love-relationships and marriage in a modern world.

In the Introduction, I briefly discussed the use of womanism by African American feminists and African feminists, Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Mary Kolawole and how they differ. Critics (Ibrahim Sanusi Chinade, Rotimi Johnson and Vivian Yenika-Agbaw) have pointed out Alkali's use of womanism in *The Stillborn*, debating Alkali's womanist stand in relation to the ending of the novel which indicates Li's desire to reconcile with Habu. While a

womanist reading is useful to explain Li's wish to return to Habu, Awa's patience and tolerance towards Fiama and highlight the importance of men and women working together, it does not result in a nuanced reading of the text. Focusing on West African feminisms, Naomi Nkealah examines the various strands of African feminism, pointing out that the different regions of Africa have their own versions of feminisms. Nkealah notes that feminists such as Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Obioma Nnaemeka are from the eastern region of Nigeria, the Igboland, while the western and northern regions dominated by the Yoruba and the Hausa respectively have produced their own models which are more suited to their culture (63).

Novian Whitsitt proposes the use of Hausa feminism to read novels by Muslim writers from the northern region. He asserts that Hausa women writers are feminists because they are concerned with improving the condition of women and reiterates the importance that Hausa Muslim women writers give to religion: "The single most important consideration in the construction of Hausa feminism is the significance of Islam, given that the religious faith colors virtually every aspect of social relations" (389). The model that Shirin Edwin uses, African-Islamic feminism, provides a nuanced reading of the role of Islam in the changes the protagonists undergo in the backdrop of a northern Nigeria which is mainly Islamic. Besides referring to Novian Whitsitt, I draw from Shirin Edwin's African-Islamic feminism that is productive in examining the evolutions of the protagonists. Shirin Edwin argues that Islam empowers Li who undergoes "noetic transformation - the realization and self-correction of her flaws" (78), evolving from an immature young woman who is impatient and intolerant to a mature adult who embodies Islamic virtues. The once rebellious and restless Li, who found Islam to be suffocating, transforms gradually to become more tolerant and retains her faith in the institution of marriage when she accepts Islam wholeheartedly. However, to attribute Li's metamorphosis and her empowerment entirely to the noetic transformation that she undergoes is tantamount to ignoring lessons learnt from the trials and tribulations she undergoes, and her life experiences that are tempered with disappointment, betrayal, and disillusionment and other intersecting factors such as family, culture, tradition, age and modernity. As such, I have reservations on Shirin Edwin's stand that Islam is all empowering and it is the main reason for Li's evolution.

Faku, who finally plucks the courage to leave her husband and her oppressive polygynous household, finds meaning in life serving others, after a long and laborious journey of drifting "without a proper sense of direction" (102). In contrast, Awa who continues to adhere to the ideals of traditional African womanhood, remaining a tolerant wife and the

producer and nurturer of children, becomes an unhappy woman entrapped in the patriarchal order. I suggest that, through the lives of Li and Faku, Alkali reinforces the need for women to separate themselves from patriarchal oppression, even if temporary, and the importance of acquiring further education and careers to achieve any sort of self-fulfilment.

While the term polygamy is generally used by critics even when they refer to specific polygynous situations, I consciously use the term polygyny to refer to situations in which men take on more than one wife, which is the case in the novels considered in this study. Female characters considered in this chapter and other chapters are affected by the practice of polygyny and this resonates with what Enitan of *Everything Good Will Come* (considered in Chapter Six) demands of her father when she is frustrated with the issue of polygyny and how native laws allow it at the expense of the wives: “Show me one case”, I said. Just one, of a woman having two husbands, a fifty-year-old woman marrying a twelve -year-old boy” (135). The case of Li’s grandmother who boasts about having been married fourteen times is debatable since we are not provided with details if she had one or more husbands at one point in time.

A Village in Transition

In this section, I explore Alkali’s appropriation of several stages associated with the Nigerian village novel to present a realistic portrayal of the village that transforms because of modernisation and the influence of urban values that are seen as corrupting. I draw attention to Alkali’s use of the realist form to picturise the village meticulously and establish the village setting, paying particular attention to space. I suggest that Alkali portrays the village punctiliously in order to bring out the before and after-effects of modernising changes on the village and its residents.

The village is divided into two unequal parts by a stream where the smaller part with the “farmland and a few scattered mud huts” (2), relatively untouched by modernisation, invokes “the innocent and natural idyllic life” (Akabay 311) while the larger area with a bigger population shows signs of influence of modernisation, spotting some houses with “zinc roofs” (2). The European quarters called the Hill Station at the base of the hills that enjoys better infrastructure consists of houses that are “built of stones and roofed with asbestos” (2). Through such a portrait at the start of the narrative, Alkali not only highlights the contrast between the landscape and housing of the coloniser and the natives but also draws our attention to how modernisation was slowly invading the rural environment and the lives of the villagers. The image evoked of the village is one of safety, familiarity and comfort and Li, like Saroja

discussed in the last chapter, knows the village very well, even in the night, and this familiarity gives her reassurance especially after her negative experiences in the city.

While this description acts like an aerial view of the village, the detailed description of the layout of Baba's compound with its huts is like a zoom in. I suggest that such a picturisation that brings out typical characteristics of the environment of the village and the life of its residents serves two purposes. Firstly, it highlights the power structure and hierarchy in the relation between the natives and the coloniser and the patriarchal power structure evident in the compound ruled by Baba, in the parent-child relation as well as husband-wife relation. Secondly, it captures the village this way so that it can be contrasted with the picture that is presented twenty years later at the end of the novel to highlight the transformations experienced by the village, its environment, and the residents. At the end of the novel, Li marvels at the development that the village achieves, how the streets were lit up and were crowded with busy people and how "there was no longer any distinction between the Hill Station and the African Quarters" because "new zinc houses springing up everywhere" merged the two places. But Li is also nostalgic about the disappearance of the "backyard gardens" and "sound of the cockcrow" (94) in the early morning and how the villagers tended to keep to themselves rather than freely interact with one another as before. Grace Okereke observes that the novel begins and ends with Li's observation of the village: "Alkali shows Li meticulously noting the landscape and the natural state of the village at the beginning of the novel, and towards the end she shows Li, now a transformed woman, again noting the remarkable transformation of the village into a town" (119). This reinforces the cyclical nature of time although transformations have occurred both in the landscape and the residents.

Alkali's use of language with its Hausa patterned English helps to paint a realistic portrayal of the village residents. Alkali presents the lifestyle of the Hausa community and the interconnected nature of its members and their use of Hausa proverbs that impart wisdom to prove their points. She highlights how people greet one another in traditional ways; siblings are seen greeting one another using terms such as "son-of-my-mother" and "daughter-of-my-mother" (96). Islamic expressions such as "May Allah forgive you! Praise be to him, the Merciful" (72) and Islamic exclamations like "Allah" (21) found in the speech of the characters, reinforce the presence of Islam and its importance in the daily lives of the village residents. Shirin Edwin notes that Alkali had admitted to the difficulty she faced in using English language to bring out the "native idiom" (29) since her characters spoke in Hausa in their daily lives and certain expressions were lost in the process of translation.

Wendy Griswold discusses the village novel and its structure in relation to novels set “no later than the very end of the colonial period” that present the colonial encounter as “a before-and-after story of modernization” (714). Although *The Stillborn* begins in the early post-independence period that saw the rise of urban migration and ends in the 1980s, Alkali’s vivid portrayal of the village environment with its traditional lifestyle exhibits some of the stages that Griswold discusses in relation to the Nigerian village novel. For example, the traditional African village that is made up of “a cluster of compounds organised by patrilineal kinship from which people go out daily to farm” (Griswold 710) is reflected in the compound headed by the patriarch, Baba, and how the family engages in farming for its sustenance. Furthermore, the communal lifestyle of the villagers is brought out by Alkali who highlights how gossiping serves as a favourite pastime amongst villagers who are suspicious of outsiders. The typical attitude of villagers towards outsiders and fellow residents who do not have “full membership in the community” (Griswold 712) is reflected in their evaluation and rejection of characters such as Garba, Habu and Habu’s uncle Herman.

While *The Stillborn* may not adhere to all the five stages suggested by Griswold, the first two stages “Traditional social order” and “Disturbance from outside” and the last stage, “Disintegration” (714) are evident in the narrative arc. Alkali’s depiction of the traditional village as a mostly peaceful setting except for some tension resulting from the conflict between Islam and traditional religion constitutes stage one. Insider/outsider status that spells out who belongs and who does not, is given prominence in this stage that portrays “the traditional community’s settled ways” (714). “Disturbance from outside” that marks stage two is described as an external factor that is usually “associated with the Western impact on African society, which can manifest itself in terms of modernization, urbanization, Christianity, colonial government, the expansion of trade, or the exposure of African youth to Western ways through education or travel” (714) that upsets the peace in the village. In *The Stillborn*, I suggest that it is the presence of outsiders, Garba and Habu, in the village that upsets the status quo, bringing about troubles in the lives of Faku and Li as soon they marry these men. Habu is considered a stranger since he is from another village. Garba, with his shady background, on the other hand, is also seen as an outsider because he has lived all his life in the city although he was born in the village. The villagers are concerned by Garba’s return to the village since they worry about how he may influence their children with his drinking and gambling habits. Thus, Garba can be seen as symbolising corrupt city values and mores that lure young men and women and bring their downfall. While Dan Fiamma does not go to the city, the city that comes

to the village, as predicted by Awa, in the form of modernisation, nevertheless impacts him when he is demoted during the restructuring of the village school by the government.

The meeting between Li, Awa and Faku and their prospective husbands, Habu, Fiama and Garba at the hilltop is an important scene that fulfils several functions. Firstly, it predicts changes coming to the village because of external disturbances in the form of modernisation and mass migration to the city. It is not by accident that this meeting takes place in the hills, near the Hill Station that represents modern and sophisticated living of the coloniser. Secondly, it foreshadows the problems that Li, Awa and Faku would experience in the hands of their husbands, Habu, Fiama and Garba who change for the worse in their response to modernising changes, becoming irresponsible womanisers and alcoholics. Lastly, it also forebodes the different responses of the three girls to their marital problems that shatter their romantic ideals and personal aspirations.

The older and tougher city dweller Garba entices the village youngsters with his exaggerated tales about the fun, easy and carefree life in the city. Garba lives in Kano, the only location that is named in the narrative. Kano is one of the largest cities in northern Nigeria and in the 1960s and the 1970s Kano and Zaria were cities that were densely populated (Isah Abbass 108). Garba launches into describing “the availability of free women, easy money and idle living” (44), imparting his “city wisdom” (45). Habu grimaces when listening to Garba’s story about his friend “who keeps four women in four different areas of the city” and how “none of them (the women) knows the others exist” (45); but that is exactly the double life that Habu would act out when he becomes entangled with another woman in the city while Li would be at a loss as to what changed Habu.

When Nigeria obtained its independence on 1 October 1960, the country was divided into three regions, the north, west and the east (Kemi Amina 193). The north was mainly occupied by the Hausa Muslims, the west by the Yorubas and the east by the Igbos. Chikwenye Ogunyemi suggests that the three young couples who meet in the hills allegorise the three regions of Nigeria, linking the failure of their marriages to the failure of integration of the three regions (308). But the narrative does not seem to intimate such an allegorical reading and references are not made to the Civil War. At the start of their meeting, the men play a practical joke on the girls and the varied reactions of the three girls to the alleged threat foreshadow their responses to the problems they would face in their marriage. Ogunyemi’s reading of how the three women respond to the alleged danger at the start of their meeting is illuminating:

Faku, one of the girls, disappears from the scene in fright; in adult life, overwhelmed by her situation, she turns into a prostitute. The reaction of Li's sister, Awa, is to lie prostrate on the ground; later in life, she appears passive, playing the role of the sweet mother in touch with the earth. She bears the burden of caring for all the children of the household, including her alcoholic husband. The third girl, the "stubborn" Li, reacts differently. Legs firm apart in a masculinist pose, she holds up her cutlass, ready to take the offensive for the good of her home and country" (308).

Awa's passivity can be seen in her patience and her acceptance of her role as a nurturer who holds the family together while Faku's drifting away reflects her inability to cope with the oppression she faces as a second wife. Li's defensive stance, on the other hand, indicates her revolt against the waiting game that she is made to play by taking control of her life, rather than standing up for her home and country as suggested by Ogunyemi.

According to Griswold, stage five, "Disintegration" shows outdated "traditional order" being replaced by new "social existence" (714) in the village. In *The Stillborn*, this stage is evident in two levels. Firstly, in the physical transformation of the village landscape and specifically, Baba's compound and secondly, in the changes in familial relations and stereotypical gender roles and responsibilities. With the advent of modernising changes and progress, the village boasts of better infrastructure and amenities and looks more like a town. Similarly, Baba's compound that was in ruins after the demise of Baba and Kaka, now houses "a large four bedroom house" built by Li, who becomes "the man of the house" (101).

Using a gender lens to analyse *The Stillborn* reveals what is considered normative femininity and masculinity in the traditional Hausa community during the early sixties and how these gender stereotypes are challenged by modernity. Marriage and motherhood are considered important in the traditional society that demands women to be domesticated, submissive and patient. Li challenges gender stereotypes, exhibiting some masculine traits, not only in her posture but also in her attitudes and behaviour. For instance, during the meeting in the hills, Li "stood with her legs wide apart, cutlass raised high in the air", when she perceived danger and Awa relates this to "masculine traits in her (Li)" and Fiama tells Li, "You are brave, a he-woman" (39). When Mama scolds Li for her "forward and tactless manner" (12) she is actually chiding Li for being impatient and assertive, traits considered masculine. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be authoritative, take on the role of the breadwinner, provide financial security to the family, and ensure the lineage is continued by fathering many children, especially sons. Men who do not adhere to normative masculinity are ridiculed as can be seen in the case of Manu who is considered half a man by the villagers since he is impotent.

Sociocultural changes in the sixties impact family structures and prescribed gender roles, bringing about shifts in familial and gender relations. Kaka disapproves Li and Awa mingling freely with Habu without parental approval, attributing it to “modern living coupled with a foreign culture, a thing that was sweeping the whole community like wildfire” (25). The authority of the father weakens in this period as can be seen in how Li and Sule become more rebellious. When Audu’s son becomes a chef in the city and “cooks for the big men in the city”, Audu complains: “My son has turned into a woman” (50). Audu’s son’s venture into cooking, a woman’s domain, is seen as emasculating and becoming effeminate. Mairama gripes about how the city has changed her daughter who has become so lazy that “there was no womanhood left in her” (50). These instances highlight how life in the city with its lax attitude is blamed for transforming traditional society’s concepts of femininity and masculinity. The older villagers complain about how city life has altered fixed gender roles and responsibilities. In the city, traditional gender roles are lax, men and women interact freely, and cohabiting exists since the city’s anonymity makes it easier for the opposite sexes to mingle uninhibitedly.

It is interesting that drinking is associated with a new form of masculinity that is associated with modernity. Kaka links teenager Sule’s initiation to drinking with modernising changes sweeping through the village. Garba and his friends introduce Sula to drinking home-brewed beer and this can be seen as Sule’s initiation into manhood besides his act of impregnating his girlfriend. Garba and Habu’s drinking habits in the city and their polygynous relations appear to reinforce a new type of masculinity that is promoted in the anonymous city. In the case of Fiama in the village, he uses drinking to compensate his double emasculation, his demotion at his workplace and his shift from his own home to his wife’s natal home.

From the reactions to modernising changes and role reversals, what can be observed is that females exhibiting masculine traits are tolerated better than emasculated or effeminate men. The term “man of the house” (101) refers to responsibilities traditionally associated with males and in this instance, Sule, the eldest male in the family has run off to Niger and it is a daughter, Li, who takes over the son’s duties. Times are changing and gender roles are less rigid, and Li is appreciated when she takes over the responsibilities of the son. Even before Li secures the means to provide for the family and rebuild the family compound, it is Awa who runs the family and takes care of her alcoholic husband.

By using several of the stages associated with the village novel, Alkali effectively brings out how the traditional order and peaceful life in the village are disrupted by modernising

changes that sweep through and how urban values that are considered corruptive contribute to the downfall of men which in turn has repercussions on the lives of women. Even though such a depiction hints a sense of nostalgia for the lost past that Griswold associates with village novels (717), I suggest that Alkali's use of the village setting underscores how her women characters persevere to find agency to regain control of their lives.

Dreams: Aborted, Stillborn or Reborn

In the sections that follow, I trace the trajectories of development of Li, Awa and Faku, focusing on to how the dreams of these young women to have a blissful married life and a fulfilling career are shattered and how they respond to the calamities in their lives and manage their disappointments. I pay particular attention to how Alkali incorporates the features of Littattafan Soyayya to bring out the young protagonists' fantasies about love relationship and married life and to provide advice on managing their issues when the discrepancy between the ideal situation and reality hits them. I also examine Alkali's reconfiguration of the journey motif, how she relates travel away from the village with exposure, growth, agency, and autonomy even if the experiences gained are negative or traumatic.

Ibrahim Chinade suggests that the three young girls “plan achieving self-realisation through marriage, as it is the only mean of self-fulfilment available to them as females” (5). It is true that Li, Awa and Faku's dreams are built around Habu, Fiama and Garba and the young women learn the hard way that they need to depend on their own inner resources rather than depend on their men to fulfil their dreams. Sule Egya briefly mentions that in the early 1960s, the period in which the novel is set, “girls in northern Nigeria were hardly sent to school” (103) and northern Nigeria was “educationally backward” (101) compared with other regions in Nigeria. The difference in progress between Nigeria and other regions can be linked to the type of education in northern Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, Islamic education was given more emphasis since Western education was associated with Christianity. Progress was faster in other regions where Christianity disseminated rapidly, and mission education was introduced. Yakut Akbay elaborates on the Hausa community's take on female education, pointing out that primary school education “is considered the only education appropriate for girls” and how girls are denied higher education because they are expected to be involved in “domestic labour as well as the care of younger siblings” (311).

In the novel, Alkali shows how Awa's dream to become the head of the adult education department does not materialise because she not only depended on Fiama to offer her the

position but also because she failed to further her studies after her primary seven. Similarly, Li and Faku discontinue their studies after completing their primary school education and get married at the age of fifteen. Awa continues to be a submissive woman, having internalised the importance of having a man in her life. Li and Faku, resemble the phoenix in their efforts to pick themselves up, upgrade themselves and find fulfilment when they finally learn not to wait or depend on their husbands who had abandoned or ill-treated them. Through the characters of Li and Faku, Alkali advocates the importance of female education, reinforcing how women can take bold steps to overcome their oppression by pursuing higher education or skills training that not only empowers them financially but also boosts their self-confidence.

Li's Journey: From the Life of a Dog to the Man of the House

In this section, I trace Li's development, showing how her initial rebellion against patriarchy and self-assertion are subsumed by her marriage to Habu and how she regains control of her life to achieve independence and self-actualisation. I examine Alkali's use of journey and dream motifs to present Li's physical journeys that involve movement from the village to the city and the nearby town and her metaphorical journey into the future through her dreams that act as premonitions and how these journeys influence the life choices that Li makes. Li's ability to prophesise suggests that she has supernatural powers, hinting a magic realist link but Alkali does not develop it, and the novel retains the social realist mode.

Grace Okereke identifies three main stages to Li's independence, namely, the initial stage of "domestic revolt" followed by "the adolescent stage of marital subsumption and revolt" and finally "the mature stage of self-assertion and reconciliation" (98). While these three stages accurately capture the struggles Li goes through to forge an independent self-identity, Grace Okereke does not consider Li's sexual development or rather Li's frustrations with the obstacles she faces in developing her sexual identity⁶. I suggest that Li's problematic sexual development contributes to the delay in achieving maturity.

Alkali draws attention to Li's rebellious and restless nature from the beginning, establishing her as "an iconoclast" (100), who has supernatural abilities to prophesise. When Li challenges normative femininity she resembles her grandmother and her anti-patriarchal stance. Awa whose personality is in sharp contrast with Li, is submissive and takes after Mama in her conformity and docility. Using contrast and similarity, Alkali brings out the personalities

⁶ In Chapter Six that examines *Everything Good Will Come*, I discuss how Enitan's establishment of a positive sexual identity acts as a foundation for her to build her feminist identity followed by her political identity.

of the young and older women and how they impact one another. While Li dislikes her grandmother she loves the stories that she imparts and Halima Shehu points out how Alkali portrays the grandmother as an individual with a focus on “her life, choices, and the qualities she possesses” (203), going beyond the typical portrayal of the grandmother as a storyteller⁷ who transmits cultural knowledge to the younger generation: “Shrewd and dominating, she had driven three other wives from the household and had ruled father and son with an iron hand. It was rumoured that she had been divorced three times by Kaka, but each time had refused to leave” (8). Also, through the non-conforming and fearless grandmother, Alkali challenges gender stereotypes of women as submissive and afraid of patriarchy.

While it is true Alkali takes much effort to establish Li as different, I tend to link Li’s rebellious nature and assertive behaviour at the start of the novel to her frustrations with the constraints that hinder the exploration of her budding sexuality at the age of thirteen. Even though the women do not observe purdah, it is the restrictions that Baba imposes on Li’s movements and his disapproval of the mingling of both sexes in traditional events and festivals in the name of Islam that infuriate her. As an adolescent, Li yearns for more freedom to explore her burgeoning sexuality and engage in a love relationship with the opposite sex and therefore considers the home environment as “suffocating” and “worse than a prison” (3). She also hates the drudgery of household chores in the village⁸.

Li’s first encounter with Habu, her instant attraction to him as a good-looking young man, her immediate courtship with him and her secret meetings with him evoke the features of popular romance fiction that portray youngsters falling in love passionately. Besides love, Li views marriage to Habu and settling in the city as a means of attaining freedom and escaping the restrictions in her home and the village besides achieving self-actualisation. This is evident in her fantasies about city life: “She was dreaming of a paradise called ‘city’. A place where she would have an easy life, free from slimy calabashes and evil-smelling goats.....She was going to be a successful Grade 1 teacher and Habu a famous medical doctor, like the whitemen

⁷ Qusseina Alidou states that in the Hausa community, “the oldest woman of the household or neighbourhood - the grandmother - is the “master” storyteller” who imparts knowledge to young boys and girls about “culture and worldview, norms and values, morals and expectations” (139). However, once the children reach adolescence, it is the mother’s duty to socialise a girl “into her future role as a woman” (139). In *The Stillborn*, Mama is successful in socialising Awa to embrace traditional womanhood but faces difficulties with Li.

⁸ Li’s desire to escape the drudgery of domestic chores and the monotony of village life is similar to the frustrations experienced by Ofunne in *Sky-High Flames* (2005) by Azuah Unoma. Ofunne who hates the toil of housework, aspires to excel in her studies to achieve her ambition of becoming a teacher. Her desire to explore her budding sexuality is restrained by Christianity that controls the sexual freedom of girls in the Girls Training College where she studies.

in the village mission hospital. The image of a European house full of houseboys and maids rose before her” (55). Li’s aspirations are linked to the coloniser since she wants to mimic the lifestyle of the coloniser, attributing it to success and progress. The use of elements of the romance novel in *The Stillborn* differs from that used in *Two Virgins* discussed in the last chapter; Kamala Markandaya’s explicit description of human sexuality and her employment of the trope of the innocent and idealist romantic heroine versus the stereotypical foil who is sexually empowered, aligns *Two Virgins* with Western Romance. Furthermore, *Two Virgins* does not engage in didacticism since Markandaya’s intention is not to provide social instruction but to dismantle patriarchal structures that control and oppress female sexuality.

Since intense physical attraction, infatuation and dreams built around future marriage form the basis of the relationship, Li does not exercise caution even though the thought that Habu could be a potential womaniser like his uncle runs through her mind. She also does not act on the nagging suspicion she has about the trustworthiness of strangers in the village. Li’s self-assertion is evident in this stage when she goes against Baba to marry Habu, who is not only an outsider but also a heathen, unlike Awa and Faku who choose Muslim men for their husbands. Through Li’s whirlwind romance with Habu that does not end well, Alkali appears to advise caution to youth who are easily swept away by their fantasy about romantic relationships.

In the second stage of Li’s development, the journey that Li makes to the city after four years of waiting plays an important part. While waiting, Li airs her frustrations asking, “How long can a woman wait for a man?” (63). Although Li is rebellious and assertive before her marriage, having lived all her life in the village, she is unfamiliar with the ways of the city and is at a loss as to the reasons for Habu’s changed behaviour. Li’s married life with Habu suppresses her and all her dreams are thwarted, leading to disappointment and disillusionment. The contrast between the fantasy of city life and its reality lead Li, who had yearned to live in a city with all its material comfort before, to reach the conclusion that the city “destroys dreams” (94). Sule Egya asserts that “the dream to go to the city, a result of the fashionable urban migration of the time, is largely responsible for the failure of the marriages of Li and Faku” (103). This is quite true in the case of Li’s marriage since Habu’s migration to the city transforms him into a womaniser and an alcoholic and this in turn ruins Li’s life and her aspirations. Unlike Faku, discussed in the next section, who is directly oppressed in her polygynous household, Habu’s polygynous relationship with his city wife impacts Li indirectly since she never meets Habu’s second wife. In the case of Faku’s marriage, I suggest that it is

doomed from the start because Garba is already the hard-core city dweller from the beginning, even before he marries Faku and takes her to the city. To begin with, Faku makes a mistake in choosing Garba but the failure of Faku's marriage and her inability to salvage it is a result of Garba's warped understanding of polygyny and his manipulation of the traditional aspects of polygyny with anonymous city living that helps him evade his responsibilities towards Faku.

As mentioned earlier, critics have tended to read *The Stillborn* as Alkali's condemnation of patriarchy and religion. However, Shirin Edwin's analysis of Alkali's work in 2016 is refreshingly different, especially her argument on the empowering nature of Islam in the daily lives of Muslim women. Chikwenye Ogunyemi suggests that when Li tells her father that a dog may have made the hole in the fence, to cover up her act of sneaking out to the village dance the night before, Li is "referring to woman's existence in Islam as dog's life" (309). Edwin Shirin rightly criticises Ogunyemi, pointing out that it is not Alkali's intention to condemn Islam for Muslim women's oppression through the character of Li (309). Li's retort to Awa that "she would rather be a heathen" should not be taken out of context to mean that Li is against Islam since Li is expressing that if heathenism could give her more freedom, she prefers it. The novel depicts women as embodying different degrees of Islamic virtues and behaviour; Awa wholeheartedly embraces Islam and exhibits virtues such as patience and tolerance while the iconoclast Li is concerned that Islam restricts her movement; Mama, on the other hand, is chastised by Baba for not fully embracing the religion.

Interestingly, Alkali uses the imagery of the dog, likening a woman and her life with that of a dog several instances in the novel, making direct comparisons. When four years elapse and Habu does not send word for Li to join him in the city, Li wonders: "Was she to wait for a man like a dog waiting for the bone from its master's plate?" (85). When Li finally gets to live with Habu in the city, she is tormented by his cold attitude: "He treats me as he would treat a dog, with disgust" (70). These comparisons highlight Li's frustrations in the delay in consummating her marriage, experiencing city life that she had fantasised about and becoming a teacher as well as her disappointment with Habu who has become distant. I suggest that Alkali uses this analogy to bring out the pathetic situation of women in a patriarchal society who are dependent on their men for their happiness and how inaction on the part of women prolongs victimisation.

Li's return journey from the city is prompted by a dream in which Baba's house is burnt down, a premonition of Baba's impending death. This return from the city to the village is

significant because it prepares Li, who has been stifled by her marriage, for a revolt against patriarchy after a long period of passivity. Li's conflicted self is brought out when she repeats her act of waiting when Habu does not call for her after she delivers her daughter, let alone share in her grief of having lost Baba. Amid villagers who were ridiculing Li's predicament, was Li to follow tradition and wait for Habu as advised by Kaka or go to the city on her own accord as suggested by Awa and Mama?

Shirin Edwin points out how many African feminists have been biased against Islam, considering it a foreign religion that oppresses women. She suggests that since African feminism does not give due consideration to Islam, analysing Muslim women's texts using only African feminism would be incomplete. She notes that Islamic feminism, on the other hand, relates more to Arab culture. She contends that the African-Islamic feminism that she uses to read texts by Hausa Muslim women writers "mediates Islamic and African feminist theories" so that "personal modes of Islamic engagement" of the female characters are brought out (13).

According to Shirin Edwin, the turning point in Li's life, whereby she decides to further her studies to become a Grade 1 teacher instead of waiting for Habu, is a result of Li embracing Islam gradually. Pinpointing to how scholarship on *The Stillborn* has focused on condemning Islam for the oppression of women, Edwin offers an innovative view that young Li who had preferred heathenism before transforms to become a mature and accomplished woman with virtues associated with Islam when she embraces the religion wholeheartedly. Edwin elaborates on the influence the Hausa Muslim landlady, Hajiya, has on Li, suggesting that Hajiya is a mentor figure who imparts her wisdom, reiterating the need for patience and tolerance in a marriage. Li looks up to the landlady as someone who is kind, and the landlady's patience reminds her of Kaka. Alkali's sense of "social responsibility in advising youth" (Whitsitt 388) through her writing is evident in the social instruction she provides on how to handle marital problems through the character of Hajiya. Edwin also argues that having embraced Islam, Li not only appreciates the sacrifices Awa has made for the family but begins to emulate Awa. Edwin asserts that Li undergoes a "noetic transformation - the realization and self-correction of her flaws" (78) and enumerates the Islamic virtues that Li learns from Awa.

It is true that women's oppression in *The Stillborn* tends to be associated with Islam at the expense of other factors that contribute to the subjugation of women and quite often Islam and polygyny are conflated even though traditional religion also promotes the practice of

polygyny and women are expected to accept it unquestioningly. As Li matures, she shows gratitude towards her family members, acknowledging how Awa and Mama had been supporting the family including her own daughter, Shuwa, by working hard in the farm when Baba dies, and Kaka is taken ill. Li even appreciates Baba when Sule reflects on how Baba's enforcement of discipline in the home had helped him to become a responsible adult and Li's improved relationship with her family shows her maturity. But Edwin's effort to establish Li as a repugnant character who blossoms into a likeable character with all the virtues associated with Muslim women because of the influence Hajiya and Awa is rather overstated. While Li is not as likable a character as Saroja in *Two Virgins* discussed in the last chapter, she is nevertheless not as despicable as Edwin paints her to be. Furthermore, Edwin's reading becomes problematic when she does not address the changes that Awa undergoes, how she becomes hardened and embittered after years of compliance in the patriarchal Muslim society.

When the abandoned Li manages her rejection by Habu by attending the dances in the village and inviting attention from men, she is labelled, ostracised, and even attacked by the village women. In contrast, Fiamma resorts to alcohol to manage his emasculation when he is demoted, and his drinking can be seen as a bolthole to escape from his problems. As highlighted in the last chapter, there are no boltholes for women to escape and they are required to face their problems squarely in the village. When Fiamma finds an escape route to his problems through alcohol, Awa is pressured to take on the burden of looking after her parents and her own large family. This shows that in a hegemonic masculinist world men resort to outlets to manage their emasculation which not only affects them negatively but also their women. In contrast, women like Li, who are seen as not self-regulating their sexuality and upholding their femininity, are punished by society.

I suggest that while Islam instils virtues such as patience and tolerance in Li, the turning point in her life occurs after the episode at the village well where Li suffers harassment and abuse in the hands of the village women. Li is so shaken up by this incident that she decides that she cannot remain in the village waiting indefinitely for Habu. She comes to a realisation that she cannot depend on her husband anymore: "Who says a husband makes for a guardian or a father? Certainly not the Hausas, who would say, 'a woman who takes a husband for a father will die an orphan'" (85). I suggest that this episode that leads to the turning point in Li's life happens because Li who is in her mid-twenties is in her prime, having become the most beautiful woman in the village: "She had reached the peak of her womanhood and was overwhelmed by her own popularity" (83). With her sexuality at its height, Li acts in abandon,

attending events, enjoying the attention from the men in the village. I suggest that Li acts this way to deal with Habu's indifference towards her and her resultant dissatisfaction with her married life and unfulfilled sexual desires. Li's state here can be seen in relation to a rejected woman seeking self-assurance through the attention she receives from other men in the village. However, it must be noted that Alkali does not present Li as seeking pleasures elsewhere when abandoned by Habu unlike some men who believe that if they do not get to exercise their conjugal rights within the marriage, it is acceptable to seek it outside; Fiama, for instance, does this when his first wife, a sickly teenager, is unable to perform her duties as a wife. As such, I suggest that Li's frustration at the hindrance to attaining her marital and sexual identity is what leads to the turning point in her life, pushing her into action.

The third stage of Li's development takes place when she journeys to a town nearby to further her studies. This journey contrasts with the long-awaited journey to the city to begin her marital life with Habu. It brings self-fulfilment and economic independence because of the bold step Li takes to regain control of her life by investing in further education to become a teacher after the humiliation she experiences in the village. Not heeding Kaka's advice to wait for Habu or Awa's suggestion to marry Alhaji, her persistent suitor, Li flees the village to resume her journey towards achieving her dream of becoming a teacher, believing that to be the best solution to her predicament. The dreams she has when she leaves the village for the town contrast with the initial romantic, youthful, and superficial dreams that revolved around attainment of an easy life and material comfort in the city: "A mighty modern building to house everyone, old and young. A regular monthly income to educate the small ones and keep the old ones warm and well-fed" (82).

In the beginning of the third stage, Li remains resolute in achieving her target. In a conversation between Li and Awa that is presented in three pages, we are informed of Habu's attempts to reconcile with Li and Li's refusal to accept him back in her life, his disclosure of his double life in the city and how he became entangled with the "woman from the south" (93) and the accident that makes him lame. While a summary like this is dissatisfactory to the reader, it also becomes problematic because it tends to present Habu as a victim of circumstances by shifting the blame to the other woman instead of portraying Habu as seizing the opportunities available to men in the city that Garba talks about and engaging in polygyny, the city style. This stage does not stop with Li becoming a mature and accomplished woman since another journey is anticipated after these milestones since Li hopes to return to the city with her daughter to be reunited with Habu whom she believes has reformed.

Again, it is a dream that is instrumental in initiating this thought of reconciliation in Li. Li's dream about attending her great grandchild's wedding, and this happy dream, as opposed to Li's previous dark dreams which are premonitions that predict unfortunate events, prompts Li to consider returning to Habu in the city. Critics view the closure of the novel as reflecting Alkali's advocacy of womanism whereby women are encouraged to persevere alongside their menfolk for the progress of the individual, family, community, and the nation. For instance, Ibrahim Chinade links Li's wish to reunite with Habu with the ideals of womanism that are reflected in "the authorial voice in the epilogue" (9) of the novel. Rotimi Johnson suggests that *The Stillborn's* social vision is borne out of Alkali's womanist ideals that give importance to complementarity between men and women (654-655). However, other feminists disagree with this ending, viewing Li's wish to return to Habu as relinquishing her autonomy and returning to patriarchy.

Vivian Yenika-Agbaw who acknowledges Alkali's womanist perspective, nevertheless, disagrees with the ending: "Li has so much potential as a character, and yet she must give up almost everything she has worked for alone for the one man who consistently humiliates her" (126). However, what needs to be acknowledged here is that returning to the city to Habu does not necessarily mean returning to patriarchy since Li is a different person now. She is not the naïve village girl anymore, having become a mature and economically independent adult. Similarly, it was noted in Chapter One that some critics saw Laila's return from self-exile to start a life with Asad as a return to patriarchy, ignoring Laila's evolution to become a mature woman and the role that Asad plays as her pillar during her difficult and traumatic times.

Li's wish to return to Habu can also be seen as Li's intention to reintegrate with society, reuniting her family and coming out of the stigma of single motherhood. Li's wish to reconcile with Habu also aligns *The Stillborn* with the traditional Bildungsroman where the male hero returns to society in the end, after accomplishing his endeavours and his reintegration with society is sealed with his marriage. Didacticism associated with Littattafan Soyayya dominates the epilogue when Li announces her decision to give Habu a second chance instead of dismissing the institution of marriage. Thus, I suggest that even though some dreams are stillborn or aborted and others take a long detour before they are fulfilled, *The Stillborn* still appears to end on a promising note despite its title that implies otherwise.

Faku's Journey: From Marginalised Identity to Meaningful Existence

In this section, I examine Alkali's portrayal of Faku as a marginalised young woman who is impacted by the life choices she makes because of limited options available to her. I trace the important events in Faku's life that destroy her dreams, and how she loses grip of herself, drifting aimlessly before finding meaning again. I suggest that Faku's difficult journey to find a stable and meaningful life comprises four stages: An adolescent stage where she harbours dreams of a fulfilling marriage where her husband would provide her emotional and financial security and an escape from the village environment that marginalises her, her married state that oppresses her psychologically and physically, young adulthood where she revolts against patriarchy by leaving her marriage and engaging in prostitution for survival and lastly, mature adulthood where she finds meaning through service to others with the guidance of a senior social worker. I also explore how Alkali brings out the impact of polygyny on women by highlighting how men abuse the system of polygyny and how women create problems in the lives of other women and oppress them in a polygynous household.

Several factors contribute to Faku's decision to become a second wife to Garba who is nineteen years older than her. Firstly, it is her social standing as a fatherless girl living with her widowed mother who is stigmatised and accused of witchcraft because of the accidental deaths of her brothers. Faku believes that by marrying Garba and settling in the city, she can escape her marginalisation since she will be away from the rural community that perceives her as cursed. In addition, even though she is close to her mother, she is tired of her solitary life with her mother with no support from anyone else and earnestly believes that Garba is wealthy and wise and her marriage to him would solve her all her problems: "She would like to be Garba's only wife. What woman wouldn't? But if the man could afford to feed a dozen other wives, who was she to object? For her, polygamy wasn't the point at all. The point was that once she married, living alone with her mother was over. They would no longer have to work their fingers sore to feed themselves or mend the leaking roof, because someone else would be responsible" (46). Faku here is seeking some form of emotional and financial security from Garba, viewing the institution of marriage with romantic idealism as a teenager. Lastly, it is Faku's unquestioning acceptance of polygyny and her conviction that it cannot go wrong since it is sanctioned by both religion and culture.

As such Faku is infected by "city fever" (56) and is eager to start her life in the city as soon as Garba proposes marriage. Faku's dream of enjoying stability in life by having a man in the house, something she has not had from the age of six when her father dies, reinforces the

importance of the presence of a man in the family: “A man’s muddy shoes outside my door! A man’s commanding voice in the early hours of the day and the late hours of night. Where indeed is the Lord of the house who brings in food for his obedient wife to cook?” (100). Faku’s aspirations, built on traditional gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with the role of breadwinner and femininity with cooking, serving and obedience and her fantasies about married life indicate her romantic idealism.

While no one forces Faku into this polygynous marriage, her socially disadvantaged position limits her choices and being young, inexperienced, and ignorant, Faku is blinded and agrees to marry the first man who shows an interest in her. Li who is concerned about Faku believes that “Faku was eager to prove to the villagers that she too could get married in spite of what they thought of her family” (46-7). The judgement of the village gossips on Faku-Garba marriage is as follows: “She has nothing to lose”, “She comes from bad seed, a cursed family”. “The city man is no good either. He is rootless” (52). Thus, it is evident that Faku settles for Garba, refusing to exercise caution over his shady background and exploitative nature, because she feels her options are limited. Chielozona Eze’s discussion of Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Wives of Baba Segi* is illuminating since he points out why women consent to polygynous relationships in the first place and how they remain in the household even when oppressed. He highlights how Baba Segi’s first three wives marry Baba Segi because of their desperate need to escape poverty and how they remain in it even though Baba Segi becomes more ruthless, imposing restrictions on their movements and threatening to expel them if they disobeyed, when his impotency is revealed; unlike his fourth wife Bolanle who divorces him because “she has alternatives”, the first three wives remain in the marriage that oppresses them because they have no other options (*Feminist Empathy* 322). Faku’s economic hardships as a fatherless girl and her eagerness to improve her social standing push her to accept Garba’s offer of marriage.

Alkali’s intention in *The Stillborn* appears not so much to attack the institution of polygyny but more so to draw attention to how polygyny can oppress women in various ways and how both men and women contribute to victimisation of women by using religion and culture to justify their actions. This can be related to *The Stillborn* being a reformist text that does not want to challenge foundational structures of patriarchy even as it highlights the need for women’s condition to be improved. Alkali not only presents Faku’s polygynous marriage to Garba that is sanctioned by Islam but also contrasts it with Li’s grandfather, Kaka’s polygynous marriage that is sanctioned by traditional religion and how Li’s grandmother

resorts to extreme measures to chase her co-wives out. Alkali also uses the scene of the meeting of the three young couples at the hilltop to put forward various opinions on the institution of polygyny. While the others express their reservation on polygyny as practiced in the city, it is Faku who thinks that polygyny is acceptable so long as the husband has the means to maintain all his wives and her view reflects the ideal situation.

Acknowledging that polygyny has always been a controversial subject, Novian Whitsitt discusses how the verses about polygyny in the Quaran have been subjected to close examination and interpretation (as qtd. in Whitsitt 400):

Should you apprehend that you will not be able to deal fairly with orphans, then marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three, or four; but if you feel you will not deal justly between them, then marry only one, or out of those over whom you have authority. That is the best way for you to obviate injustice.

Whitsitt elaborates on the context in which the above verses came about and highlights how the lines reinforce the importance of “dispersal of justice” besides providing a guide on the maximum number of wives a man could take on (400). Discussing the works of Mariama Bâ and Zaynab Alkali, Ibiyemi Majola condemns polygyny, citing that it exploits women; she asserts that even though both “Islam and traditional African religions sanction polygyny” it would be impractical for a husband to treat all his wives equally (129). In a similar vein, Maina Quaradima also suggests that in reality it is difficult for a husband “to love four wives without being partial” (182) and give them equal consideration.

Garba’s stand on polygyny is complicated but he clearly manipulates the system so that he “can acquire many wives without slaving for them” (45) and even get the wives to work hard for him. Garba’s evasive ways, the secrecy surrounding his business, and his long periods of absence imply that Faku and the senior wife may not be the only women in his life. Pointing out that local traditions continue to play an important part in the lives of Nigerians, Yakut Akby discusses how Garba engages in polygyny that is sanctioned by both Islam and tradition. Akby highlights that polygyny is considered “a legal marital institution” in many Nigerian communities and the husband is obliged to provide equally for all his wives but Garba evades his “legal obligation” (312) because the city allows him freedom of movement and anonymity. Using the character of Garba, Alkali stresses on how modernising changes and urban migration make it easier for men to exploit polygyny and oppress women in the process.

Faku’s polygynous marriage is illustrative of how a wife can be impacted on various levels when the husband neglects her and fails to perform his duties. Shocked by Faku’s total

transformation in six years from a robust, plump young girl to a “gaunt-looking woman”, Li asks “How could this near-stranger be her friend Faku? Famished in body and no doubt famished in soul?” (77). Alkali also points out how women oppress other women in polygynous marriages. To begin, when Faku becomes Garba’s second wife, although she is unaware of the implications because she views polygyny in its ideal state, she unwittingly upsets the status quo of Garba’s senior wife as the only wife of Garba. In return, the senior wife ill-treats Faku and abuses her power in the polygynous household to maintain her position as “the mother of the house and the master of the house” (79) whilst Faku, the naïve village girl, unaccustomed to urban ways is no match to the older senior wife. Through the characters of Faku and the senior wife Alkali reinforces how women create issues for other women and victimise them, unknowingly or deliberately⁹.

Senegalese novelist Mariama Bâ is considered a pioneer in Islamic feminism and no discussion on the impact of polygyny on African Muslim women would be complete without reference to her *So long a Letter (Une si Longue Lettre)* (1980) that depicts issues related to polygyny in a Senegalese Muslim household from the perspective of the senior wife, Ramatoulaye, whose position is usurped by a co-wife who is young and modern. Farouk Tapan commends *So Long a Letter* for its treatment of “the subject of polygamy, or, more specifically, being co-wife to a younger woman, with sensitivity and depth” (3). Ramatoulaye and her twelve children are abandoned by her husband of twenty-five years when he takes his daughter’s teenage friend to be his second wife without even informing Ramatoulaye. Unlike *The Stillborn* that does not attack polygyny directly, in *So long a Letter*, the practice of polygyny is “roundly condemned” (Susan Arndt 37), showing how men use religion and culture to justify their treatment of their wives, impinging on their rights and dignities as human beings. Mariama Bâ also highlights how women allow themselves to become victims of their own circumstances by contrasting Ramatoulaye’s passivity with her friend Aissatou who is proactive in finding a job that gives her independence after her husband takes a second wife.

While men are critiqued as individuals in *The Stillborn*, Mariama Bâ’s transformative text appears to critique men as a group by focusing on Ramatoulaye and Aissatou’s husbands who engage in polygyny. Both men and patriarchy are sharply condemned for the oppression

⁹ On the contrary, In *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in Chapter Six, Sefi Atta presents Sheri’s stepmothers as living harmoniously and engaging in cooking collectively in their polygynous household even after Sheri’s father’s death. But we are also told that Enitan’s father, Sunny, was very affected by the situation in the polygynous household in the village that he grew up.

of women, especially their treatment of widows and the continuation of the levirate system. But what is surprising is that both *The Stillborn* and *So Long a Letter* underscore that ‘good’ men exist. In *The Stillborn*, men like Kaka and Hajiya’s husband are presented as ‘good’ men. Hajiya’s husband leaves behind a property for her because he knows that as a childless woman she will be disinherited by the family when he dies; in *So Long a Letter* Ramatoulaye’s suitor, Daouda Dieng and her sons-in-law are presented as ‘good’ men.

Alkali seems to highlight here that Faku is overwhelmed and at a loss on how to manage her oppression because she is riddled with several problems all at once; on top of the burden of neglect by her husband and ill-treatment by the senior wife, Faku has managed to produce only one child, a son. Through Faku’s implied lack of fertility, we do not know if Faku is infertile or if Garba does not sleep with her anymore, Alkali seems to highlight that numbers are also important in a patriarchal society where male child preference is blatant. Alkali also uses the character of Hajiya to bring out the discrimination women face when they are barren and the impact of the politics between the different wives in a polygynous household. Faku’s position in the family becomes vulnerable because she does not conceive anymore while the senior wife’s position is strengthened because she bears nine children.

The message Faku sends her mother through Li exemplifies her desperate situation: “The land is still brown and unyielding. Not until it is covered with green will I come to the village” (80?). This could be taken to mean that Faku will not return until her marital situation improves or until she strengthens her status in the polygynous household by having more children. Faku’s situation and Li’s initial yearning for a child are contrasted with Awa’s fecundity that results in a child every other year and Awa is teased about having “the womb of the pumpkin” (86). Alkali uses the imagery of the land and green vegetation to present women’s fertility, reinforcing the importance of motherhood in the traditional Muslim society.

Faku does not demand from Garba her rights to be treated equally and her acquiescence indicates her acceptance of the powers accorded to the senior wife. Faku’s silence reflects her desire to keep her problems a secret so that it does not reach the village folk who would ridicule her. It is rumoured that the senior wife has used witchcraft to make Faku barren and was working on driving Faku to insanity. Thus, the concerns Awa expresses during the meeting at the hilltop about how “co-wives were always vying jealously for the husband’s favour” (46) are clearly played out in Faku’s life.

By picking up courage to leave the polygynous marriage that victimises her, Faku revolts against patriarchy and this separation is crucial although she must drift, travel to various cities, and even engage in prostitution for survival. The exposure and experience she gains culminate in her attainment of maturity and a meaningful life whereby she trains to become a social worker when guided by an elderly social worker who acts as a mentor. Thus, through the trials and tribulations that characterise Faku's life, Alkali appears to underscore the need for women to separate themselves from an oppressing environment as a first step towards regaining control of their life. While one of the common themes expounded in Littattafan Soyayya is how to manage rivalry and conflicts between co-wives, *The Stillborn* seems to emphasise that when a wife is doubly oppressed by a neglectful husband and a cruel senior wife, and her situation cannot be altered, she needs to leave in the interest of self-preservation.

Awa's Aborted Dreams: From Compliance to Bitterness

Halima Shehu points out that Awa "projects dutiful conformity with societal expectations" and it is not accidental that Alkali names her Awa, the Muslim name of Eve, showing that Awa acts out "scriptural attitudes of self-sacrifice that have become entrenched in traditional perceptions of women's character" (200). In the section that follows, I examine Alkali's portrayal of Awa as a traditional woman, highlighting how women can become victims of their own circumstances when they internalise patriarchal ideology and faithfully act out their prescribed roles and responsibilities without adapting to the changing social norms around them. I suggest that Awa's marriage to Fiana and the restructuring of the school that results in her resignation and demotion of Fiana are key events that trigger the start of a lifelong entrapment in the patriarchal order for Awa.

I suggest that it is difficult to discern different stages that indicate progress in Awa's development because as she grows older, she becomes more entrenched in patriarchy. It appears to be a case of growing down rather than growing up. Family, religion, and culture are the key determinants that contribute to Awa becoming the embodiment of traditional womanhood. Being the first-born female in the family, she is expected to take on nurturing duties, look after her younger siblings besides engaging in domestic chores to help Mama. Fearful and compliant, Awa is successfully socialised by Mama to follow traditions and take on her role as a traditional woman. She is like Mama not only in her fear of Baba, "a fear that made her humble and submissive beyond reason" (13) according to Li, but also in how Mama embraces patriarchal norms and effectively conducts her domestic chores by delegation of duties.

Awa embraces Islam willingly and obeys the rules and restrictions that Baba imposes on the children, especially the girls. Even though she is allowed to go alone to the river to fetch water, duties that cannot be entrusted with Li who uses the time to visit friends, Awa is still monitored. Awa is eighteen and this is considered rather old during the time when girls were married off early and the restrictions imposed by Baba on mingling with the opposite sex appears to be the obstacle in her finding a suitable marriage partner. Furthermore, her sheltered life in the village and her lack of exposure make it difficult for her to break out from the traditional mould of womanhood.

Despite her focus on achieving ideal womanhood dictated by religion and tradition, Awa too has dreams about career advancement. However, these dreams are built around Fiana, the man she wishes to marry: “A secondary school will be attached to the primary school and HM will be the first principal. The last time the Primary School Inspector came, he as good as told him so. The HM promised me an important position in the school. I will be head of the Adult Education Classes for older women” (56). In the end, her desire to “do something big in the village” (56) does not materialise and Awa becomes enmeshed in a life where her responsibilities continue to increase. On top of Awa’s own growing number of children, Li and Sule’s children add to the list, and Awa also takes it upon herself to care for her aged parents, grandparents and her alcoholic husband.

Unlike Li and Faku who travel away from the village to the city and town, Awa never steps out of the village and her confinement in the patriarchal environment does not give her the opportunity to develop herself. Li furthers her studies to resume her journey to achieve her ambition of becoming a teacher and Faku acquires skills to begin a professional engagement in the field of social service, but Awa’s educational qualifications do not go beyond her primary seven education. Awa even quits her teaching job in the village when the school system in the village is restructured and her qualifications are seen as lacking and only suitable for low level jobs like cleaning. What is highlighted here is that although Awa predicts that modernising changes would come to the village, she and Fiana are unprepared to handle the changes that affect their careers. Halima Shehu highlights how Awa and Fiana continue to uphold traditional notions of womanhood and manhood despite the changes that were sweeping through the village. Shehu suggests that both Awa and Fiana are unprepared for the changes and Awa’s focus on her role as wife and mother, producing children every other year and immersing herself in her nurturing duties and Fiana giving in to alcoholism to deal with his emasculation result in “the tragedy of their lives” (202).

Unable to develop herself personally and achieve her dreams, Awa appears to grow down, becoming embittered in the process. Shirin Edwin contends that African-Islamic feminism is a quietist feminism that is relevant to women who are not keen to engage in confrontations. She suggests that Awa is “grounded in the awareness of her Islamic identity” and adopts an “African-Islamic feminism” and therefore “does not express her feminism as a revolt” (78). Edwin is correct about how Awa willingly embraces her Islamic identity but what seems to be missing in her reading is that virtues such as patience, tolerance, nurturing instincts that are positive qualities can be entrapping when women allow themselves to be overwhelmed and even exploited in a patriarchal set up. As such, Awa looks more like a victim of her own circumstances especially since she is not proactive about altering her situation.

While Awa exercises patience and tolerance towards Fiama’s irresponsible behaviour, she does not change her strategies when compromising does not reform Fiama. Furthermore, Edwin’s reading does not explain Awa’s embittered and hardened state, raising the question that if Islam is empowering, why is Awa unhappy. Awa remains in her marriage, living within Islamic codes but her unhappy state problematises the feminism she practices. Surprisingly, Awa, who is considered the model Muslim woman by Edwin, discourages Li from returning to Habu. Having tolerated her irresponsible husband for years, Awa is judgemental towards Habu, and this raises the question of whether irresponsibility is less evil than abandonment.

While Awa’s wish to remain in her marriage is understandable, her lack of action to improve her situation by getting Fiama to be more accountable is rather unsettling. As such, I see Awa’s submission and inaction as an aspect of a reformist feminist text. Susan Arndt proposes that in a reformist text the author expresses concern on improving women’s condition but not at the expense of altering foundational patriarchal systems (33). I suggest that as a reformist text *The Stillborn* registers the need to improve the situation of women but is cautious about directly challenging basic patriarchal structures and this explains Awa’s submission. This is in contrast with *Sunlight on a Broken Column* discussed in Chapter One where Laila challenges Muslim patriarchy’s control of women’s freedom and their sexuality. While Zahra of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is more like Awa in her submission to patriarchy and her embodiment of traditional Muslim womanhood, Zahra is nevertheless different because she is manipulative.

In addition, the novel notes how gender relations change with modernisation, especially in the city, but as a reformist text it does not advocate radical changes to traditional

responsibilities of men and women. It suggests that women's situation can be improved with education and career, but women should not reject their roles as wives and mothers and should continue to be the pillars of a family, as can be seen in the portrayal of Awa as a self-sacrificial figure. However, Alkali shows Faku leaving her marriage and this seems to suggest that it is acceptable to leave a marriage when one's physical and psychological well-being are affected. In Awa's case, rather than ill-treatment, she is overburdened by her duties; she singlehandedly takes care of her own family and children because of Fama's alcoholism and looks after her parents and grandparents because her brother, Sule, has left the country.

Awa's sacrifices to her family are acknowledged by Li but on a personal level Awa remains stagnant. Grace Okereke succinctly captures the reasons behind Awa's thwarted growth: "The traditional woman, as exemplified in Awa, is made to mature precociously in bearing family responsibilities, but her personality and psyche are stunted as she is socialized into accepting her limitations in the village as her destiny" (100). Awa tolerates Fama's alcoholism and irresponsibility because she has internalised the importance of the institution of marriage and the presence of a man in the family. "Every woman needs a man...at least to mend the fence" (88), she tells Li, persuading Li to marry her persistent suitor, Alhaji Bature. This highlights Awa's indoctrination that having a man in the family will solve problems; in the case of Alhaji, who has been helping the family, the family will receive continuous financial support and some sort of protection from other villagers who wait for opportunities to condemn the family. Awa believes that Li's remarriage will uplift the family from economic hardships, but Li has learnt her lesson; one marriage to Habu is enough and she is alert enough not repeat her mistake since she realises that if she marries Alhaji her problems will start although Awa's and the rest of the family's problems will be solved¹⁰.

When compared with Li and Faku's development trajectories, in Awa's growth there's no place for revolt and without this challenge against patriarchy, it is difficult to grow. Furthermore, Awa does not receive any guidance or support from anyone to steer her back towards her dreams, like Hajiya or the elderly social service worker who provided some sort of mentorship to Li and Faku respectively. As such, Awa remains in the patriarchal order, continuing to be the pillar that supports the family but becomes "surprisingly hard" (93) as

¹⁰ In *Night Dancer* discussed in the next chapter, Ezi does not even want to consider a long-term lover let alone remarriage because of the lessons she has learnt from her marriage to Mike; she believes that any commitment to man will result in restricting her freedom and that love, and marriage are mutually exclusive.

observed by Li. Awa's embittered state is evident when she questions Li's intention to return to Habu. Although Awa and Fiama do not crave to experience city life, the city does come to the village, impacting their careers and lives. Fiama, "a good mallam and a good farmer" (49) who was considered "every woman's dream of a son-in-law" (51) by the village women after his teen wife died of illness, resorts to drinking while Awa gives up her dreams, opting to be defined only as a wife and mother.

This chapter has examined Zaynab Alkali's portrayal of the dramatic transformations brought about by modernisation and rapid urbanisation in a northern Nigerian village in the early 1960s. Alkali's use of Li's family, whose members have different religious affiliations, as a microcosm of the multi-cultural and multi-religious nation was explored. I have discussed Alkali's depiction of the village and its residents, consisting of the Hausa Muslim community and how the changes brought about by mass migration to the cities and the absorption of liberal city values influence them. Specifically, I have looked at how Alkali captures the shifts in gender and familial relations during this period of sociocultural changes. Using a gender lens, I have demonstrated how concepts of normative femininity and masculinity undergo changes and gendered roles and responsibilities evolve with the advent of modernity.

I have argued that a hybrid of genres is created when Alkali appropriates the popular Hausa romance fiction genre, *Littatafan Soyayya*, and the Nigerian village novel to portray the village in transition and illustrate the impact of modernisation and urban values on the village and its residents, specifically how it influences the growth of young women during that period. I have asserted that the incorporation of the mystic structure of the Nigerian village helps to provide a detailed description of the village and its residents in transition, while the romance novel features adopted effectively bring out the lives of the three young female protagonists, narrating their fantasies about love-relationships and their career ambitions and marriage in a modern world.

I have drawn attention to how women's lives are intertwined and how they support one another in times of trouble. I have examined how the three protagonists' dreams that are built around their men and not based on their inner resources are shattered; Li continues her arduous journey with guidance from Hajiya and support from Awa and Mama who take care of her daughter while Faku manages to seek self-fulfilment with the help of her mentor, a senior social worker. Since Islam plays an important part in the lives of the protagonists, especially in the decisions they make, I have referred to Novian Whitsitt's *Hausa Feminism* and drawn from

Shirin Edwin's African-Islamic feminism for a nuanced reading of the text. I have suggested that Li's traumatic life experiences and her "noetic transformation" (Edwin 78) are pivotal in her evolution from an immature young woman who is impatient and intolerant to a mature adult who embodies Islamic virtues. I have suggested that the turning point in Li's life occurs when she decides to take control of her life and not wait for Habu. Discussing Habu's abandonment of Li for a second wife in the city and Faku's oppression in her polygynous marriage to Garba, I have highlighted how Alkali brings out issues related to polygyny, showing how men like Garba and Habu manipulate the situation in the city to take on more wives but not oblige them. I have also pointed that Alkali highlights how women create problems in the lives of other women in polygynous households through the character of Garba's senior wife who subjugates Faku in her effort to retain her position. I have suggested that Alkali uses the character of Awa to show how women can become victims of their own circumstances since Awa, who is pillar of support in the family, continues to bear her burdens in silence although embittered by her experiences when Fiama becomes an alcoholic.

I have highlighted that Alkali adopts a womanist ending to the narrative by stating Li's intention to return to Habu in the city with her daughter, to restart her life and how this reinforces the tenets of African feminism which reiterates the importance of marriage and collaboration with men to improve the condition of women. In the next chapter, I discuss Ezi, the main protagonist of *Night Dancer*, who refuses to stay in a polygynous relationship and the repercussions of her refusal to adhere to traditional society's expectations of women's submissiveness.

Chapter Five

Night Dancer - The Price of Emancipation

“As for my daughters, they will have to take their own chances in the world. I am not prepared to stay here and be turned into a mad woman, just because I have no sons. The way they go on about it one would think I know where sons are made, and I have been neglectful about taking one for my husband. Well, if my daughters can’t forgive me when they grow up, that will be too bad” (*Joys* 168-9).

The above quote is Adaku’s response when Nnu Ego, the main protagonist of *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), written by second-generation Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta, questions her co-wife Adaku if she had considered the consequences of her action on her daughters, proclaiming that “no Ibo man will marry girls brought up by a prostitute” (*Joys* 168). Nnu Ego is thrown out by her first husband because “she is as barren as a desert” (*Joys* 39) but later becomes the mother of many sons and daughters when she remarries Nnaife. But Nnaife’s junior wife, Adaku, is fed up with Nnaife’s inability to feed the growing number of mouths in the polygynous household and frustrated with the low status she is accorded because she has not produced sons for Nnaife like the senior wife Nnu Ego. Adaku begins to trade in the market to support herself and her daughters and soon after decides to engage in prostitution. By walking out on her marriage to become a single mother, Adaku makes a bold statement that she refuses to take the blame for not producing sons since it is not in her capacity to choose the sex of her foetus. Adaku’s act of resorting to prostitution could be viewed as her rebellion against patriarchy that subjects women to polygyny and commodifies their bodies for their reproductive capacity, especially their ability to produce sons. Adaku empowers herself financially to provide an education to her girls, valuing girls during a period when boys were given the privilege of education, even though her means of achieving agency stigmatises her as a loose woman.

The novel that will be discussed in this chapter, *Night Dancer* (2012), by third-generation Nigerian writer Chika Unigwe, captures a similar pattern of revolt against patriarchy; the main female character, Ezi, retaliates against the traditional Igbo community that practices male child preference and endorses mothers who bear sons, by walking out on her marriage, refusing to stay in a polygynous household. Ezi is the “night dancer” that the title of the novel alludes to, hinting that she becomes a prostitute after leaving her marriage. However, Chika Unigwe clarifies in an interview that Ezi does not become a prostitute but takes on lovers who

pay her (Tunca et al. 59).¹ *Night Dancer* is Chika Unigwe's third novel and is considered her most African novel since her first two novels deal with migrant experience in Belgium². Set in the Nigerian cities of Enugu and Kaduna and the village Lokpanta, the narrative begins in Enugu in 2001 and ends in Kaduna in 2002 but in between the readers are taken back in time to be provided with a glimpse of the protagonists' childhood and their growing years in a traditional Igbo community.

It is November 2001 in Enugu and Ezi has just died, leaving behind a bundle of letters for her daughter, Adamma, known as Mma. During Ezi's lifetime her relationship with Mma is estranged because Mma blames Ezi for her solitary childhood where she grows up without a father or any relatives. In addition, Ezi's questionable reputation makes both mother and daughter social outcasts. Ezi's memoirs reflect her life journey, her strong personality, her marriage to Mike and the hardship she undergoes to raise Mma as a single mother. Meanwhile, Rapu, prophesied to be the saviour of her family, moves from Lokpanta to Kaduna to work as a housemaid in Mike and Ezi's house, to support her family afflicted by economic hardship. Ezi who is burdened by her initial infertility finally succeeds in getting pregnant after four years of marriage, believing that all her woes are over. Rapu, who has made herself indispensable with her housekeeping skills, is sent back to the village when found to be pregnant. However, when Ezi's mother-in-law brings Rapu and her son back to Kaduna, Ezi discovers that Mike had betrayed her by sleeping with Rapu. Ezi then leaves Mike, taking three-month old Mma with her, refusing to stay in a polygynous relationship. Ezi's family disowns her when she goes against their advice to remain with Mike. When all efforts to eke a decent living by working from home to look after her baby fail, Ezi resorts to taking lovers who support her financially. Mike then marries Rapu, who becomes the mistress of the house. Having read Ezi's letters and realising that she is not an orphan, Mma begins her quest for her identity and search for her kinship with the help of her mother's best friend, Madam Gold. After her trip to

¹ In an interview conducted in 2013, Chika Unigwe explains that Ezi does not resort to prostitution after leaving her marriage but gets financial support from her lovers. Unigwe explains further that the term "night dancer" also refers to a non-conforming woman in Ugandan language: "a witch – not a witch in the spiritual sense, but in the sense of anti-woman; that is, a woman who does not act like one. Ezi breaks down social barriers and refuses to be what a woman ought to be in her culture, so she's a witch, a night dancer" (Tunca et al. 59).

² Chika Unigwe is an Igbo writer who was born in Enugu, Nigeria, but migrated to Belgium after her marriage. Her first novel *Phoenix* was published in 2007. Her second novel, *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), won the Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2012 while *Night Dancer* was shortlisted for the NLNG Nigeria Prize for Literature. It is interesting that although Unigwe's novels were written in English originally, it is the Dutch translation that had been published first.

Aba to reconnect with her maternal relatives, Mma visits her father in Kaduna and meets his family, Rapu and her three children. The journeys undertaken by Mma enable her to view her mother in a different light. Disillusioned with her father, Mma begins to appreciate her mother better when she discovers how her mother's rebellion against sexist Igbo cultural norms resulted in her being disowned by her parents and ostracised by society.

In the Introduction, I reiterated that historical, sociopolitical, and economic changes that take place in the public realm find their way into the domestic sphere and the selected authors attempt to portray the impact of these transitions on their female characters. In *Night Dancer*, the political climate of the period in which the novel is set is hardly referred to except for the religious riot that takes place in Kaduna in the early millennium. Besides taking the effort to create the social context of the novel, Unigwe's emphasis is more on the economic crises experienced by the postcolonial nation in the different periods. Poverty was an issue in the sixties in the newly independent Nigeria and its economy initially depended mainly on agriculture. The Nigerian economy experienced massive changes when it began to depend on petroleum and the oil boom in the early 1970s resulted in a prosperous economy. However, the economy that improved dramatically in the seventies went downhill in the early eighties when oil prices dropped, resulting in the country experiencing a recession. During this economic crisis, the naira, Nigeria's national currency, was devalued several times. While the economy improved slightly in the 1990s, there was an inflation in the early millennium. *Night Dancer* registers the postcolonial nation's economic conditions, the drastic changes it undergoes and how it affects the lives of the protagonists' and their families. It highlights the disparity between the rich and poor, the attempts of the poor to break away from the vicious cycle of poverty in the villages in the 1960s and the financial hardships that single mothers faced in carving out independent lives for themselves in the 1980s, after the oil boom of 1970s ended and the high cost of living marked the early millennium.

Mother-daughter relationship is often discussed as a significant theme in *Night Dancer*. Adedapo Atoyebi investigates the different types of gender conflicts in *Night Dancer* and identifies the presence of generational conflict in her discussion of mother-daughter relationships and attributes it to ideological difference (72). While the conflict between Ezi and her own mother, and Ezi and Mma can be viewed as generational conflict, the basis for these conflicts is different. It differs from *Difficult Daughters* discussed in Chapter Two where intergenerational conflict is a result of mothers continuing to exert control over their daughters' lives, forgetting that they had resisted their own mothers' restrictions during their growing

years. Mma's estranged relationship with Ezi is a result of the hatred Mma has towards Ezi for depriving her of her rightful family and for the social ostracisation that she suffers. On the contrary, Ezi's unresolved conflict with her own mother stems from Ezi's refusal to remain in her marriage despite her mother's advice and her mother's inability to see beyond the consequences of Ezi's rebellion on her family's reputation and the chances of a good life for her other children.

Analysing Unigwe's second novel, *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), Chielozona Eze suggests that Unigwe's focus is on the female body and the pain it suffers as he draws attention to how women's bodies are objectified and exploited by patriarchal and capitalist ideologies (*Feminism* 94). In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Unigwe presents the lives of four African women who are exploited when they become sex workers in Belgium, highlighting how these women are denied their rights and dignities as human beings. In his discussion, Chielozona Eze addresses the question "whether women's bodies really belong to them" since patriarchy assumes that they "belong to society, i.e., men" (*Feminism* 92). I believe that this assumption that female bodies belong to men is also interrogated in *Night Dancer*; Unigwe, however, is more concerned with how local traditions and prescribed gender roles in the patriarchal Igbo society oppress women who are valued for their utility and groomed to perform their roles as wives and mothers, especially of male children, in *Night Dancer*. Through the characters of Ezi and Rapu, Unigwe exposes how culture and tradition are used to justify the control and commodification of women's bodies.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the trend has been the use of postmodernism in postcolonial literature. Susan Andrade observes this shift in African literature: "The literary critical pendulum has now swung violently: anti-mimeticism is valued more than mimeticism; it is understood to be sophisticated and complex" (183). She notes that the realist form is linked with nationalism in the texts published prior to independence and how after independence the disillusionment with the emerging nation state prompted a shift towards postmodernism. However, some third-generation African writers continue to use the realist form as can be seen in *Night Dancer* considered in this chapter and *Everything Good Will Come* examined in the next chapter, published in 2012 and 2005 respectively. Modernism and postmodernism tend to give importance to the inner state of consciousness of the protagonist to bring out the fragmented self rather than focus on the external reality. As such, they resort to the use of techniques such as the stream-of-consciousness technique to bring out the innermost thoughts of the protagonist or employ magic realism that helps to imagine the

different worlds inhabited by the protagonist, the real and the mythical or spiritual. For example, in the semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman *Freshwater* published in 2018 by Akwaeke Emezi, who identifies as a non-binary transgender, the use of magic realism to create a spiritual world based on African myth works well because it effectively brings out the dilemma of the split self, the difficulty in dealing with issues related to trans people and LGBT issues. Even though internal conflicts, especially those related to personal impulse versus society's demands, impact the protagonists, the external reality in the form of gender and other inequalities and historical, political, and sociocultural contexts, are seen as playing a major part in influencing the lives of the protagonists in the selected texts. As such, the chosen writers use the realist form largely to deal with female subjectivities who attempt to carve an autonomous life for themselves while resorting to other strategies when the realist form becomes inadequate.

Night Dancer, with its three-part structure, is framed by Mma's perspective since Parts One and Three use a third person point of view that is focalised thro Mma. Part One which is the longest, constituting half of the novel, is set mainly in Enugu, in the southeastern region of Nigeria, where Mma grows up. However, the letters that Ezi leaves behind for Mma take Mma and the readers back to Aba where Ezi grew up. Part Three is the shortest and is set in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, where Mma travels to meet her father. Part Two that forms about one third of the novel, on the other hand, is fully presented with a series of flashbacks. There is a shift in point of view in this middle section; an omniscient narrator presents Rapu and Ezi's childhood and girlhood stories and Ezi's married life with Mike and how the lives of these three characters intersect and influence one another.

Reading *Night Dancer* as a Bildungsroman with three protagonists, allows me to consider Unigwe's modification of the traditional Bildungsroman conventions to portray the interconnected and intertwined lives of Ezi, Mma and Rapu, paying particular attention to the journey motif that is abundant in the novel. I trace the development trajectories of Ezi, Mma and Rapu who embark on journeys to seek independence, establish self-identity, and fulfil a prophecy respectively, considering how each of them is impacted not only by gender but also by tradition, culture, family, religion, social class, and patriarchy in different ways. Considering Ezi as the main protagonist, I discuss how the life choices she makes as she journeys towards establishing her own identity and independence, not only affect her but also impact her daughter, Mma and pave the path for the housemaid turned the other woman, Rapu, to substitute her as wife in Mike's house.

I draw attention to Unigwe's use of proverbs, adages, Igbo words and phrases and Igbo patterned language that lend authenticity to the traditional Igbo world that she creates in *Night Dancer*. I argue that Unigwe uses the social realist mode to critique how patriarchy controls and commodifies women's bodies in the name of tradition and culture in a traditional Igbo community. However, the mediated nature of the realist form used is apparent in the way Unigwe selects events that create the setting and context of the novel whereby she gives more significance to the sociocultural and economic aspects of the backdrop. The only political event that forms the backdrop of the novel is the religious riot that takes place in Kaduna during Mma's visit. The realism that Unigwe uses is self-conscious in that it reminds the reader that what is created is an Igbo world that attempts to depict the life of characters both in the village and the city in an independent Nigeria from the 1960s to the early millennium, especially the difficulties females face in establishing an autonomous identity even though times have changed.

I examine Unigwe's use of "the convention of paired women" (Stratton 97), in her representation of Rapu and Ezi, to bring out the contrast between women who are successfully socialised into embodying traditional African womanhood and women who defy and use their female subjectivity and agency to achieve self-actualisation in a masculinist world. I use a gender lens to examine *Night Dancer's* exploration of issues such as infertility, male child preference and polygyny, proposing that by exposing the control and commodification of the female body by patriarchy, Unigwe critiques the Igbo society for the demands it makes on women to produce children, especially sons and how it subjugates women to polygyny when they are unable to serve their purpose. In her critique of patriarchy, I suggest that Unigwe targets mothers and mother-figures who act as patriarchal agents in the socialisation of daughters, highlighting the repercussions faced by females attempting to enter the public sphere in a masculinist world through the main character, Ezi. By focusing on these older women, who police the activities of the younger women and refuse to support them when they challenge patriarchy to alter their victimised status, Unigwe underscores the need for female solidarity and the employment of "feminist empathy" proposed by Chielozona Eze to address the pain and suffering of women (*Feminist Empathy* 311).

I discuss Unigwe's negotiation with the genre of memoir, arguing that Ezi's letters that constitute her memoir not only give Ezi the voice to narrate her story and create a new subjectivity for herself and her daughter in a traditional Igbo world but also initiate changes in Mma and bridge the wide gap that existed between Mma and Ezi during Ezi's lifetime. I

suggest that the novel's disruption of a linear narrative structure, associated with the portrayal of male hero's incremental development, to travel back and forth in time is reflective of Ezi and Mma's struggles and the obstacles they face in their quest for self-emancipation and self-identity respectively. I propose that Unigwe devotes much time in Part Two to present the motivation behind Rapu, Mike and Ezi and justify their actions by reconstructing key events in their lives from the 1960s to the 1980s. Overall, this narrative strategy of framing the story from Mma's perspective and then shifting the focus amongst other main characters allows readers to appreciate the reasons behind the choices made by the three female protagonists and Mike, rather than viewing their actions as heroic, villainous or victimised.

Commodification of Female Body: Mothers as Patriarchal Agents

In this section, I examine how Unigwe creates an authentic Igbo world and uses the social realist mode to critique culture and traditions that are used to perpetuate male dominance and female subordination and justify oppression against women. I analyse Unigwe's representation of mothers or mother-figures who act as patriarchal agents in their attempts to socialise daughters on the importance of marriage, motherhood, and male heir through the characters of Ezi's mother and mother-in-law and Rapu's mother. I point out how these older women, who have internalised patriarchal values, see it as their duty to impart these values to their daughters in their roles as "intergenerational indoctrinators" (Cruz 111) and how they refuse to exercise what Chielozona terms as "feminist empathy" (*Feminist Empathy* 311) when daughters challenge their subordinated status. Using a gender lens, I examine Unigwe's interrogation of normative femininity and masculinity, gender stereotypes and the consequences of non-conformity on females. I draw from Mary Okolie's notion of a symbolic border, "the gender border" (124), to discuss Ezi's transgression that can be viewed as crossing the gender divide.

Unigwe uses the realist form to create an authentic Igbo world in *Night Dancer* and this is evident in her use of proverbs, an African oral tradition, and adages that display the richness of the Igbo culture. Ogbuide Victor commends Unigwe's "generous use" (252) of proverbs in *Night Dancer*, highlighting how proverbs have the power to impart ancient wisdom and practical knowledge. He groups the proverbs used in the novel according to the type of "general truths" they express: "common sense proverbs, proverbs of patience, proverbs of

caution, philosophical proverbs and proverbs of opportunity” (249)³. The rich use of proverbs is visible in how each part of the novel starts with an Igbo proverb that provides the essence of what is in store in the narrative and how various characters in the novel continuously sprout proverbs in their day-to-day life. In addition, Unigwe uses code switching, where the characters using English frequently switch to Igbo words in their utterances and this highlights their Igbo identity. Egbuta et al. who observe that Unigwe “displays an obvious inclination towards an Igbo-patterned English language” in *Night Dancer*, suggest that Unigwe’s employment of linguistic appositioning, the juxtaposition of Igbo words and their English translation, brings out the ‘Igboness’ of her narrative and the characters” (43)⁴.

Unigwe’s painstaking effort to create this authentic Igbo world using various linguistic strategies underscores how culture and traditions are such integral parts of the Igbo community where women’s roles and responsibilities are well-defined and any action of women that deviates from the prescribed gender norms is considered a cultural taboo. While the use of proverbs by various characters in the novel brings out Igbo traditions and customs, it must be acknowledged that some of the proverbs tend to perpetuate patriarchal values by reinforcing the secondary status of women and encouraging women’s submissiveness. In the Igbo society where gender roles and responsibilities are seen as natural, females are expected to exhibit traditional womanhood by playing subservient roles as daughters and wives and the nurturing role as mothers. In contrast, men are first and foremost breadwinners, and it is their duty to their ancestors to carry on their lineage. Mike exhibits normative masculinity in his role as a successful businessman who provides well for his family; he would not hear of Ezi going to work since he equates his ability to make money with his masculinity even though Ezi’s intention of seeking a career is to keep herself occupied and manage her depression.

³ While Ogbeide Victor’s brief history on proverb usage in the African context is useful, some explanations he provides in the context of their usage in *Night Dancer* tend to be prejudiced against Ezi’s challenge of the institution of marriage. For example, in attempting to explain the proverb “Those with buttocks do not know how to sit”, he views Ezi’s act of walking out on her marriage as her inability to use opportunities to her advantage, suggesting that Mike and his mother love Ezi and it is foolish of her to give up on her marriage for “just an act of marital unfaithfulness” (252).

⁴ For the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with Igbo language, Unigwe provides an online glossary in her website so that their understanding of the narrative is not compromised. Observing how Unigwe refuses to use italics for her Igbo words in *Night Dancer* unlike in *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Egbuta et al. attribute it to stylistic innovation (49). As for the other writers in this study, except for Attia Hosain who provides a brief glossary at the start of the novels, the rest use non-English words without italics.

The sharp criticism that is targeted at both men and women suggests that *Night Dancer* is a transformative feminist text, according to Susan Arndt's classification. While male characters such as Ezi's father, Rapu's father, Mike, Mike's friends, and his relative Silas represent the patriarchal system, I propose that Unigwe singles out women who are complicit in upholding patriarchal values in her critique of Igbo society. The novel reveals the acts of mothers and mother-figures that promote and maintain gendered expectations of women, pointing out how these older women oppress and victimise younger women who attempt to stand up for themselves. Chielozona Eze's claim that most patriarchal societies "share an implicit belief that women's bodies do not belong to them" (*Feminism* 94) and that these societies create different customs and practices to control women's bodies is useful in discussing the role of mothers or mother-figures in *Night Dancer*.

Through the figure of Mike's mother, Unigwe brings out how women are commodified for their reproductive ability and condemned when they are unable to fulfil their childbearing duties. When Mike's mother commends Ezi for her "child-bearing hips" (97) she is emphasising Ezi's future utilitarian value, how she would be a provider of many babies, especially sons to carry on Mike's lineage. So, it is not surprising when Mike's mother who monitors Ezi's barrenness tells Mike to take a second wife: "You don't even have to love her. Just get her to give you a baby" (198). It is ironic that Rapu, whom Madam Gold describes as a "slip of a girl" (9) who is "as skinny as a chewing stick" with "no buttocks, no breasts" (11), is the one who is fertile and gives birth to a son while the well-endowed Ezi struggles with infertility for years before delivering a girl. It is Mike's mother who brings Rapu and her son back from the village, handing over Mike's male heir to him, and this displaces Ezi from her matrimonial home.

Ezi's mother's refusal to support Ezi's decision to leave Mike and her subsequent disowning of Ezi, bring out her role as a patriarchal agent who uses culture to oppress women, insisting that they remain in situations that victimise them. When Ezi experiences a meltdown upon discovering Mike's betrayal, Ezi's mother tells her "There is nothing the eyes would see that would ever make them bleed" (210). Downplaying Mike's transgression, implying that what he has done is nothing new, she advises Ezi to brace herself and accept the situation since no matter how much she cries, her tears will not turn into blood. This proverb reinforces that men will be men no matter what and women have no choice but to accept their infidelity and move on with their lives. Ezi's mother's trivialisation of Mike's infidelity and dismissal of

Ezi's reaction as overboard, underscores the conflict in culture, highlighting how culture is used to silence women, forcing them to accept their men's waywardness.

Ezi's mother, whose position in her husband's house becomes unassailable when she has two sons, advises Ezi not to lose out to Rapu by retaliating but "have more babies with Mike" and "give him a son" (215) in future to strengthen her foothold in the house. Two things are emphasised in Ezi's mother's advice; firstly, polygyny is an accepted cultural norm in the Igbo community and Ezi should not be averse to sharing her husband because preserving her marriage is of utmost importance and secondly, motherhood is important and bearing sons fortifies a woman's position in her marital home.

In the last chapter, I discussed Yakut Akby's emphasis on how traditions were an integral part of the lives of Nigerians and how both Islam and African traditional religion sanctioned the practice of polygyny. I highlighted that Zaynab Alkali's literary representation of polygyny focussed on how the system is exploited by men in the city and how women victimise other women in polygynous households. In this chapter, Unigwe illuminates how polygyny impacts women's autonomy, their sense of dignity and their rights as human beings through the figure of Ezi. In her discussion of the representation of polygyny in Mariama Bâ's *So long a Letter* and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, Ibiyemi Majola stresses that Islam and traditional religion endorse polygyny and "only Christianity rejects it" (129). It is surprising that Ezi's family and Mike who are Christians accept polygyny as part of their traditions and culture and Rapu, also a Christian, is willing to defer to Ezi as the senior wife. In a multi-religious Nigeria that is entrenched in traditions and culture, the type and degree of Christianity embraced differs. Ezi admits that her father was "Christian and superstitious" (44) while her mother was less Christian. Rapu's father talks about the different types of Christianity practiced in the village and how some are stricter and do not encourage traditional religious practices while others are more flexible. It appears that while Christianity does not endorse polygyny, the people are so steeped in their culture and traditions that they continue to practice it. Unigwe's representation of the multi-religious Nigeria that is rooted in traditions reminds the reader of Li's house in *The Stillborn* which acts as the microcosm of the nation with its members who practice different religions.

Unigwe also uses the example of family relations to illustrate the importance given to traditions and customs in relation to appropriate behaviour towards elders. Madam Gold instructs Mma to apologise to her grandfather and father on behalf of her mother because elders

did not apologise to the younger ones even if they were wrong. It is the early millennium, and this practice does not make any sense to Mma but she is compelled to gift bottles of gin to her elders as a gesture of apology. When Ezi's father expresses his regret that Ezi did not reach out to apologise and therefore did not give her parents an opportunity to make amends, what is brought out is how some customs prolong enmity between family members. The different strands of African feminism converge in the importance they give to family, marriage and motherhood. Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism reinforces the significance of "building on the indigenous", but she also points out how traditions that are oppressive should be discarded (376). It appears that Unigwe is advocating the need to review traditions that are not applicable or relevant especially those that are detrimental to the individual, family and society rather than continuing to adhere to them because they had always been followed.

When a woman's behaviour challenges established traditional norms, she is perceived as crossing the gender boundary and "inhabiting the unsafe zone" (Okolie 124) and by attempting to stop Ezi from leaving her marriage Ezi's mother acts as a "gender border guard" (Okolie 128). But Ezi who feels that her dignity as a human being has been abused cannot be stopped; by walking out, Ezi stops patriarchy's commodification of her body for its utilitarian value of building a family and propagating a lineage. Ezi's mother curses Ezi: "May your own children bring you as much unhappiness as you've brought me" (44) and this emphasises how indoctrination on the importance of marriage is so deep in the older generation of women that a mother refuses to empathise with her daughter's condition and her dire need to alter her situation. In addition, Ezi's mother sees Ezi's abandonment of her marriage as a selfish act that would affect her siblings' future. This is reminiscent of Virmati's mother's anger when she discovers Virmati's relationship with Harish and blames Virmati for being selfish, tarnishing the family's reputation and spoiling her younger sisters' future marriage prospects, as observed in Chapter Two. Ezi's walking out of her marriage and Virmati's illicit relationship are seen as acts of selfishness because in a collectivist society, the individual's desires are considered secondary to that of the family and society.

Through the characters of Ezi's mother who disowns her and Ezi's mother-in-law who turns against her, Unigwe highlights the lack of "feminist empathy" amongst women, especially mothers or mother-figures in *Night Dancer*, campaigning for solidarity between women to address cultural norms that oppress women. Chielozona Eze proposes the employment of "feminist empathy", the ability to identify oneself with "the experience of a woman in undeserved suffering" (311), to examine texts by contemporary women authors, and

“a double-minded focus of attention” (318) that will allow one to address systems that cause pain and suffering in women. Even Ezi’s best friend, Madam Gold, who is supportive of Ezi, is ambivalent about traditions that victimise women. For example, Madam Gold’s ambivalence shows when she says that she does not condone what Mike did but nevertheless justifies his act, affirming that “every man deserves a son” (6). Disagreeing with Ezi’s decision to leave Mike, Madam Gold admits that she would have no choice but to acquiesce if her own husband were to take another wife. Madam Gold is one character in the novel who always resorts to proverbs to prove a point, and this reflects how culture is transmitted through proverbs which are considered ancient words of wisdom and taken to be the truth, overlooking how some proverbs discriminate women and reinforce their subordination. While Madam Gold appreciates Ezi’s determination she is unable to totally support Ezi’s decisions that go against the prescribed behaviour of women because she is too steeped in culture.

Rapu’s mother is another of those older women who act as “intergenerational indoctrinators” (Cruz 111). When Ezi jokes about Mike in front of Rapu, Rapu sees it as Ezi’s lack of respect for her husband, attributing it to Ezi’s mother’s incompetence in socialising Ezi: “It seemed like this woman’s mother did not do a very good job of teaching her manners” (172). Rapu recollects her own mother’s advice imparted through proverbs: “Men are like palm wine”, her mother told her when she was old enough to know. ‘You sip a bit at a time and you sip it with respect’ (173). In his explanation of this proverb, Ogbuide Victor highlights that palm wine is a drink that is enjoyed leisurely by the elders during special occasions and links it to how “men are held in high esteem” in a patriarchal African society and how “wives are taught by their mothers to respect their husbands, prepare their food in time and wash their clothes” (250). Rapu puts her own mother on the pedestal: “Her wise mother, could teach this woman a thing or two about holding on to her husband” (173). Rapu then continues to think along adages that contain folk wisdom on how women should never forget their secondary position and always respect their husbands: “no matter the size of your husband’s penis, no other woman should know it. Every girl was taught that back in the village” (173). Rapu’s attitude and her condemnation of Ezi for not exhibiting traditional womanhood, highlight how Rapu’s mother has successfully indoctrinated Rapu to be a compliant female within the patriarchal order. Thus, it is not surprising that Rapu takes over Ezi’s position as Mike’s wife without any sense of guilt about betraying her mistress because she is convinced that Ezi deserves to be replaced. Rapu views Ezi as not representing traditional womanhood, not only because of her disrespectful

attitude towards her husband but also because of her laziness since Ezi does not cook for her husband and serve him.

It can be seen in the contrasting treatment of Ezi and Rapu how patriarchy rewards conformity and punishes rebellion. In the process of fulfilling her prophecy, Rapu is rewarded with upward mobility in her social class as she performs the duty of a woman, that is, getting married and giving birth to children, especially sons. In contrast, Ezi's non-compliance results in her being disowned by her parents and she is stigmatised by society for being a divorcee, a single parent, and her questionable reputation⁵.

Ezi's Tumultuous Journey Towards Independence

In this section, I trace Ezi's development from a rebellious youngster, who challenges stereotypical gender roles, to a mature adult who achieves freedom to live life on her own terms and "by the rule that men were dispensable" (67). Ezi's conditions appear to be that no patriarchal system or men should impose their restrictions on her. This achievement does not come easy because Ezi must navigate a path full of obstacles in the form of her family that does not support her decision, a husband who betrays her, a mother-in-law who turns against her, a house maid who usurps her position as wife, a society that ostracises her and a daughter who hates her. I suggest that Unigwe uses Ezi's refusal to stay in a polygynous relationship that affects her dignity and devalues her daughter, to expose the tensions in the patriarchal set up that demands women's compliance in the name of culture. Unigwe highlights that while Ezi regains control of her body and life from patriarchal domination to create a new subjectivity for herself and her daughter, she is stigmatised forever for choosing to be a single mother and seeking financial support from her lovers.

The inclusion of Ezi's memoir and the use of the first person 'I' in the letters give the Bildungsroman an autobiographic mode, providing Ezi the voice and autonomy to tell her own story. The letters provide an insight into Ezi's personality and the hurdles she encounters in her life, presenting her as beautiful, loud, colourful, and intelligent but also stubborn, decisive, impatient, and rebellious. While what Ezi shares in her memoir corroborates with Madam

⁵ In traditional patriarchal societies, the importance of men in the figure of fathers and husbands is reinforced as reflected in the texts under study. As such, single motherhood and fatherless children are stigmatised alongside women who resort to prostitution for survival or women who are deemed to have a questionable reputation. In the next chapter that discusses *Everything Good Will Come*, I explore Sefi Atta's representation of Sheri and her stigmatisation by fellow women because she is a mistress to a wealthy and influential man.

Gold's opinion of Ezi, the reader is mindful of Ezi's reliability as a narrator since she selects the episodes of her life to be shared; furthermore, the reader is reminded of Mma's accusation that the letters present "half-told stories" (13). The selective and incomplete nature of Ezi's letters to present her life story and the choices she makes, reflect the potential and limitations of the social realist mode used to depict the traditional Igbo world realistically with a special focus on customs that are oppressive to women. The reader is reminded of the author's selection of events and contexts to bring out the difficult lives of women from the sixties to the eighties that reinforce the mediated nature of the realist form.

Through the character of Ezi and her radical and confrontational ways of challenging patriarchy that is in line with her personality, Unigwe interrogates cultural norms that pigeonhole women and restrict them from following their passion. Ezi pursues Accountancy in the university in the seventies, when tertiary institutions were considered a man's world, going against her principal's advice to take up teaching or nursing, careers considered suitable for women since nurturance is believed to be an innate feminine quality. Unigwe highlights how education and careers that are gendered attempt to straitjacket women, limiting their options. It is interesting that Madam Gold considers teaching and nursing to be respectable careers because when Ezi eventually becomes a "night dancer" she plunges herself into a lifetime of disrespect from society.

Ezi's non-conformity is seen in her refusal to cook and serve her husband, unlike what we had observed in the earlier chapters whereby some of the female characters are metonymically linked to domesticity. It is interesting that the only feminine activity that Ezi engages in is knitting which seems to have a therapeutic effect on her. However, Ezi does not exhibit masculinity in her appearance or movements, in fact, she flaunts her assets through her loud and colourful dressing which Mma finds distasteful. When Madam Gold tells Mma "Your mother would have made a good man. She came in the wrong body" (11), what she means is that Ezi has all the qualities and attitudes that are considered masculine in a traditional society. Ezi's choice of her study in the university, her impatience, decisiveness, business acumen and even her act of taking lovers are considered manly in a traditional society.

Ezi, depicted as the epitome of non-conformity in her younger, does go through a phase when she temporarily relinquishes her feminist beliefs. In her married life with Mike in Kaduna, Ezi becomes deeply troubled by her initial infertility when pressured to perform her duty as a wife and daughter-in-law to fill the house with children. This period is significant because it

shows a desperate Ezi, bringing Rapu into her home following the advice a pastor: “very often what barren women needed to open their wombs was to take in someone young to look after them”(188). Quoting Bracha L Ettinger, Mary Okolie points out that the lethargy Ezi feels while being barren is Ezi’s period of “fragilization in marriage” (127). After this temporary period of regression⁶ Ezi resumes her feminist stance and forsakes a marriage in which her rights and dignity are compromised, and a son is valued over a daughter: “Sometimes in life, we need to take a stand. It does not help to sit on the fence, even if we have to hurt the people we love-love” (49).

Ezi does not display patience and tolerance that is expected of a traditional woman and her refusal to continue traditional responsibilities associated with being a wife are in contrast with Awa of *The Stillborn* discussed in the last chapter. Cristina Cruz suggests that *Night Dancer* is different from other third generation Nigerian novels that portray wives leaving their marriages because Ezi is a mother, and it is marital infidelity and betrayal that “constitute a catalyst for emancipation” rather than “domestic violence or sexual abuse” (113). It appears that Cruz has not taken into account *Everything Good Will Come* by Sefi Atta, discussed in the next chapter, where Enitan, also a new mother, leaves her marriage to the surprise of her neighbours who see Niyi as a good husband because he works hard and does not womanise. It must be noted that Ezi’s decision to leave Mike is not solely based on Mike’s infidelity. Ezi is against living in a polygynous household and refuses to have any part in raising Rapu’s son, whom she views is the reason for her state: “Every time she heard Rapu’s baby cry, she wanted to strangle it, to choke it, to kill the thing that had changed their lives. How could she live under the same roof as it?” (216). Furthermore, Ezi is unable to accept Mike’s intimation that “a son is of greater value than a daughter” (Owonibi and Gaji 140). Mike’s male child preference is reinforced when Mike shares with Mma how he gave Ezi an ultimatum, a choice that is not really a choice, when she returned once to Kaduna: “She begged me to send Rapu away. But it was impossible. I had married her by then. Ezi wanted her daughter to have a father. I begged her, too. I wanted to be father to my son. Either I kept the two of you, or I kept my son” (258-9).

⁶ Enitan of *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in the next chapter also experiences regression before walking out on her marriage though her reason for walking out is different. Enitan, who is troubled by her initial infertility, asserts that a woman is not equal to her womb. In the last chapter, Li in *The Stillborn* also goes through a rough patch in her married life when she spends much money on a spiritualist to salvage marriage.

Ezi's journey from Kaduna to Enugu to start a new life after her separation from Mike is symbolic since Enugu represents freedom, a separation from "a male-defined environment" (Felski 124). Mary Okolie rightly points out how different spaces are associated with different ideologies, suggesting that Aba and Kaduna, places of Ezi's natal and marital homes represent patriarchal spaces that constrain Ezi's freedom while Enugu denotes independence. When Mma visits her father in Kaduna, she observes that her mother who loved to abandon herself would never have been free in Kaduna like she was in Enugu: "This house would not have accepted her mother's twirling in her red dancing shoes, laughing her loud laugh" (231). Seen in the light of Cristina Cruz's suggestion that dancing symbolised freedom of movement and emancipation, remaining in Kaduna would have not allowed Ezi to evolve to become a self-emancipated woman.

Next, I discuss reasons behind why Ezi resorts to becoming a "night dancer" and the implications of her action. Since Ezi's activity as a "night dancer" is surrounded with an air of mystery, hinting prostitution, critics loosely refer to Ezi as a prostitute in their discussions. However, I have already pointed out earlier that Ezi does not become a prostitute but takes lovers who pay her for her maintenance or even provide her a house like what her married lover does. Cruz argues that *Night Dancer* champions the freedom women obtain when they regain control of their body, stopping patriarchy from using it for reproductive purposes. She suggests that Ezi's act of becoming a "night dancer" gives her the self-emancipation required to live life on her own terms (114), drawing our attention to how Ezi is in control and not exploited by her boyfriends. In a similar vein, Mary Okolie suggests that Ezi's commodification of her body is an "agentic avowal of femaleness, not corporeal invasion" (130) since she chooses her own lovers. I agree with Cruz and Okolie that Ezi does not seem to be exploited like the four women in *On Black Sister's Street* who are abused and deprived of their rights and dignities as human beings (*Feminism* 98). By linking Ezi's becoming a "night dancer" to "purposefully rebelling against social expectations" (110), Cruz seems to suggest that Ezi commodifies her own body to deliberately defy patriarchy. But the issue is that both Cruz and Okolie do not acknowledge the circumstances that push Ezi to become a "night dancer" or discuss the difficulties that Ezi faces in raising her child singlehandedly.

Nigeria's economy collapsed in the 1980s after the end of the oil boom and it is during this period of recession that Ezi, a single woman with a baby and no collateral, faces difficulty in starting a business because no banks would give her a loan. By juxtaposing Ezi's financial situation with the lifestyle of her lovers who are wealthy men in shiny cars, Unigwe underscores

the wide gap between the rich and the poor in a Nigeria that was attempting to bounce back from its economic crisis. Furthermore, the contrast between the rich living in private properties and those like Ezi, living in flats and sharing the facilities with neighbours, reinforces the divide between the different social classes. Through Ezi's precarious situation, Unigwe highlights how economic changes do not affect everyone in the same way in that some are more vulnerable than others.

Rather than attributing Ezi's becoming a "night dancer" to her defiance of patriarchy, I suggest that it is her dire economic situation that drives her to it. Asserting that Ezi's act of resorting to prostitution is not an act of self-assertion, Sola Owonibi and Funmilayo Gaji argue that Ezi is forced into prostitution because "her other plans to eke a living" as single mother who is unable to take a full-time employment are "thwarted at every turn" (141). Madam Gold shares with Mma the economic hardships that Ezi faces and how she is driven to despair when she is unable to pay her debts since her food catering business, something she embarks on to work from home while looking after her baby, fails because of competition from copycats.

Ezi who refuses to remarry or settle in a long-term relationship for the fear of not being able to live life on her terms, commodifies her body out of necessity, taking lovers after exhausting all means of trying to make an honourable living. I suggest that through Ezi's actions Unigwe critiques a society that stigmatises and shuns single mothers, not giving them opportunities to rebuild their lives with their children. Would Ezi have been marginalised if her family, especially her mother, had been supportive when she wanted to return to her natal home in Aba: "I can come back and live at home for a while until I find my feet again. I can get a job" (211). Or would Ezi have needed to resort to heartless money lenders if banks had exercised their discretion to support single mothers in their business ventures to become self-sufficient?

Ezi believes that, even if her family withheld support, she would still be able to get a job and support herself and her baby because she was educated. Obviously, Ezi overlooks the economic problems in the country and overestimates traditional Igbo society's capacity to change: "How difficult really would it be to live on her own with a baby? Things must have changed since her mother's time, when women were terrified of living alone. Society had become more intelligent, more tolerant, surely" (216). However, Ezi learns the hard way that society has not changed for the better to be more inclusive and fending for herself and her daughter would not be easy in a Nigeria undergoing an economic crisis in the eighties.

Ezi's reclamation of her body from patriarchy's dictates reinstates the confidence and self-esteem that she loses in the four years of her marriage, and this is evident in the way Ezi navigates her life, amassing wealth with her business acumen. This is not to say that Unigwe condones Ezi's method of seeking emancipation since Unigwe does not hesitate to paint the consequences of Ezi's choices that render Ezi and Mma social outcasts and the impact it has on Mma's childhood and girlhood, which will be discussed in detail in the next section. Even though family, marriage and motherhood are considered important in African feminism, Unigwe problematises motherhood by depicting Ezi's radical feminism and her extreme and exclusive parenting style.

The self-confessed nego-feminist, Chika Unigwe, states in an interview that through Ezi's character she wanted to explore what would happen when a woman uses radical feminism to challenge patriarchy when using nego-feminism would have worked (Tunca et al. 13). Obioma Nnaemeka reinforces the importance of complementarity between men and women and proposes nego-feminism, "the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism" (360-1) that is suitable for the African context. She points out that the concept of negotiation is a value that is common amongst many cultures in diverse Africa and highlights how African feminism challenges through "negotiations and compromise" rather than confrontation: "It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts" (378). Obioma Nnaemeka's feminism contends that negotiation works better than confrontation and reinforces the need to collaborate with men to improve the situation of women.

Ezi could have negotiated and remained in a polygamous marriage and exercised her privileges as the senior wife, believing that Mike would keep his word and send Rapu back to the village once his son was older; she could have even attempted to provide Mike with more children especially sons as advised by her mother. While this would have preserved Ezi's marriage and Mma would have grown up with a father in a traditional family, how would this have impacted Ezi, who believes that it is not in the interest of her own self-respect and the interest of her girl child who is blatantly perceived as secondary to a son, to remain in Mike's house? Although the situation of bigamy in India in the thirties and polygyny in Africa in the eighties may be different, we looked at the case of Virmati in Chapter Two who is unable to rise from her unhappiness and bitterness even though political circumstances do not allow Ganga, the first wife, to return. The point here is that while negotiation and compromise may

have saved Ezi's marriage but given her vivacious and loud personality, life in a polygynous household would have consumed Ezi. As such, I suggest that the use of nego-feminism is problematised in the case of Ezi, who is an iconoclast, even though Unigwe suggests that it would have worked.

While men are presented as being flawed in the novel, highlighting that they are products of patriarchal system encourages readers to view them empathetically. Besides targeting older women who act as patriarchal agents, Unigwe also brings out that Ezi, a victim of oppressive traditions and culture, is also a victimiser in certain situations. Ezi's microaggression towards Rapu is evident in the way she uses her class privilege and her status as an educated woman to belittle Rapu, the young, poverty-stricken, and semi-literate village girl. As such, Unigwe not only portrays men as lacking but also underscores how women create problems in the lives of other women when they do not exercise empathy. Through Ezi's difficult life, Unigwe points out how women's experiences have not changed for the better because of certain oppressive Igbo traditions that persist even though the country has attained independence and times have changed. Ezi thinks that she can manage as a single mother because society has advanced, but that is not the case as evident in the trials and tribulations she undergoes to lead an independent life on her own terms.

Mma's Journey of Self-Discovery: Search for Self-Identity and Kinship

In this section, I examine the physical and metaphorical journeys Mma undertakes to discover herself and rediscover her mother and how Ezi's memoir plays a crucial role in prompting Mma's quest and initiating changes in her. Mma's negative view of her mother is juxtaposed with Madam Gold's fond recollection of Ezi and Ezi's own description of her life in her letters. However, Mma only gets a complete picture of her mother and her motivations after she meets her grandfather and maternal relatives in Aba and her father and his family in Kaduna. I trace how Mma finds herself, validates her patricentric identity and becomes a mature and self-assertive adult in her quest for self-identity and how she discovers her mother who had been elusive during her living days.

It is the early millennium with 2001 coming to an end and Nigeria is ruled by a civilian government after the dictatorship ends in 1999. Unigwe portrays a Nigeria experiencing inflation during this period and people migrating overseas for better opportunities. Ezi's comparison of Nigeria that was regressing with Ghana that was moving forward and Madam Gold's complaint about high prices of household products, bring out the economic crisis in

Nigeria. Mma is grown up now, almost twenty-two years of age and is unable to secure a job with her theatre degree during this period. But the economic situation does not affect Mma adversely because she has become rich after inheriting Ezi's wealth. Although financially well off, the impact of the stigma that Mma had experienced as a child affects her tremendously. "An apparently timelessly judgmental Nigerian society governed by patriarchal traditions" (Cruz 107) that stigmatised Ezi in the 1980s appears to have not changed much even in Mma's time. Mma's questionable background and parentage place her in a socially disadvantaged position, resulting in several of Mma's suitors to drop her. Mma's current boyfriend, Obi, is hesitant to introduce Mma to his family: "Who would I say you were?" (27). Mma's hatred towards Ezi stems from her anger at being cut off from her family and forced to lead a solitary life and the indignity suffered because of Ezi's reputation as a "night dancer". As such, Mma feels that "she had lived her entire life in embarrassment" (30). Mma's hatred is so intense that she even denies Ezi an elaborate burial according to Igbo traditions. Although Mma resembles Ezi in her physical appearance, she makes a conscious effort to not be like Ezi in her dressing and demeanour,⁷ embarrassed by Ezi's loud and colourful personality.

Egbuta et al. who observe Unigwe's consistent use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in *On Black Sisters' Street*, also note that in *Night Dancer* Mma's thoughts are narrated using the same technique. They identify the portrayal of Mma's thoughts and inner dialogue during the dinner scene in Kaduna as an example of the stream-of-consciousness strategy used by Unigwe. It is true that during her first meeting with her father Mma goes through a kaleidoscope of emotions, excitement, anxiety, shock and disappointment and Unigwe tries to register Mma's feelings. *Night Dancer* is a realist text and as such, Unigwe's incorporation of the stream-of-consciousness strategy, that is associated with modernism, is rather unexpected. Nevertheless, this strategy brings out Mma's conflicted inner state, especially her growing sense of anxiety and guilt as she gathers more information about her mother, maternal relatives and father through Madam Gold and her mother's memoir.

Mma's sense of guilt is not only linked to her fear that she may have been wrong in her judgement of her mother but also to the thoughts that she had harboured about poisoning her mother with pesticide: "She had thought several times of what it would be like to mix otapiapa

⁷ Daughters in other postcolonial novels are shown as wanting to be different from their mothers for various reasons. In Chapter Two, we saw that Ida wants to be different from her mother because her mother, Virmati, was an embittered and unhappy woman. Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* aims to achieve social mobility and not be like her mother who suffers from poverty and is overburdened because of her irresponsible husband.

in her mother's food" (240). Critics discuss Mma's guilt in relation to her misjudgement of her mother but surprisingly do not link it to Mma's dark thoughts and the resultant nightmares she experiences. Mma is tortured by dreams of Ezi suffering death by otopiapia poisoning; her guilt stems from seeing herself as having been complicit in her mother's death because of her dark thoughts. I suggest that the stream-of-consciousness technique is particularly effective in bringing out what Mma calls her "upside down thoughts" (240) and her inner conflicts. As mentioned earlier, some daughters like Mma are very clear about not wanting to be like their mothers in appearance and behaviour but entertaining thoughts of murdering the mother does seem extreme even if intense hatred is the motive. Mma who harbours dark thoughts can be compared with Antara, the protagonist of *Burnt Sugar* (2019), a novel by Avni Doshi, that was shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize. However, the reason for Antara's hatred towards her mother is different. Antara, who had been neglected by her mother as a child, is now placed in a situation where she needs to take care of her mother who suffers from the onset of Alzheimer's. Affected by postpartum depression, Antara is further troubled by her traumatic childhood memories which resurface when her mother begins to forget the present and starts to travel to her younger days. Unable to cope with her mother's increasing problematic behaviour and angry that her mother was forgetting how she had ruined her childhood, Antara considers poisoning her mother by adding a small amount of sugar in her food daily, something that would aggravate her disease.

In the earlier section, I reiterated that Unigwe's negotiation with the genre of memoir provides Ezi the voice to tell her story and establish Ezi's non-conforming personality. In this section, I discuss the crucial role the memoir plays in initiating changes in Mma, prompting Mma to undertake metaphorical and physical journeys and bringing about a connection between mother and daughter who were poles apart during Ezi's lifetime. Mma's quest for self-discovery is triggered when she begins to read her mother's memoir and takes a metaphoric journey into her mother's past. The structure of *Night Dancer* is similar to that of *Difficult Daughters* discussed in Chapter Two in that the story of the mother is framed by the daughter who goes on a search that not only reconstructs her dead mother's past but also helps her to discover herself. In Chielozona Eze's words, the quest and subsequent discovery are "cathartic as well as catalytic" (*Feminism* 98) for the daughters. The journeys undertaken by Mma are not very different from that of Ida's discussed in Chapter Two. While Ida travels to her mother's natal home in Amritsar, a place where she spent her holidays while growing up and to Lahore where her mother had spent much of her time acquiring a higher education, Mma

travels for the first time to her mother's natal and marital homes in Aba and Kaduna. While the quests of the daughters are similar, the journeys of the mothers are very different. Unlike *Difficult Daughters* which covers the meandering story of Virmati that falls into patterns of progression and regression as Virmati deals with patriarchal interventions, it was noted that Ezi who is very decisive, never returns to her marriage. Furthermore, *Night Dancer* is a much shorter novel although the number of pages of the novel (262 pages) is deceptive since a much bigger font size and a longer line spacing are used when compared to *Difficult Daughters* that is compact, containing much more content in its 280 pages.

Mma's initial reluctance to read the letters, she only starts four weeks after Ezi's death, and her hesitancy to plod through the letters indicate her fear of discovering that she could have been wrong about her mother and her guilt on having harboured thoughts of poisoning her mother. When Ezi is alive, Mma accepts the silence between herself and her mother, affirming that they were "all 'talked out'"(38). Núria Solà suggests that the irreconcilable issues between mother and daughter is "negotiated through the written medium" since her mother's letters "offer a counternarrative of Mma's initial perception of Ezi" (510). It is true that the letters improve communication between mother and daughter especially since they give Ezi an opportunity to reveal the secrets that she had kept from Mma. I propose that, in addition, the letters play a crucial role in prompting Mma to make journeys that enable her to reconnect with her mother. Interestingly, Mary Okolie goes further to assert that the letters are "umbilical objects" that initiate Mma's "crossing into the symbolic gender space occupied by her mother" (132). Seen in the light of Mma becoming more assertive after completing her quest, what Mary Okolie says is relevant.

Mma is happy to discover that she has maternal relatives and a father whom her mother had deprived her of: "Every child deserved a father. Indeed. Especially a child with a mother like hers to balance out her life" (7). As such, Mma's quest for her identity is very much related to her desire to verify her cultural and patricentric identity that would distance her from her tainted identity as a "whore's daughter" (16). Mary Okolie sees Mma's trips from Enugu to Aba and Kaduna as moving from a space that denotes independence to spaces of "cultural dominance" (131). Mma's grandfather's and her father's homes are spaces under the control of patriarchs and adherence to traditions is important in these spaces. The importance these spaces give to culture and tradition can be seen in the advice that Madam Gold gives Mma, telling her to apologise to her grandfather and father because elders or parents did not apologise, even if they were at fault.

Mma's journey of self-discovery culminates when she completes her physical journeys from Enugu to Aba and Kaduna. Though unlike the male hero's journey from the province to the city to become an apprentice and learn about life, this journey nevertheless brings about maturity upon discovering herself, rediscovering her mother, finding her father and her kinship and her own place in the world. Mma's impression of her mother transforms totally after her journeys to Aba and Kaduna, and she is full of regret for judging her mother unfairly. According to Núria Codina Solà, "more than a passive reader of Ezi's text, Mma becomes its rewriter and engages actively in the process of retelling her mother's past" (511). By journeying into her mother's past through her letters and visiting her maternal relatives and father, Mma reconstructs Ezi's life, and this allows her to understand and appreciate Ezi better.

During Mma's visit to Kaduna, one of the largest cities in the north populated mainly by the Muslims, religious riots take place, and this is the only real-life political event that is used as a backdrop in the narrative that focuses on the socioeconomic situation of Nigeria. The actual riot took place in Kaduna when it hosted The Miss World competition in November 2002⁸ but Unigwe shifts this event to January 2002, providing an explanatory note on how the sequence of events in the narrative required the shift. While the adjustment Unigwe makes reminds the reader of the mediated nature of the text in its use of the backdrop, the addition of the line "everything else about the riots is true" (263) reinforces the author's attempt at providing a realistic portrayal of the historical event. Furthermore, this political event that forms the context to Mma's visit to Kaduna serves several other purposes. Unigwe reinforces that in contemporary Nigeria, religious and ethnic tensions continue to exist by drawing attention to sporadic episodes of violence that erupt in Nigeria and making references to previous incidents such as the riots between the Christians and Muslims in Kaduna state in 2000 when Islamic law, the Sharia, was introduced. Mike talks about his supermarket being burnt down during the 2000 riots and how he refused to return to Igboland after the incident and this reinforces that tension between different religious groups is a common occurrence. Through Rapu's opinion that the military rule was better, Unigwe highlights how some Nigerians preferred the military rule that ended in 1999 because it kept in check the tension between different religious and ethnic groups. In addition, the mounting tension in the home

⁸ Some of the conservative Muslims were against The Miss World competition being held in Nigeria; the clash between the Muslims and Christians was provoked by Christian newspaper article that fuelled the volatile atmosphere by joking about how Prophet Muhamed would have selected one of the contestants from the beauty pageant as his wife if he had seen them.

front between Mma and Rapu, who suspects that Mma's visit is to ask for money, and the increasing friction between Mma and Mike when Mma learns the real reason why her mother left Kaduna parallel the volatile situation outside the home, in the streets of Kaduna. Lastly, the clash between the two religious groups could also be seen as the tension between progress and freedom of speech and orthodox ways of living in contemporary Nigeria. The sporadic outbursts that are common in Kaduna many years after Nigeria's independence echo the situation of Amritsar in independent India as witnessed by Ida in Chapter Two, who links the occasional bombing and riots in the city with Partition chaos and upheaval but on a smaller scale. In her attempt to depict the situation of Kaduna in the early millennium, Unigwe also brings to attention the long-lasting repercussions of the country's past on the present.

Initially, Mma is fixated to a negative portrayal of Ezi because of her hatred towards her and although Madam Gold's recollections provide an alternative image of Ezi, Mma is defensive and not open to the different view presented. But upon completing her journeys to Aba and Kaduna, Mma gets a full picture of her mother who had the courage to take on the world single-handedly. Thus, over a period of slightly more than two months, starting from November 2001 to January 2002, Mma transforms from a self-righteous and selfish young girl to a mature young adult who appreciates her mother.

Mma also becomes more assertive at the end of her journey although she had never appreciated her mother's attempt at imparting her feminist thinking. When Obi, who had concerns about Mma's lack of patricentric identity, proposes to Mma after she has met her father, Mma appears firmer, telling Obi that his parents should also know about her mother besides meeting his father: "You take me as I am or you don't take me at all" (261). However, the feminism that Mma adopts is inclusive of her newly found family although she returns to Enugu disappointed with her father for valuing a son more than a daughter. Mma also signals to Obi that she is looking for a relationship that is more egalitarian. Through the transformed Mma, Unigwe appears to suggest an alternative way of life where men and women could work together to live harmoniously.

In Chapter One, I had discussed how Anupama Jain views maturation as a process rather than a final goal and how her migrant protagonists engage in "accommodation" rather than "assimilation" with their host society in America (50). Mma's attainment of maturity at the end of the novel that indicates that she is ready to move on to the next chapter of her life reinforces that the end of her self-discovery journey is not a closure or completion.

Furthermore, rather than assimilate into society like the traditional male hero, Mma appears to want to do what she thinks is appropriate. While Mma's feminism is not radical and exclusive like her mother's, she does not give in totally to normative ideology since she insists that Obi takes her for who she is, without erasing her mother whom she has rediscovered. As such, Mma's feminism can be seen as embracing features of nego-feminism.

Rapu's Journey to Fulfil her Prophecy

Around half of Part Two is devoted to Rapu's journey, depicting her development from childhood to girlhood to maturity. Beginning with Rapu's journey that is focalised through Rapu, the narrative moves to Mike's and Ezi's perspectives before returning to Rapu's perspective. I suggest that by giving emphasis to Rapu's journey towards fulfilling her prophecy, Unigwe is asking readers to view Rapu as more than just the other woman. Through Rapu, Unigwe shows how women are contained in a patriarchal set up by successful internalisation of their roles and responsibilities and how one's social class and educational level contribute to this placement. In this section, I discuss how the journey Rapu undertakes from the village to the city facilitates the fulfilment of her prophecy to become the saviour of her poor family.

I begin my discussion by highlighting how Rapu is appreciated by her family for her future utilitarian value and her capacity to uplift her family from poverty by bringing wealth and good fortune. In the sixties poverty was a major problem in Nigeria, especially in the villages, when Nigeria's economy depended on agriculture mainly before the petroleum industry took over from the late sixties and early seventies. The life of the poverty-stricken in the villages is brought out through Unigwe's depiction of Rapu's childhood and how her family suffered financial hardships in this period. In his analysis of Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street*, Chielozona Eze discusses the background of one of the four protagonists, Sisi, to highlight how Sisi's future "utilitarian value to her parents" is predicted by a soothsayer who prophesies at her birth that she will bring good luck to the family and how this prophecy comes true when Sisi leaves Nigeria to earn money in Belgium, becoming a prostitute (95). Chielozona Eze's point that Sisi's parents' hopes are anchored on the believe that Sisi's bright future would benefit them can also be seen in the case of Rapu. When Rapu is born, "the expert midwife and certified soothsayer" tells Rapu's father: "She will lead you away from hunger. Ugani has left your household. Famine shall never visit you again. It is gone" (133). Rapu is named appropriately since her name means "go away" (137), referring to the banishment of ill fortune.

What is emphasised in the prophecy is that Rapu will bring good luck and wealth to the family through her future utilitarian value as a daughter.

The soothsayer's prophecy comes true when Rapu goes from her village, Lokpanta, to the city, Kaduna, to work as a house girl and is impregnated by her employer, Mike, and gives birth to a son. Rapu becomes the mistress of the house when she allows her body to be commodified by her employer, for his sexual pleasure and procreation. Thus, Rapu's utilitarian value to her parents is achieved when she utilises her reproductive capacity to provide her employer with a son, something that his lawfully wedded wife, Ezi, is unable to do. Rapu's social status is elevated when she becomes the mother of a male child and a wife, and her class mobility not only changes her fortunes for the better but also that of her family. When Rapu's father visits her, he feels very proud of her: "It did not matter now what his sons did, how long they decided to go to school for - his daughter had wiped the spittle off his face" (224). Rapu's father's appreciation of his daughter over his sons in a traditional Igbo community that values the male child reinforces the flexible nature of patriarchy.

Although the city provides Rapu exposure, freedom and purchasing power, Rapu's view on the role and status of women in the family and society does not waver because she has been indoctrinated with patriarchal values that privilege men. Rapu does not plot to usurp Ezi's position, but does engage in girlhood fantasies about getting married, becoming rich and privileged and enjoys silly banter with the neighbour's maid about getting Mike to banish Ezi because she was not good wife material. By tracing Rapu's development from childhood to girlhood and adulthood rather than only show Rapu as the despicable other woman as perceived by Mma during her visit, Unigwe underscores how Rapu becomes the woman she is because of her socioeconomic status and successful socialisation by her mother.

Critics have commented on how Rapu provides a contrasting picture of female complacency against Ezi's transgression. In the last chapter, we looked at how Zaynab Alkali used contrast and similarity between female characters to bring out the opposing effects of submission to and retaliation of patriarchal restrictions; we also noted how the Indian novels discussed earlier brought out the difference between women who conformed to traditional womanhood and those who challenged it, through the use of contrast. In the case of Rapu and Ezi, I suggest that Unigwe highlights the contrast between them to emphasise that the degree of success of indoctrination of patriarchal values depends on one's family background, educational level, social class, self-perception, and self-worth. In her study of contemporary

African novels by both men and women writers, Florence Stratton identifies the presence of dual women characters who are contrasting in the way they deal with patriarchal domination, “one passively submitting, the other actively resisting” in African women’s writing and calls this trope “the convention of paired women” (97).

The use of such a device is present in *Night Dancer* and it helps to bring out the differences in ideologies between Rapu, a girl who has been successfully socialised to embody traditional African womanhood, and Ezi who embodies challenge of patriarchy. Through this device, Unigwe illuminates the reasons why Rapu adheres to traditional African womanhood and how she is rewarded by patriarchy for her utilitarian value as opposed to Ezi who is punished for her transgression and her refusal to be commodified. *Everything Good Will Come* discussed in the next chapter also employs this trope to show how the double Bildungsheld of the novel, Enitan and Sheri, also exhibit opposing feminist stances in the way they respond to patriarchal demands and restrictions.

Unlike Ezi who refuses to entertain an identity linked to domesticity, Rapu’s female subjectivity is closely tied to traditional African womanhood which emphasises women’s domestic roles. Rapu’s personality is resonant of characters such as Zahra in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Kasturi and Ganga in *Difficult Daughters* and Awa in *The Stillborn*. Rapu make herself indispensable in her employer’s home by engaging in gendered tasks of cooking, serving, and cleaning, tasks that non-conforming Ezi avoids. Rapu, who is praised for being an expert in all womanly duties, feels that she is an asset in the patriarchal society. Semi-literate but sharp, Rapu secures her place in the patriarchal world because of her mother’s successful indoctrination of gendered expectations that guides her in making herself indispensable in her employer’s home and seizing the opportunity to become the mistress of the house.

Rapu’s perception of herself and her judgement of other women are based on how well a woman is groomed to take on her traditional role and responsibilities. Having internalised the secondary status of women and the elevated state of men in the patriarchal Igbo community, she looks down upon Ezi for disagreeing with Mike and not taking care of his needs by cooking and serving him, labelling Ezi as lazy. Rapu’s staunch belief in gender stereotypes is brought out in her condescending attitude towards Ezi’s initial infertility: “She wished she could throw her (Ezi’s) barrenness in her face, sing for her the songs they sang for women whose wombs were withered in the village, to tell her that a hen that did not lay eggs was not much of a use

to anyone” (171). Grace Ojonide rightly points out how this proverb “a hen that did not lay eggs was not much of a use to anyone” reflects the belief of a patriarchal village society that a married woman who does not get pregnant is a worthless woman and how the proverb is “sexist” as it “places women at the receiving end” (138).

Unlike Ezi who sees living in a polygynous household as an insult to her dignity, Rapu is willing to become Mike’s second wife and defer to Ezi as the senior wife since she has internalised and accepted polygyny as part of her culture. Furthermore, acquiring the status of wife will improve her social position. Rapu’s lack of “feminist empathy” (*Feminist Empathy* 311) is highlighted in the proverb that begins Part Two of the novel: “A fish that does not swallow other fishes does not grow fat” (129). This proverb alluded to Rapu’s story whereby she usurps her mistress Ezi’s position in her efforts to maintain her economic and social standing. Suggesting that a fish needs to consume another of its kind to grow fat also indicates Rapu’s survival instincts and her justification that Ezi who does exhibit typical African womanhood does not deserve Mike, a good husband.

Rapu’s journey from childhood to girlhood and adulthood can be seen in her transformation from a poverty-stricken child in the village to a housemaid in the city, and finally to a housewife and mother of a male heir, displacing her mistress and her daughter. Rapu’s journey towards maturity resembles the traditional male hero’s journey in her movement from the village to the city, her sexual initiation that forms the rite of passage from her burgeoning girlhood to adulthood and her eventual marriage to Mike. However, even though her story appears to enjoy a happy ending when she becomes Mike’s wife, the mother of his three children and the mistress of the house, Unigwe draws attention to Rapu’s submissive role as Mike’s wife, her heightened sense of insecurity and her fear of losing her status. This can be seen in the way she “guarded her home with a ferociousness” (220), not allowing her maid to cook or serve her husband and her relief when her friend Anwulli stops visiting her. Rapu’s resentment of Mma and her suspicion that Mma has come to visit to get money from her father also highlight Rapu’s paranoia.

In this chapter, I have explored how *Night Dancer* revises the Bildungsroman genre to portray the intertwined lives of Ezi, Mma and Rapu and their journeys to seek freedom, search for kinship and self-identity, and fulfil a prophecy respectively and how the sociocultural and economic circumstances impact them. I have discussed how Unigwe incorporates stories of other women associated with the protagonists such as Ezi’s mother to bring out the

intergenerational conflict and Ezi's best friend, Madam Gold, to highlight how women are supportive of one another in difficult times. I have highlighted how Unigwe depicts the condition of women's lives, focusing on how sociocultural norms that oppress women continue to exist and how the economic crisis in the country makes it even more difficult for women to become financially independent. I have examined Unigwe's use of proverbs, adages, Igbo words and phrases and Igbo patterned language that lend authenticity to the traditional Igbo world created while also highlighting how some of the proverbs reinforce sexist ideologies that reiterate the secondary status of women. I have argued that the novel's use of the social realist mode is effective in critiquing patriarchy's control and commodification of women's bodies and how Igbo traditions and culture are used to justify discriminations against women. I have suggested that by focusing on infertility, male child preference and polygyny, Unigwe targets mothers and mother-figures acting as patriarchal agents to socialise daughters to internalise the importance of marriage and children, pointing out the lack of female solidarity and "feminist empathy" (*Feminist Empathy* 311) amongst women.

I have argued that Unigwe incorporates the features of the memoir to give voice to Ezi and allow her to tell her own story of how she challenged patriarchal discriminations to become emancipated and how Ezi's letters bridge the gap between mother and daughter when Mma's quest for her self-identity becomes cathartic. I have discussed the reasons behind Ezi's decision to abandon her marriage to lead an independent life as a single mother, and the impact it has on Ezi and Mma, arguing that by becoming a "night dancer" for her sustenance, Ezi attains freedom to live life on her own terms, but it comes with a hefty price. Analysing the novel's structure, I have suggested that the disruption of a linear narrative structure to travel back and forth in time to present the past reflects the difficulties that Ezi faces in becoming an independent woman and the issues that Mma confronts in her search for her self-identity.

I have also proposed that through the character of Rapu, who is successfully socialised by her mother to accept her position as a traditional African woman who is submissive, Unigwe suggests that one's family background, educational level and social class play an important part in determining the degree of success of indoctrination of patriarchal values. I have used a gender lens to discuss Rapu's successful socialisation to embody the traditional African woman and how Ezi's non-conformity is seen in relation to Ezi exhibiting masculine rather than feminine traits in her attitude and behaviour in the traditional Igbo society. I have pointed that Unigwe uses what Florence Stratton terms as "the convention of paired women" (97), to bring out the contrast between Rapu and Ezi, who embody women who are successfully socialised

into representing traditional African womanhood and women who attain self-actualisation in a masculinist world using their female subjectivity and agency. In the next chapter, I examine Sefi Atta's revision of the Bildungsroman conventions and her dialogue with several other genres to bring out the development trajectory of the main protagonist, Enitan, the story of Enitan's best friend, Sheri, and multiple stories of other women associated with the protagonists.

Chapter Six

Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* - From Apathy to Becoming Politically Empowered

Sefi Atta's debut novel, *Everything Good Will Come*, published in 2005, is set in Lagos, Nigeria. The narrative with its four parts covers a period of twenty-four years, from 1971 to 1995. The novel has not only received much critical attention from scholars but also many commendations for its feminist dimensions. It won the inaugural Wole Soyinka award for literature in Africa in 2006¹. The rich corpus of criticism on *Everything Good Will Come* focuses on themes such as coming of age, patriarchy and gender inequality, motherhood, mother-daughter and family relationships, female body and trauma of rape, impact of the city of Lagos on women's identity and postcolonial Nigerian politics.

Everything Good Will Come portrays the lives of adolescent girls Enitan and Sheri from girlhood to adulthood in a politically unstable post-independent Nigeria. Enitan, belonging to the Yoruba ethnic group, grows up in a home where her parents Sunny Taiwo and Arin are constantly fighting. Enitan dotes on her father who encourages her to be a feminist but is fearful of her strict mother who resorts to a Pentecostal Church that practices an extreme form of Christianity, following her brother's illness and subsequent death. Enitan's neighbour, Sheri, is of mixed heritage, being the daughter of Alhaji Bakare and an English woman, and is a member of Bakare's polygynous Muslim household. Brought up by her maternal grandmother in downtown Lagos, Sheri is bold and has a colourful personality in contrast to the reticent Enitan but the girls bond and become good friends. However, their friendship is estranged when Sheri is raped by a group of three boys. When Sheri becomes pregnant, she attempts to abort it on her own but instead ends up damaging her uterus. Enitan who is traumatised by Sheri's rape and her subsequent near-death experience, is packed off to England for her studies. Enitan's parents go through a divorce during the period that Enitan is in England. Nine years later, upon Enitan's return from England as a lawyer, the friends resume their friendship. Enitan marries Niyi Franco, a lawyer and a divorcee with a son and Enitan's reluctance to play the role of a submissive wife and engage in domestic chores create problems in their

¹ Sefi Atta has written novels, plays and short stories and has won several awards. Atta has written four more novels after *Everything Good Will Come*; *Swallow* (2010), *A Bit of Difference* (2013), *The Bead Collector* (2019) and *The Bad Immigrant* (2022). Sefi Atta was born in Lagos in 1964 to Christian mother and a Muslim father. She resides in US, dividing her time between US and Nigeria.

relationship. Meanwhile, Sheri who was a beauty queen, becomes a mistress to Brigadier Hassan, believing that no decent man would marry her, a barren woman. Despite their different backgrounds and personalities, Enitan loves to challenge prescribed gender roles while Sheri enjoys using her femininity to her advantage, the friends who reunite continue to be supportive of one another. While Sheri encourages Enitan to be less confrontational and more tolerant, Enitan trains Sheri to be more assertive. Enitan severs ties with her father when she discovers that he has fathered a son outside his marriage. It is only after her mother's death that Enitan realises how her father had been unreasonable towards her mother, who suffered from depression. When Hassan begins to control Sheri's movements when she embarks on a catering business, encouraged by Enitan Sheri leaves him to lead an independent life. When Enitan's father is detained for speaking out against the country's tyrannical military rule, Enitan joins Grace Ameh, a journalist and political activist, to fight for his release. After years of apathy, Enitan becomes politically active when encouraged by Grace Ameh who mentors her. When Niyi refuses to let Enitan continue her fight for human rights, she leaves home taking her daughter, Yimika, with her.

In the Introduction of this dissertation, I have argued that the emergence of Indian and Nigerian postcolonial Bildungsroman is an attempt by writers to capture the historical events and the transforming sociopolitical, economic, and cultural landscapes of postcolonial nations as they gained independence from their colonisers and the impact of these changes on the citizens. I have also asserted that women writers were especially concerned with portraying the development of young females and the lives of other women associated with them in this period of transition, highlighting how the repercussions of events in the public sphere were felt in the domestic sphere. It was noted in the previous chapters that Kamala Markandaya, Zaynab Alkali and Chika Unigwe use the transforming nation that impacts the protagonists as a backdrop against which the plot unfolds while Attia Hosain and Manju Kapur go further to use the family as a microcosm of society and nation at large to show the impact of historical events played out in the public realm on women and their families in the domestic front. As for Sefi Atta, she goes beyond using the transforming nation as a backdrop or the family as a microcosm of the nation. Sefi Atta engages with the decolonising struggles Nigeria undergoes after its independence by mapping the coming of age of her young female central character in relation to key sociopolitical events that mark Nigerian history. The novel highlights the political instability that marks the Nigerian landscape from 1971 onwards, after the Civil War which took place from 1967 to 1970, how power is held by the military mostly while the civilian

government is an intermittent affair and how military coups characterise the change of power from civilian rule to dictatorship. By emphasising the transforming political landscape of the country, Sefi Atta underscores its effect on the lives of the protagonists and their families, particularly how it influences the key stages in Enitan's development.

Scholars have observed how Enitan's long and difficult journey towards self-actualisation reflects Nigeria's struggles to establish itself as a postcolonial nation after its independence and the country's tumultuous history of political instability (Zouaghi and Tugba). Six pages to the end of the novel, Enitan shares that she was born in 1960: "I was born in the year of my country's independence and saw how it raged against itself" (324). Enitan's birth coinciding with Nigeria's independence from the British may be viewed as an invitation to read the novel as a national allegory². However, as mentioned in the Introduction, the novel's consistent use of a realist mode and its well-developed characters, who cannot be reduced to symbols representing the nation at large or its dictatorship, dissuade such a simplistic reading of the text. Marian Eide briefly discusses Fredric Jameson's claim on the political nature of third world texts that requires them to be read as national allegories. She observes recent postcolonial writers' use of allegory "to make larger political claims from private experiences" (156), pointing out that the writers also resist simplistic readings that do not go beyond acknowledging how individual lives reflect the socio-political situation of the country. In her reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Marian Eide proposes that the authors use "an entangled form of allegory" (157) to bring out the impact of General Sani Abacha's dictatorship in the nineties on the lives of Nigerians: "Allegorical lines of association in these novels are entangled; the thread that might connect literary sign to social concern, in the manner Jameson suggests, sometimes presents itself self-consciously as internal critique or *reductio ad absurdum*, sometimes breaks off or crosses over to another realm, thus setting forth on a formal level the entangled experience of the postcolony" (158). At times, Sefi Atta's engagement with Nigerian politics

² The fact that Enitan shares her birth year with Nigeria's independence is not highlighted in the beginning of the novel although an observant reader may have worked this out since we understand in the beginning of the novel that it is 1971 and Enitan is 11-year-old. This is in contrast with Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) whereby Saleem Sinai, the novel's protagonist, begins the novel by proclaiming that he was born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the moment India's independence from the British was declared. Unlike *Everything Good Will Come*, Rushdie's text that uses magic realism, encourages a national allegorical reading right from the beginning.

in *Everything Good Will Come* appears to exhibit the “entangled” (157) allegory that Marian Eide proposes whereby the complex and problematic lives of the citizens, especially women, not only reflect the appalling state of affairs of the country but also highlight the impact of political instability and military regime on the citizens and the need for change by political activism.

Sefi Atta uses conventions typical of a traditional Bildungsroman with a male hero at the start of the novel and I link this with her attempt to bring to the fore her ideas on nation-building and good citizenship. Ogaga Okuyade (2011) rightly points out that *Everything Good Will Come* is “a Bildungsroman that conflates the search for an autonomous female identity with the quest for a meaningful political identity”, suggesting that Sefi Atta appropriates the Bildungsroman genre as a device for “developing national identity and promoting social cohesion” (167-8). Perceiving the Bildungsroman more in terms of an ideology rather than the life of an individual hero, Franco Moretti, who focuses on Bildungsroman with male heroes, links it to the nation, seeing the genre as a vehicle for socialisation of individuals to become good citizens. Moretti stresses on the individual’s integration with society and nation by pointing out that an individual’s life gains meaning only when there is “an opening up to the *outside*, an ever wider and thicker network of external relationships with ‘human things’” (18). I suggest that Sefi Atta switches to using feminist Bildungsroman conventions later, especially after Enitan’s marriage, when the traditional genre with masculine values becomes inadequate to represent her female protagonist struggling to establish her self-identity in a patriarchal society and her political identity in the arena of nation-building which is dominated by men while living in a domestic environment that continues to uphold patriarchal values.

Besides exhibiting combined features of the traditional Bildungsroman genre and the feminist Bildungsroman, *Everything Good Will Come* also engages in conversations with several other genres. Features of the historical novel are embraced in its use of key political events to form the backdrop of the novel and to map the events to key stages in the main protagonist’s life. The consistent use of the first person “I” gives the novel an autobiographical mode; rather than an individualistic autobiography, a collective representation is favoured since along with Enitan’s life story, we are also presented with Sheri’s story and the stories of other women associated with these two protagonists. Traits associated with the novel of awakening are also found in the novel in Enitan’s reflections in the form of internal journeys and dreams about her father when he is imprisoned. Lastly, the Bildungsroman also enters into a dialogue with the testimonial novel. In the prison episode, stories of women prisoners and the violence

committed against them are shared and this confessional element in the Bildungsroman connects it to the conventions of the testimonio. By evoking multiple genres *Everything Good Will Come* expands its scope to present multiple stories of women and reinforce the double impact of patriarchy, how women are dominated in the domestic sphere by patriarchy and oppressed in the public sphere by the military government that is paternalistic.

Unlike the other novels discussed in this study where critics' debates on the genre of the novel do not go beyond one-liners or at the most consist of a single paragraph acknowledging that the novel is a Bildungsroman because it presents the coming-of-age story of the protagonist, discussions of *Everything Good Will Come* include some in-depth analysis of Sefi Atta's use of the Bildungsroman form (Courtois, Tugba and Okuyade 2011). Sefi Atta begins the novel by adhering to several features that define the traditional Bildungsroman with a male protagonist. Like the incremental growth of a male hero, Enitan's development is accumulative since she acquires formal and informal education and undertakes outward journeys away from home, first for her secondary education at Royal College and then to England to study law. Harry Olufunwa draws attention to how Sefi Atta stresses on "moral progression as the main metaphor for personal growth" and focuses on "the idea of measurable physical, emotional, and intellectual development for women as an essential component of truly beneficial rites of passage" (68). Enitan's incremental growth that contributes to her maturity is effectively captured in the narrative that covers twenty-four years of Enitan's life.

While Enitan's friendship with Sheri increases her awareness of female sexuality, her understanding of the complex patriarchal structures in Nigeria with its multi-religious and multi-ethnic society increases steadily when she attends the boarding school at Royal College with girls from different backgrounds. Her sexual initiation that takes place in England and her brief relationship with Mike Obi when she returns to Nigeria can be linked to sexual encounters that are "debasing" and "exalting" that the male hero experiences as part of his learning journey (Buckley 18). Enitan's transformation from a reticent and naïve girl to an independent and self-assertive mature adult is presented chronologically adopting a linear structure that is typical of a traditional male Bildungsroman. Sefi Atta's consistent use of a linear narrative structure contrasts with the structure of some of the other novels discussed in this study whereby the nature of the content invades the form. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *The Stillborn* begin in a linear fashion but the presentation of the problematic lives of the heroines disrupts the chronology. The narratives of *Difficult Daughters* and *Night Dancer* are framed by daughters but the flashbacks that go back and forth in time to present the stories of

the mothers disrupt the linear narrative, reflecting the struggles that both mothers and daughters undergo. Besides *Everything Good Will Come*, the only other Bildungsroman that uses a linear structure consistently is *Two Virgins*, which chronicles the adolescent lives of two sisters in a linear fashion as they enter adulthood.

Kehinde and Mbipom's who trace Enitan's journey of self-discovery observe that the novel is a Bildungsroman that presents "an unbroken growth pattern till Enitan comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman" and rightly point out that each of the four parts of the novel "attests to a particular phase in the journey to Enitan's self-discovery and realisation" (67). Furthermore, these stages that highlight Enitan's growth from an adolescent to a young adult and finally to a mature adult are also mapped against key events in the political history of Nigeria which is marked by coups, military rule and dictatorship.

Even though Enitan's development trajectory covers a period of twenty-four years, the focus is on her adult life. This is evident in Parts Three and Four that portray Enitan's adult life constituting four fifths of the entire novel whilst Parts One and Two depicting Enitan's adolescent life only make up about one fifth. Coverage of the adult life of a female protagonist, especially after marriage, is typical of the feminist Bildungsroman which "embraces a wider range of age" (Felski 137). Furthermore, the internal journeys that Enitan engages in the form reflections that bring about maturity and the ending of the novel that shows Enitan leaving her marriage to seek self-fulfilment are traits associated with the novel of awakening (Felski 124). Thus, Enitan's journey that begins in 1971 as an eleven-year-old naïve girl only ends in 1995 when she is a thirty-five-year-old adult who becomes politically involved after many years of apathy.

In the last chapter, I briefly discussed why some third-generation African writers continue to use the realist form despite the trend that favours postmodernism, specifically, how Chika Unigwe's use of the social realist mode in *Night Dancer* was effective in creating an authentic Igbo world and critiquing patriarchal oppression of women. Sefi Atta also uses the social realist mode to critique the patriarchal Lagos community and the intermittent oppressive military regime in Nigeria after its independence. Analysing several novels by third generation Nigerian women writers including *Everything Good Will Come*, Jane Bryce is puzzled that the novels are largely realist. She attributes this trend to the authors' use of intertextuality whereby the writers engage in dialogues with their literary predecessors (53) and links it to the texts' appropriation of the trope of feminine double or the doppelganger (59). Jane Bryce also

observes that her selected novels are “predominantly historical, self-consciously recreating specific moments in Nigeria’s recent or pre-Independence past” (54). I propose that Sefi Atta’s use of the social realist mode can be linked to the features of the historical novel that she incorporates to bring out the failure of the civilian government, the prevalence of corruption and violence in the country and the rise of the repressive military regime.

In Chapter Two, I referred to Ulka Anjaria who links the use of realism with authors’ intention portray protagonists who refashion themselves and reimagine their nations to demonstrate how Shakuntala and Swarna Lata use their agencies and subjectivities to become politically active citizens. Ulka Anjaria’s point on the creation of “complex political subjectivities” who could reinvent themselves and “reimagine what they wanted their country to be” (28) is also true of Enitan. Enitan struggles to achieve her identity as a politically active Nigerian citizen and attempts to promote politics that is inclusive since she believes that everyone must be involved in bringing about changes to improve the sociopolitical situation of the country.

In the sections that follow, I trace the growth pattern of the main protagonist, Enitan, as she transforms from a reserved adolescent to a mature, self-assertive adult. I pay particular attention to how the four parts of the novel focus on the various stages of development that Enitan undergoes to establish the different facets of her identity, namely, her self-identity, sexual identity, female identity, and finally political identity and how these key stages in her life are mapped against major political events that mark the political history of Nigeria. I argue that by juxtaposing the turning points and milestones of the protagonist with the key points in Nigeria’s history of decolonisation, Sefi Atta effectively brings out the impact of a politically unstable Nigeria, with its intermittent military coups and corrupt interim civilian government, on the lives of postcolonial citizens, especially women and young females coming of age in this volatile period. Sefi Atta highlights how women from various backgrounds are impacted not only by patriarchy in the private sphere of the home but also by the military government and dictatorship that is paternal in the way it disciplines its citizens. I also trace Sheri’s *Bildung* and underscore how Sheri and Enitan influence one another and how their friendship becomes a source of empowerment even though they come from different backgrounds and challenge traditions and patriarchal norms in opposing ways.

Besides axes such as gender, religion, tradition and family and the sociopolitical landscape of Nigeria in transition, I analyse the role of female community to show how it

facilitates Enitan's development, enabling her to empower herself by providing friendship and mentorship. Enitan's development trajectory is influenced by the political instability in the country and the rise of military government, especially in the 1990s with the tyrannical rule of dictatorship. Apathy pervades the novel and only in the last part Enitan's political awareness increases and it dawns on her that political activism and "imagining new national realities" (Ndaka 214) are crucial for changes to happen in the lives of Nigerians. Critics who discuss the theme of sisterhood or female solidarity in *Everything Good Will Come*, discuss Sheri's role as a friend in Enitan's growth but tend to overlook Grace Ameh's role in encouraging Enitan to be politically active (Courtois and Kehinde). Grace Ameh tells Enitan to speak out against injustice: "Use your voice to bring about change" (251). Sandra Nwokocha, on the other hand, elaborates how Enitan's alliance with Grace Ameh encourages Enitan to be politically involved besides detailing how Enitan's adolescent friendship with Sheri broadens Enitan's outlook on female sexuality. Sandra Nwokocha argues that female solidarity in the novel exemplifies how personal friendship and political alliance with other females provide an avenue for women to "share their feelings, opinions, achievements and challenges" (314), and that sisterhood is not necessarily an attempt to join forces to overcome male domination.

It is interesting that Sandra Nwokocha does not use the term mentor or role model to describe Grace Ameh. Enitan's father may have been Enitan's mentor in her younger days since he influences her political views and encourages her to be a feminist; he may have even been her role model since she becomes a lawyer like him. However, she is disappointed with him when she discovers his hypocrisy, how he had driven her mother to become a recluse despite his advocacy of women's liberation and severs ties with him upon finding out that he had fathered a son outside his marriage. Thus, I suggest that Enitan, in her thirties, meets her mentor from the female community, in the form of Grace Ameh, who is instrumental in persuading her to speak up, to use her voice. I argue that while journeys undertaken by Enitan increase her awareness, widen her exposure and contribute to her gradual and incremental understanding of herself and the complex world around her, it is the pivotal role played by the female community in the form of her best friend, Sheri and her mentor, Grace Ameh, that establishes Enitan's self-identity as a woman with a voice and her political identity as a Nigerian who is not a bystander anymore. While adolescent friendship with Sheri broadens Enitan's outlook of female sexuality, their friendship as adult women demonstrates the contrasting feminist strategies they use to navigate their way in a complex environment and

how they learn from one another to adapt their feminist stances and evolve. Sheri learns to become more independent while Enitan engages in negotiation rather than confront all the time.

By showing that Enitan's achievement of her political identity and her freedom to engage in political activism come with a cost, since Enitan leaves her husband Niyi who is against her political involvement, Sefi Atta reinforces the constraints imposed on women by the institution of marriage in a patriarchal society. I assert that Sefi Atta uses the traditional male Bildungsroman genre conventions in the beginning to reinforce nation-building and good citizenship but switches to feminist Bildungsroman traditions later because of the limiting options available to female protagonists in the traditional narrative structure with its masculine values and this switch reinforces the difficulties women face in engaging in activities in the public sphere. In addition, I suggest that *Everything Good Will Come* exhibits a hybrid of genres because it evokes other genres such as the historical novel, the testimonial novel and autobiography that is collective in nature, to present multiple stories of women from different walks of life who are impacted by the historical, political, economic and sociocultural transformations that Nigeria undergoes in its tedious efforts to become a republic.

Enitan's Difficult Quest for Identity and Nigeria's Struggle for its Identity as a Postcolonial Nation

In this section, I discuss the different stages that Enitan needs to go through in order to assimilate different aspects of her identity and how these stages are mapped onto key events in Nigeria's political history as the postcolonial nation state attempts to become a republic. Harry Olufunwa suggests that to achieve maturity women need to go through three stages that are like rites of passage: "the traversal of familial tensions, the negotiations of cultural ambiguities, and the crossing of modernity's contradictions" (70). He proposes that the three facets of Enitan's identity as "an individual, a woman, and a Nigerian" (78) are achieved when she completes the above-mentioned rites of passage. What seems to be missing in this progression is the lack of attention to the formation of a healthy sexual identity. I suggest that Enitan begins the process of consolidating different aspects of her identity by trying to forge her self-identity as an individual and then struggles from her adolescence onwards to form her sexual identity. Using a gender lens, I highlight how her sexual initiation in England becomes a hindrance to the development of a healthy sexual identity and how this situation only reverses when she finally finds self-acceptance through a positive sexual experience in her relationship with her boyfriend Mike Obi. Next, Enitan's female identity is consolidated, allowing her to

find her feminist voice to challenge patriarchy and inequality and finally she achieves her political identity.

Some knowledge of Nigerian history and politics is useful in comprehending Atta's strategy of mapping key political events with the protagonist's crucial stages in life. Walter P Collins provides a brief history on the formation of Nigeria in the early twentieth century. He traces the occupation of British missionaries in four regions, "The Northern Empire, The Calabar Kingdom, The Oduduwa Empire and The Benin Empire" in the 1800s and the formation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British. He details how the British created Nigeria by combining three regions, the Northern and Southern Protectorates and the colony of Lagos and how Nigeria was ruled by a Governor-General from then onwards (68). After its independence in October 1960, Nigeria became a republic in 1963, but the civilian rule was interrupted by a military coup and the assassination of the Prime Minister in 1966. The Civil War took place from 1966 till 1970, and the military continued to be in power from 1971 until 1979. Etebom John Monday lists out how power shifted from one military leader to another after the Civil War, starting from the period when Gowon was overthrown by Muritala in 1975 (74). The second republic was formed in 1979, and this lasted until 1983. From 1983 to 1998, the military once again took over and during this period power transferred from Buhari to Babangida in 1985 and finally to Sani Abacha in 1993. The third republic was formed in 1999 when the power was returned to the civilian rule (82). The rise of the power of the military amidst intermittent civilian rule highlights Nigeria's struggle to become a republic after the Civil War.

The four parts of the novel, which use years as their titles, present the different phases of Enitan's life and these years correspond to the different military coups and dictatorships that Nigeria experienced from 1971 to 1999. Part One, '1971', depicts Enitan's attempt to establish her identity as an individual during her adolescence in the backdrop of Nigeria under military rule, in the year after the Civil War. Part Two, '1975', presents Enitan's problematic development of sexual identity in her teenage years in a Nigeria that experiences a military coup and the takeover of the country from one military leader to another. Part Three, '1985', portrays Enitan who has returned home from England, striving to forge a healthy sexual identity and find her feminist voice by consolidating her female identity, in a Nigeria that is under a military coup. Part Four, '1995', presents Enitan's venturing to establish her national and political identities as a Nigerian and a political activist in a Nigeria under the tyrannical rule of General Sani Abacha, where human rights were abused, and citizens were silenced. By

structuring the novel this way, Sefi Atta effectively brings out the impact of the country's decolonising struggles on its citizens, especially females growing up during that period.

Adolescent Identity Leading to Self-Identity

I suggest that Enitan's friendship with Sheri and her outward journey away from her dysfunctional family to pursue her secondary education at Royal College are instrumental in helping Enitan to overcome her alienation and attain an adolescent identity that leads to the establishment of her self-identity as an individual. Unlike the male hero of the traditional Bildungsroman, who needs to travel to the city to gain more experience and exposure because his provincial town is unable to cater to his growing needs, or female protagonists like Lalitha of *Two Virgins* or Li of *The Stillborn* discussed in the previous chapters, who aspire to go to the city to experience a modern and liberating life, Enitan who lives in Lagos gets the exposure required for growth through her friendship with Sheri and her first journey away from her sheltered home when she attends a boarding school.

Enitan's brother's death at the age of three resulting from sickle cell anaemia and her mother's association with a Pentecostal Church that engages in extreme forms of rituals appear to be the cause of marital discord between Enitan's parents who are always in disagreement. The disharmony and lack of unity in Enitan's family reflect the aftermath of the Civil War in postcolonial Nigeria with its multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups. Harry Olufunwa's observation is illuminating: "The conflation of family and nation is not accidental. Comprising many often-quarrelsome ethnic groups, Nigeria is in many ways like a big dysfunctional family. Its authoritarian military rulers clearly see themselves as patriarchs whose word should not be questioned; the populace acts with a wilfulness reminiscent of badly behaved children" (72). This parallel also reinforces the following: Enitan's lack of knowledge on the history behind the Civil War and the thrill she experiences as a child listening to the neighbour's driver, Akanni's "war front stories from far away" about Biafran soldiers stepping on land mines that blast their legs like "crushed tomatoes" and starving Biafran children who ate "lizard flesh to stay alive" (6). Besides ignorance, the lack of empathy highlighted here reinforces how violence and suffering resulting from wars that do not affect one directly can be overlooked.

Enitan's friendship with Sheri, despite her mother's disapproval, is presented as a turning point whereby Enitan's sheltered world expands as she becomes acquainted with a different lifestyle that is lax. Sheri has an interesting background in that she is bi-racial, born to an English mother, whom she does not know, and a Muslim Nigerian father. Sheri is taunted

for her bi-racial identity, but she grows up to be tough because she is brought up in downtown Lagos by her paternal grandmother. Unlike Enitan who is a reserved eleven-year-old, Sheri is loud, bold, colourful and is aware of her burgeoning sexuality. Enitan, traumatised by her mother's sex education based on the extreme form of Christianity she follows, is encouraged by Sheri who is "way too advanced" (47) to explore her sexuality and this marks Enitan's sexual awakening. Sheri introduces Enitan to romance novels which center on describing the physical attraction and relationship between the hero and heroine. Sandra Nwokocho, who examines the adolescent friendship between Enitan and Sheri who go on to becoming best friends from their first meeting, points out how this relationship is based on a symmetrical structure unlike the parent-child relationship and how it facilitates Enitan to "discover her authentic self through self-mirroring" (305). It is not surprising that Enitan, on reflection, links her first meeting with Sheri to the beginning of her transition even though she admits it was not heralded by Nature as the Yoruba tradition suggested.

Enitan's first journey away from home brings about greater awareness and in the four years from 1971-1975 Enitan acquires formal as well as informal education. Bonding with girls from different backgrounds helps Enitan to situate her family issues in context as she learns that sickle cell anaemia that her brother suffered from was not very rare and mothers like hers were not uncommon. She also learns much about Nigeria's complex makeup, its diverse ethnic and religious groups: "Uncle Alex had always said that our country was not meant to be one. The British had drawn a circle on the map of West Africa and called it a country. Now I understood what he meant. The girls I met Royal College were so different" (39-40). From 1900 to 1914 Nigeria was ruled by the British as "two protectorates" but in 1914, there were three regions that were populated by different ethnic and religious groups, each with their own governments but under the umbrella of "one colonial government" (Dummar 8). This boundary that was drawn by the British was for the convenience of their administration. By referring to the creation of Nigeria by the arbitrary boundary that was drawn, Sefi Atta appears to pinpoint the role of colonialism in inter-ethnic tensions and clashes in Nigeria. Furthermore, through her references to the Civil War, Sefi Atta appears to link the role played by the British in their divide and rule strategy to the war that ensued after independence while at the same time reinforcing that when rival groups with their own customs, traditions, and religions competing for resources are placed together, conflicts are bound to arise unless tolerance is exercised. The formation of Nigeria resulting from borders drawn by the British and the continuous ethnic and religious strife in the country which explode in the form of Civil War

after independence remind the reader of the way in which India was divided into two nation states by borders that were drawn up hastily and the tragic clashes between major religious groups during the pre and post Partition periods and the occasional eruptions of ethnic riots on a smaller scale in post-independent India. As mentioned in the Introduction, although the historical and political circumstances leading to continuing internal strife within Nigeria and India may be different, the novels considered in this study draw attention to the long-lasting impact of colonial legacies on the postcolonial nations.

It is ironic that only in England during her university days that Enitan fully grasps the consequences of the Civil War that raged in South East Nigeria: “I finally acknowledged the holocaust that was Biafra, through memoirs and history books, and pictures of limbless people.....There were accounts of blood drinking, flesh-eating, atrocities of the human spirit that only a civil war could generate, while in Lagos we had carried on as though it were happening in a different country” (81). Enitan also admits that she and her boyfriend Mike Obi, from “eastern Nigeria that was the heart of Biafra” (80), had “different experiences of the Civil War” (81). Enitan’s learning about her country and its past as she becomes more politically informed also becomes the readers’ learning, typical of what a Bildungsroman attempts to do. By making repeated references to the Biafran war throughout the novel, Sefi Atta appears to reinforce the impact of the past, especially colonial legacies on the present and the need to learn from history by interrogating the reasons behind the war, the ignorance surrounding it and the lack of empathy for those who suffered since it is generally believed that the rising power of the military rule with its coups is a post Biafran phenomena.

Problematic Sexual Identity

Enitan’s development of her sexual identity in her teenage years are marked by her increased sexual knowledge, physical changes, and the experience of her first infatuation with the opposite sex. But this development is disrupted when Enitan witnesses Sheri’s rape and is unable to verbalise it for years. It is the period of the oil boom in the seventies when the third military coup was imposed in 1975 to investigate corruption in civil service. Curfews are imposed in Lagos and the brutality of soldiers against civilians becomes rampant. The gender violence committed against Sheri when she is raped by three young boys whom she parties with reflects the violence inflicted on citizens during the military coup. This is brought out when Enitan’s mother drives her to the church to be cleansed from her entanglement with

Sheri's rape and on her way, Enitan witnesses soldiers flogging a driver who does not pull over in time to allow their truck to pass through:

They started slapping him. The driver's hands went up to plead for mercy. They flogged him with horsewhips and left him there, whimpering by the door of his car. At first the shouting scared me. I flinched from the first few slaps to the driver's head.....Then, I watched the beating feeling some assurance that our world was uniformly terrible. I remembered my own fate, and Sheri's, and became cross-eyed from that moment on. The driver blended in with the rest of the landscape (64).

Several things are happening in the above scene; on one level, Enitan links the violence against the driver by the soldiers with the violence committed against Sheri by the boys. Enitan acknowledges the terrible world around her when she thinks about Sheri's hospitalisation and near-death experience after her crude attempt at self-aborting her pregnancy and the terrible mess she was in, having witnessed Sheri's violation. On another level, the helplessness and suffering of the driver is brought out when no one dares to intervene. Lastly, it brings out how one can become desensitised when constantly exposed to acts of violence against humanity.

Although Enitan flinches with fear at the start, she appears to accept the lack of humanity as characteristic of military brutality. It is only as an adult with a political consciousness that Enitan reflects on how such passivity and lack of involvement lead to loss of humanity and moral decline:

How did we live comfortably under a dictatorship?.....if we never spoke out, were free as we could possibly be, complaining about our rubbish rotten country, and crazy armed robbers, and inflation. The authorities said hush and we hushed; they came with their sirens and we cleared off the streets; they beat someone and we looked the other way; they detained a relation and we hoped for the best" (224).

By focusing on Enitan's lack of interest in politics and her acceptance of violence and brutality as part of military rule, Sefi Atta exposes how political apathy is cultivated from young.

Enitan's internalisation of patriarchal values is brought out when she blames Sheri's forward behaviour for her violation: "Yes, I blamed her. If she hadn't smoked hemp it would never have happened. If she hadn't stayed as long as she did at the party, it would certainly not have happened. Bad girls got raped. We all know" (60). By depicting Enitan's formative years in Nigeria in this manner, Sefi Atta underscores how young girls are conditioned about female sexuality, marriage, and motherhood even though they may have different inclinations to begin with. While Enitan's first journey away from her stifling family environment broadens her horizon, I suggest that her second journey away from home and homeland plays an

important part in strengthening Enitan's identity as an individual based on her girlhood experiences.

Besides Enitan's racial identity as a black woman, her sexual identity as a young adult is interrogated in England. Enitan's first sexual encounter is "debasing" (Buckley 18) since her Nigerian boyfriend who enlightens her that her virginity belongs to her, while she believed that it belonged to "Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large" (68), not only takes her virginity away but also labels her frigid. Sefi Atta once again reinforces here that Enitan has been socialised to believe that she needs to conform to expectations of religion, patriarchy, and society with regards to her sexuality. Her second boyfriend, another Nigerian, breaks her heart by two-timing her. Even though Enitan experiences racial discriminations in England and her debasing sexual experiences and failed relationships with fellow Nigerian men in England hinder the development of a healthy sexual identity, she nevertheless achieves a professional identity as a lawyer that provides her a career and economic independence when she returns to Nigeria.

Anupama Jain examines the hybrid identity of South Asian female characters who migrate to America, arguing that some of them actively build new identities in the host country not only by seeking out the familiar and the similar but also by engaging with what is new and different (153). Enitan, on the other hand, seems certain of her African roots and integrates with the Nigerian community in England rather than self-fashion herself to adopt a hybrid identity. The impact that England has on Enitan who goes there to study and work for several years is also different from that of Nyasha's in *Nervous Conditions*. Unlike Enitan who spends her childhood in Nigeria, Nyasha spends her formative years in England and when she returns to Zimbabwe as a teenager she faces issues in re-assimilating into African culture. Ketu Katrak who examines the impact of relocations and English education on adolescent females highlights how Nyasha's childhood in England disadvantages her and alienates her "linguistically, and even bodily" (121) from her Shona culture. When discussing the development of Tee, the protagonist of *Crick Crack, Monkey* written by Merle Hodge, Ketu Katrak points out that when colonised people occupy the coloniser's space, they are able to re-evaluate their own culture and appreciate it better upon their return and even "develop a healthy critique of the limitations" (125) of their homeland. As for Enitan, her stay in England allows to understand Nigeria's history and appreciate her indigenous culture better but at the critique the political instability and corruption of both the civil and military governments that impact the citizens tremendously.

Female Identity and Feminist Voice

In this section, I discuss how Enitan's female identity is consolidated, allowing her to find her feminist voice to challenge patriarchy and inequalities that she witnesses. Enitan initially adheres to traditional norms of beauty, ideal femininity and body image and expresses anxiety when she perceives herself as blooming late during her adolescence, a concern that young Rapu discussed in the last chapter also shares. Enitan also faces issues in her sexual relationships with men. I suggest that Enitan is able to attain a healthy female identity only when she overcomes these problems through self-acceptance and a positive sexual experience. Her relationship with Mike Obi, helps her to conquer her phobia of sex and her obsession with washing herself after the act. While Florence Orabueze's assessment of Enitan's father, Sunny's character, and his secret family outside his marriage sound like rationalisation, she is spot on in her evaluation of Mike Obi and his role in helping Enitan enjoy a healthy sex life, suggesting that "he would have made a better husband to Enitan than Niyi" (101) if he had not cheated on her. When Mike Obi bathes Enitan after their lovemaking, she is confident of her healing: "Mike washed me with the gentlest motions, like a mother washing her baby. I felt sure that my fear was like any other fear; like the fear of a dog bite, or of fire, or of falling from heights, or death. I was certain I would never be ashamed again" (129). Enitan's fear and compulsive behaviour are not only the result of the trauma she suffers from witnessing Sheri's rape but also her internalisation of her mother's warning that "sex was a filthy act" (18) and she had to always wash herself afterwards.

Enitan's newfound confidence in her sexual identity and her acceptance of her body and her sexuality consolidate her female identity that paves the path for her discovery of a feminist voice. Enitan acknowledges in the opening of the novel that as a young girl she believed everything people told her even though she had her own propensity. But it is in her twenties as young adult that she resists the pressure to conform to social expectations, fights against gender oppression and stands up for her rights by being self-assertive: "People say I was hot-headed in my twenties. I don't ever remember being hot-headed. I only ever remember calling out to my voice" (172).

The Bildungsroman is presented through the first-person perspective, giving it an autobiographical mode and this literary strategy used by Sefi Atta gives Enitan her voice. The consistent use of "I" makes it closest to *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, examined in the first chapter, which is presented fully through Laila, the main protagonist and the narrator. Some

critics have noticed that *Everything Good Will Come* it is not very plot driven and the conversational tone of the language employed brings it closer to an autobiography. While Enitan's conversational tone sounds like gripping at times and comes across as harsh and judgmental at other times, it appears that Sefi Atta is using Enitan to name the problems that women faced in an increasingly chaotic Lagos and bring out the reality of the situation so that issues can be addressed, and solutions can be put forward. Even though the autobiographical mode adopted is in relation to the main character, Enitan, the novel nevertheless gives the feel of a collective autobiography since it includes the life story of Sheri, the second protagonist and multiple stories of other women such as Enitan's mother and mother-in-law, Sheri's stepmothers, Grace Ameh and the women prisoners. This collective autobiographical feature adopted is similar to what was observed in Chapters One and Two.

Enitan's resistance to conform to gendered roles and responsibilities can be seen in the way she makes conscious efforts to avoid being defined by domesticity. Even as a young girl, Enitan is advised by her father not to be a kitchen martyr when her mother tries to domesticate her. The metaphor of kitchen in *Everything Good Will Come* denotes a place of subservience, a sort of prison that restricts women's freedom. This is different from the portrayal of the kitchen in the novels discussed earlier where women's identity is linked to kitchen work and how domestic chores provide women comfort and reassurance. Enitan's refusal to be associated with kitchen duties causes friction in her marriage, but Enitan is very clear about not wanting to be defined by her housekeeping skills like her mother or her mother-in-law. Enitan's mother continues to cook for her husband even though the marriage has broken down and interestingly she uses it as a weapon at times, withholding food from Sunny. Enitan's mother-in-law slogs in the kitchen cooking for the family, especially for her husband who will only eat what she cooks from scratch.

In contrast, the collaborative cooking done by Sheri's stepmothers is presented in a more positive light. The women in the polygynous Muslim family are always cooking, eating and sharing food and the festive mood in their home is contrasted with the graveyard like atmosphere of Enitan's house. In fact, cooking and feasting is such an integral part of Sheri's family that at the age of eleven when Enitan tells Sheri that she wants to be the president, Sheri tells her that it will not be possible because she needs to cook for her husband. On the contrary, Enitan questions "the divisions of home duties" (192) and the belief that the kitchen is a woman's department; relating cooking and serving with subservience and deferring to men, Enitan encourages her friends not to serve their husbands during meals when she is hosting.

Enitan's refusal to conform to prescribed gender roles is attributed to being away too long from Nigeria and Sheri teases Enitan, calling her "a butter-eater" (99) and attributes her vocal and non-conforming nature to her long stay in England. While Enitan's stay in England provides her a tertiary education and a career as a lawyer, Enitan does not seem very vocal or opinionated during that period. This can be seen in her tentative responses, suggesting that military rule may be better than civilian government when her father severely criticises the army and its coups. As such, I suggest that it is only after her return from England and her successful sexual development that Enitan becomes more vocal and assertive. When she discovers that her father has not transferred the house to her mother's name as part of the divorce settlement, she relentlessly chases her father to sign the transfer until he finally gives in. Enitan's assertive behaviour is also evident when she leaves her father's home upon discovering his second family and in the way she ends her relationship with Mike, making a clean break when she catches him with another younger woman.

Enitan's problematic relationship with her mother improves when she realises how her mother had been oppressed by her father and this step is significant in helping Enitan to move forward. The importance of addressing difficult mother-daughter relation or at least coming to terms with it was mentioned in the earlier chapters and can be related Esther Labovitz's concept of "shedding" (253). When Enitan returns to Nigeria, she witnesses the sixth military coup in 1985 which attests to the increasing military power in the country in the 1980s. Enitan is not only troubled by the lack of basic amenities such as regular electricity but also feels the pinch of the rising cost of living in Nigeria that was undergoing a recession when she cannot afford her own place with the low salary that her father pays her. The disappointments and betrayals that Enitan suffers in the hands of men in her life parallel the disillusionment with the post-colonial nation's inability to have an uninterrupted democratic government and cater to the needs of the citizens. The realist form adopted in the novel brings out Enitan's social reality; through her negative experiences Enitan understands her world better, acknowledges her position as a female in that discriminating world and begins to use her agency to move beyond the limiting environment that she is placed in, creating a new subjectivity in the process.

National and Political Identity

Lastly, I discuss Enitan's transformation from a disinterested onlooker to a political activist highlighting how it is a gradual one. At the start, Enitan is presented as a child who found excitement in the Biafran war stories but lacked knowledge of the history of the Civil

War, a teenager who is disinterested in the transformations in the country and is normalised and desensitised by military violence on civilians and a young adult who continues to be disengaged with Nigerian politics while in England. However, upon her return, Enitan shows more interest in political matters and is aware of the problems in her country but still does not act. Only when her father is arrested, and politics enters her own home, Enitan acts on her political consciousness. However, to fully engage in political activism, Enitan is forced to leave her marriage.

The last part titled '1995' traces Enitan's attainment of political identity as a mature adult who engages in political activism to free her father and other political detainees who are imprisoned for speaking out against the military rule. Enitan's marriage to Niyi leads to a temporary regression in her growth when she is oppressed by patriarchal expectations of marriage and motherhood which threaten to silence her feminist voice. Enitan's feminist ideas are also temporarily forgotten, like Ezi's in Chapter Five, in a period of "fragilization in her marriage" (Mary Okolie 127) when she feels pressured to conceive. Niyi comes from a background where men and women are expected to strictly adhere to prescribed gender roles and responsibilities. He expects Enitan to be obedient, subservient and handle all the domestic chores like the other women in his family, but Enitan resents this. When viewed through a gender lens, Niyi's behaviour comes across as adherence to normative masculinity. Since traditional society links masculinity with the husband's ability to control his wife, Niyi believes that an egalitarian relationship with Enitan would undermine his masculinity. Therefore, Niyi tries to control Enitan so that his family and society will not see him as emasculated.

It is during this period that Enitan realises how her father had been unreasonable in his treatment of her mother. It dawns on Enitan that her mother did not choose to be dependent on her father and be victimised in the process as Enitan had judged her. Her parents' divorce paper that she stumbles upon reveals her mother's grounds for the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage: "neglectful and uncaring attitude; withheld housekeeping allowance, on several occasions did not return home and gave no reasonable answer to his whereabouts; influenced her child to disregard, disrespected her church family; made wicked and false allegations about her sanity" (278). This is resonant of what Chandra Mohanty says about women not being monolithic or passive victims of patriarchy (333). Arin is affected not only by patriarchy but also by religion and native laws that are biased towards women.

Sefi Atta uses the trope of prison, silence and dictatorial control in the novel to portray the lives of women in both natal and marital homes. The home is presented as a prison, where the family members are controlled by the patriarch and silenced when authority is challenged. Enitan's natal home depicts Sunny's manipulative treatment of his wife. Enitan's mother's attempt to control Enitan's sexuality and her use of extreme measures related to her church adds to the repressive atmosphere of the dysfunctional home. Alienated from her mother, Enitan enjoys a good relationship with her father and does not realise until much later that he was instrumental in turning her against her mother. The natal home depicts a picture of family members controlled, oppressed and manipulated by a patriarchal figure of authority whose behaviour reflects the control exerted by the dictator on the citizens during the military regime and this can be linked to the "entangled form of allegory" (157) described by Marian Eide.

Enitan's experiences in her marital home can also be seen as paralleling a dictator's repressive rule of the citizens. Enitan's regression and silence reflect the violation of human rights and silencing of dissenters during Sani Abacha's military rule from 1993-1998 when anyone who spoke against the regime was detained without trial and even executed³. Enitan who struggles to find ways to save her father is frustrated when Niyi, who refuses to be involved, attempts to stop Enitan, reiterating that he only cares for his own family: "I mean, how can I decide what to do about my father from a kitchen? Come to think of it, how can I decide anything with a mini Idi Amin sitting right there in my home?" (243-4). The basis for comparison between Niyi and the Ugandan dictator is the way both the patriarch and the dictator exert control on others; this does not imply that Niyi represents the dictator since he does not possess other inhumane qualities that are associated with dictators who wield their brutal and tyrannical power. What is stressed here is that Enitan cannot be politically involved from the kitchen and needs to come out into the public realm, and she cannot do that with Niyi controlling her. The kitchen, an ideologically charged space of the home, once again takes on the image of a prison in the way women's actions are restricted.

Using the trope of prison and silence that bring out the similarities between patriarchs in the natal and marital homes and dictators in the country, Sefi Atta creates an "entangled" allegory (Eide 157), highlighting the connection between patriarchal oppression of women in the domestic sphere and the brutality of dictatorship on the Nigerian citizens in a chaotic

³ During Abacha's five-year military rule from 1993-8 many human rights activists and environmental activists were hanged for speaking out against the tyranny of the regimen including the famous dramatist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. After Abacha's sudden death in 1998 and mounting international pressure, many of the political detainees were released.

postcolonial nation. When Enitan's father talks about how women were missing in political activities against the military, Enitan tells him off: "Human rights were never an issue till the rights of men were threatened. There's nothing in our constitution for kindness at home. And even if the army goes, we still have our men to answer to" (189). Here, Enitan draws a parallel between the army's repression of its citizens and patriarchy's subordination of women. After the prison episode, Enitan is convinced of the link between patriarchy and dictatorship even as she acknowledges the brutality of the military regime: "It was one thing to face an African community and tell them how to treat a woman like a person. It was entirely another to face an African dictatorship and tell them how to treat people like citizens" (277). Enitan's rebellion against patriarchal domination and constraints reflects citizens' fight for their freedom of speech and human rights under a repressive rule.

During this period Enitan expresses her political opinions strongly, asserting that the military government should step down because its brutality was impacting people adversely. However, she still does not become politically involved and even warns her father to be cautious. Enitan, who has been using her voice to express her frustration against gender inequality and social norms that oppress women, for the first time uses her voice to speak out against the military when she gives an interview on her father's unlawful detention for Grace Ameh's magazine *Oracle*. By tracing the different phases in Enitan's life and linking them to Nigeria's political history that is marked by turmoil and instability and the rising power of military rule that interrupted democratic rule with its military coups, Sefi Atta underscores the impact of militarisation of society on the coming of age of the protagonist.

Role of Female Community

Sandra Nwokocha contends that females in *Everything Good Will Come* seek friendship with other females to establish bonds and offer emotional support to one another rather than to fight against male domination or gender inequality collectively. I argue instead that sisterhood in the novel not only establishes bonds between women which allows them to draw strength from one another that helps them to make sense of the complicated world around them, but also brings about feminist awakening and promotes the need to take a stand, which in turn leads to awareness on political issues and involvement. Analysing the role of sisterhood in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow*, Rose Sackeyfio suggests that dynamics of sisterhood in the novels brings about "a feminist consciousness, a political awareness and a spirit of activism" (42). She proposes that Sefa Atta reinforces the importance of female friendship and solidarity amongst women as a strategy to "survive the dystopian environment

of postcolonial Lagos” (43). Sefi Atta gives prominence to the female community by highlighting how women help one another to navigate and negotiate their way in a world made complex by patriarchal demands and political instability.

I had discussed the strong influence Sheri has on Enitan’s adolescent life earlier and in this section, I discuss how Sheri becomes part of the female community that supports Enitan in forging her female identity and finding her feminist voice. I highlight how Enitan and Sheri who are very different, especially in the way they deal with patriarchal restrictions, resume and strengthen their friendship after a long break and how this female bonding helps both friends to break free from patriarchal values that they had internalised and heal from disappointments and betrayals to move forward in life. I also examine the character of Grace Ameh, who is usually overlooked by critics, arguing that Grace Ameh takes on the role of Enitan’s mentor, forming part of the female community that facilitates Enitan’s development to maturity and her attainment of her identity as a Nigerian with a political voice.

Personal Friendship with Sheri

Enitan-Sheri adolescent friendship that is estranged after Sheri’s rape is renewed when Enitan returns to Nigeria and chances upon Sheri. By this time the friends have taken on very different paths; one is an England-retuned lawyer while the other, who became a beauty queen, is now a mistress. Sheri attempts to lead a meaningful life despite the complications caused by her biracial identity, her rape and the stigma associated with her status as mistress. In the last chapter, we looked at how Chika Unigwe employs what Florence Stratton calls “the convention of paired women” (97) to highlight how women respond in opposing ways to patriarchal restrictions and oppression. This trope of contrasting female characters is evident in the double protagonists of *Everything Good Will Come*. However, instead of “passively submitting” (97) to patriarchy, Sheri uses her beauty and her assets to get her ways, takes on the nurturing role of cooking for others, negotiates and even manipulates difficult situations she encounters. In contrast, Enitan challenges head on gender inequality and oppressive traditions and norms in the patriarchal set up.

By contrasting Enitan and Sheri and their ways of dealing with obstacles, one defies while another manipulates, Sefi Atta highlights how women navigate their complex lives depends on their upbringing, social class, education, and economic status. The difference between the two friends is also brought out when Sefi Atta highlights Enitan’s privileged position and her prejudices. At the age of fourteen, Enitan takes care of Sheri after the rape

but later blames Sheri because of her conditioning that loose girls get raped. Enitan regrets judging Sheri for her rape once she learns from her friend Robin in England that “nothing a woman does justifies rape” (69). But Enitan’s judgmental attitude resurfaces when she belittles Sheri for using her assets to survive and forgetting to “flaunt her mind” (105). Enitan even asks herself if she would have befriended Sheri if not for their childhood friendship. This shows Enitan’s own prejudices and that she is talking from a position of privilege.

Society stigmatises Sheri for being a mistress. However, when we trace the life-changing events in Sheri’s journey from girlhood to adulthood and interrogate society and culture’s role in Sheri’s economic dependence on men like Brigadier Hassan who exploit women, the following are revealed: Firstly, Sheri’s rape when she is in her early teens and her internalisation of the social stigma attached to rape victims that makes her convinced that she was damaged goods and no decent man would marry her, push her to pursue the life of a ‘kept woman’. Secondly, it is native laws that place Sheri in a precarious position since she is unable to inherit any wealth or property from her father when he dies because of her gender, something that could have allowed her to break away from her financial dependence on men. Enitan feels frustrated with native laws that deprive women of their rightful inheritance and gets her father to help Sheri and her stepmothers from being marginalised by Sheri’s uncle who inherits everything from Sheri’s deceased father. However, when Enitan judges Sheri’s manner of living, she appears to have forgotten Sheri’s vulnerable economic situation after her father’s death. This is not to condone Sheri’s lifestyle but to highlight how life can be difficult in Nigeria when one is not economically independent, something that Enitan herself realises when she is not able to afford her own accommodation with the meagre salary her father pays her. Felix Ndaka suggests that *Everything Good Will Come* highlights the issues women face in achieving their dreams when they are not economically independent through the character of Sheri. His discussion on Sheri-Brigadier Hassan relationship that is defined by its “dependence, transnationality and materialism” (207) is illuminating. Felix Ndaka suggests that such a relationship brings out “women’s susceptibility to exploitative commodification and accessorisation in patriarchal and capitalist contexts” (207). While Sheri enjoys the material comfort that her relationship with the Brigadier provides, she is controlled and even exploited by him.

Despite the differences in their personality, background and experience, the renewed friendship between Enitan and Sheri strengthens and the friends continue to be supportive of one another. Enitan and Sheri use very different strategies to deal with the restrictions imposed

on females in the patriarchal system. Sheri compromises, uses her beauty and assets to negotiate and even manipulate to get her way but Enitan, who is straight forward, challenges inequality and male domination through confrontations. Sheri links Enitan's way of challenging patriarchy forcefully with Western feminism that Enitan had acquired from England. Sheri advises Enitan on the need to compromise and accommodate and be inclusive rather than confront all the time, especially when it concerns family.

The importance of family, a significant aspect of African feminism, is reinforced through the character of Sheri who convinces Enitan to repair her relationship with her parents. Sheri forgives her father who had taken her away from England, lying that her mother was dead and advises Enitan not to disregard her father because of his secretive second family: "You won't be the first, and you won't be the last. Our fathers, we know what they're like. We just need to accept them as they are" (167). To Enitan's surprise Sheri's polygynous family is united even after Sheri's father's demise but Sheri highlights that not all polygynous families live harmoniously, citing the jealousy and rivalry amongst her relatives. Because of her biracial identity, Sheri is not very Muslim as observed by Enitan who teases for not fasting during the Ramadan. While Sheri's older stepmother appears to be stricter in observing decorum associated with Islam, the younger stepmother seems more liberal in her ways and even has a boyfriend. Sheri's polygynous household that consists of women who observe different degrees of Islam is resonant of Li's mixed religious home environment discussed in Chapter Four where the women's allegiance to Islam also varies⁴. However, Sheri accepts polygyny as part of her Muslim background though her debate with Enitan on the impact of polygyny or monogamy on women shows her disappointment with the institution of marriage. She shares that polygyny is not an ideal situation for children to grow up in despite her family's ability to live harmoniously and how monogamy has the tendency for men to break women's heart. When compared with *The Stillborn* and *Night Dancer* discussed in the last two chapters that delve into the impact of polygyny on women and how both men and women are complicit in oppressing women in polygynous households, *Everything Good Will Come* does not invest too much in condemning polygyny but rather shows how both monogamy and polygyny can be detrimental to women's autonomy.

⁴ It is interesting that rather than Enitan who is a Yoruba Christian, the biracial Sheri, who is half Muslim, is closer to Sefi Atta who hails from an interreligious family, since Sefi Atta's mother is a Yoruba Christian, and her father is an Igbirra Muslim. In an interview with Walter Collins, Sefi Atta affirms that she writes about "people who don't have any strong ethnic allegiance or people who are in mixed marriages" (123).

The form of feminism that Sheri advocates resembles Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism, a feminism that has been theorised to suit the African context. According to Naomi Nkealah, nego-feminism expands the tenets of womanism by giving emphasis to "gender inclusion, complementarity and collaboration" (62). Obioma Nnaemeka highlights the collectivist nature of African society and reinforces the importance of "building on the indigenous" (376) by retaining useful elements of traditions. Nnaemeka points out that African feminism is inclusive, especially in relation to gender, since it believes that good men exist, and therefore it is possible to cooperate and work together with men to improve the condition of women. She stresses that "African feminism challenges through negotiation, accommodation and compromise" (380) rather than take on a confrontational stance. Over the course of the novel, influenced by Sheri, Enitan modifies her confrontational feminism, especially after the prison episode, when she realises that negotiation works better in some instances. On her part, Enitan guides Sheri on how to be more self-reliant and self-assertive, encouraging her to leave Brigadier whose controlling behaviour worsens. Sheri who is caught in "webs of exploitative dependence and seduced with material comforts" (Ndaka 208) does come out from her entrapment with Enitan's encouragement, leaving Brigadier to become economically independent by starting her own catering business. Enitan renders her support by persuading her father to patronise Sheri's business which takes off well. Sheri who did not "have a head for books" and only read "the romantic novels she'd been reading since she was a child" (203) does possess business acumen that results in the success of her catering enterprise⁵.

Hence, the two friends learn from one another, adapt their feminist stance and empower themselves with various strategies to survive their complex lives in a crowded, chaotic and expensive Lagos that takes advantage of women who are not cautious and alert. If Enitan-Sheri adolescent friendship was a turning point in Enitan's life whereby she was exposed to a different way of life, the revival of the friendship establishes a sisterhood that brings meaning to the term *aburo* (little sister) that Sheri uses to call Enitan. The betrayals and disappointments the best friends face in the hands of men in their lives bring them closer when they advise and guide one another to overcome their obstacles and move forward in their lives.

Political Alliance with Grace Ameh

While personal friendship with Sheri helps Enitan strengthen her female identity and locate her feminist voice, her political friendship with Grace Ameh, a journalist and political

⁵ It is interesting that romance fiction is very popular in Nigeria and is the "most widely read genre" in the country and "91 percent of romance book buyers" are females (Kapstein 59).

activist, encourages Enitan to use her voice to bring about changes in her country, where human rights issues were escalating with increasing military brutality. Speaking up against political oppression helps Enitan forge her political identity. It is interesting that this happens when Enitan is temporarily silenced in her marriage since Niyi is unhappy with Enitan's non-conformity that goes against submissive 'wifely' behaviour.

Apathy pervades the novel and Sefi Atta is meticulous in her efforts to show Enitan's evolution from an adolescent who is ignorant and disinterested in Nigeria's political history to a young adult whose political consciousness increases and finally to a mature adult who acts when persuaded by a mentor figure to speak out, when politics enters her own home. While Niyi blames the northerners for all the problems in the country, Enitan asserts that everyone had contributed to the mess. Enitan comes to a realisation that people had to accept that everyone had played a part, rather than engage in politics of blame and both men and women had to do something because the state of affairs in the country concerned everyone. Enitan's political apathy turns to concern about the country and its people and even regret about people's inaction. As such, Niyi's standpoint that his priority is his own family angers Enitan. Felix Ndaka suggests that "although her (Enitan's) desire for equity and justice remains unacted upon for some part of the narrative, her father's arrest and her mother's death galvanises her into action" (215). Ndaka is right to point out that the turning point occurs when politics enters Enitan's own family. However, what needs to be noted here is that Enitan is hesitant to act until persuaded by Grace Ameh. The first step that Enitan takes to become politically involved is to give Grace Ameh an interview on her father's arrest, much to Niyi's anger that he had not been consulted. Subsequently, Enitan's mother's death is also life-changing for Enitan since it pushes her to leave Niyi and move forward in her life to pursue her newfound passion: "One life was gone and I could either mourn it or begin the next" (326).

While Enitan's fight against gendered restrictions and her ability to pick herself up and move forward from disappointments and betrayals that she faces shape her life in her twenties, it is only in her mid-thirties that she becomes politically active. This delay could be related to the absence of a proper mentor in Enitan's life until her meeting with Grace Ameh. As mentioned earlier, in her growing years Enitan's father appears to have been her mentor. Later, when she makes a career switch it appears that Niyi is her mentor since he teaches her how to be calm, handle difficult people better and be assertive at her workplace when she joins a bank to become a company secretary. It is ironic that Niyi who trains Enitan to be assertive at the workplace is unhappy and intolerant when she exhibits assertive behaviour in the home front.

On the other hand, Grace Ameh, who “symbolises the revolutionary spirit in the liberated woman” (Orabueze 98) and admired by Enitan for her courage, is a suitable role-model for Enitan to emulate.

After the interview, Enitan’s friendship with Grace Ameh progresses with Enitan attending a reading session, being detained in prison together with Grace Ameh to chairing meetings with women to work together for the release of men and women who had been detained by the military government. The prison scene in *Everything Good Will Come* reveals how women who are oppressed by patriarchal systems in the domestic sphere are further subjugated by the military government when they are detained without a trial and placed in women’s prisons with unbearable conditions. The imagery of the prison as an oppressive space is an extension of how the home is depicted as a prison; the control Enitan’s mother exerts on adolescent Enitan in the natal home and Niyi’s increasingly controlling behaviour in the marital home reflect a sense of entrapment associated with the prison.

The confessional nature of the sharing that the women prisoners engage in links the novel to the traditions of the testimonial novel. Testimonio is usually an oral account of the injustices or oppression suffered by the marginalised; the subaltern’s first-hand account is transcribed and written by an interlocutor who is an elite and as such, the narrative is mediated (Beverley 15). John Beverley points out that the intention behind testimonio is to communicate “a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on” (14). Through a testimonio, the injustice experienced by the subaltern is brought out in the open so that measures can be taken address the problem. Sefi Atta adopts the testimonio mode to bring out the traumatic experiences of women of different background, class and age who are oppressed by both patriarchy in the domestic sphere and the military government in the public sphere. While a testimonial novel brings out the collective experience of a group or community that has experienced trauma through the testimony of the individual, the sharing that takes place in the prison reveals the multi-dimensional oppression of women in Lagos.

Fourteen women are cramped into the cell that was meant for seven with “no air, no light” (258); the “shit-bucket in the corner” (258) and the smells emanated by the sweating women and the woman who was dying from womb cancer are just beyond what the pregnant Enitan can endure. Through the loud and aggressive character referred to as Mother of Prisons, Sefi Atta highlights how widows are ill-treated by patriarchy in the name of traditions. Mother of Prisons shares how she was the man of the house and provided for her family before she was

ill-treated by her husband's family, separated from her children and chased out when her irresponsible husband died: " "Monday morning," she said, "my husband dies. Tuesday morning, they shave my head and say I must stay in a room. Alone. Naked. I can't touch my children. Twins."...." "They give me the water they used to bath my husband's corpse, to drink, to prove I didn't put a hex on him" (264). Mother of Prisons' sharing of her traumatic moments brings out the inhuman nature of widowhood practices.

Mother of Prisons' ordeal does not stop with patriarchal oppression in the domestic sphere since she is imprisoned when she kills a man who tries to sexually assault her when she is left alone in the street to fend for herself. When Enitan realises that six years have elapsed, and Mother of Prisons' case has yet to make it to the court, as a lawyer she is prompted to reflect on the state of her country: "A government dedicated to eradicating opposition. A country without a constitution. A judicial system choking" (268). Through Mother of Prisons, we are also presented with the stories of other prisoners like Do-Re-Mi who is schizophrenic and Born Again who was a prostitute before converting to Christianity. Thus, in the prison scene, Sefi Atta uses the confessional elements of the testimonial novel to present the injustices experienced by Nigerian women living in Lagos, mainly through the character of Mother of Prisons who acts as the individual providing testimony against the atrocities of the military government on behalf of the community of women who are affected.

Besides bringing out the deplorable condition of the women prisoners, the prison scene underscores another dimension of female solidarity. Although Mother of Prisons is harsh towards Enitan at the start, together with the other prisoners she shows care and concern for Enitan when she suspects that Enitan may be experiencing a miscarriage. Sandra Nwokocha observes that the women prisoners "demonstrate commonality to the cause of womanhood, a willingness to identify, share, and support one another regardless of class, health status, age, educational attainment, and cultural-religious backgrounds" (313) in their response to Enitan who becomes unwell. This scene brings out the bond that is created amongst the women after they share their stories of oppression.

This scene also invites questions on the nature of the women prisoners and if their subaltern status would give them the opportunity and capacity to speak. In her famous 1988 essay, Gayatri Spivak asks "Can the subaltern speak? and Can the subaltern (as woman) speak? (92). Highlighting that the subaltern woman is doubly oppressed because of her gender, Gayatri Spivak addresses politics of representation and the issue of voice when the privileged

speak for the subaltern. While the subaltern may be able to literally speak, the question of whether her own voice can be heard becomes a crucial point because of the mediating factors involved. It is interesting that after this episode, Enitan claims that she would not speak on behalf of other women in the country, admitting that she does not really know them. Enitan's disclaimer not only foregrounds the problem of the elite or the western intellectual who ends up talking for the marginalised subjects while talking about the subaltern group but is also resonant of Chandra Mohanty's assertion that women are not monolithic; Mohanty reinforces that it should not be assumed that women can be grouped together on the basis that they are oppressed and victimised by patriarchy (333).

Similarly, patriarchy is not monolithic as can be seen in the way the men in the novel use various strategies to dominate their women; Sunny, who professes to be a supporter of women's liberation, manipulates his wife and daughter, Niyi tries to control Enitan and punishes her with his silence when she disobeys, Niyi's father treats his wife like a puppet who becomes "one of those women who swallowed her voice from the day she married" (175), and the Brigadier controls Sheri by restricting her movements.

Enitan acknowledges that political consciousness is different from activism and that anger is a factor that pushes one from inaction to action. Her pregnancy does not stop her from being involved in politics. Enitan's engagement with politics of nation-building is collective since she believes that everyone has a role to play in changing the appalling state of the country. Felix Ndaka rightly points out that Enitan formulates "more inclusive and egalitarian ways of belonging to the nation, re-imagines the roles and place of women in national figurations" (216). When Enitan walks out of her marriage, she walks out of the domestic realm represented by the kitchen that is restrictive, and she refashions herself through her political activism in the public realm. On the other hand, Niyi engages in the politics of blame and refuses to be politically involved. Niyi's controlling behaviour increases especially after Enitan's imprisonment and in the end, Enitan is forced to leave her marriage in order to continue her political activism.

When Enitan walks out of her marriage, everyone is shocked and unable to comprehend Enitan's decision because according to them Niyi was a good man; he went to work, did not beat her and did not womanise. While these characteristics can be seen as Niyi's redeeming qualities, the point that Sefi Atta seems to stress here is that it is difficult for men like Niyi, who are too steeped in culture that dictates normative femininity and masculinity, to reform.

While Niyi may not be physically abusive, Enitan's temporary silence and regression in her marriage indicate psychological oppression. Nevertheless, the reader wonders if Enitan had negotiated enough before walking out since Enitan's exit works against the tenets of African feminism which reinforces the importance of marriage and collaboration between the opposite sexes. It appears that the only way for Enitan to be involved in political activism is to leave her marriage since if she remains in her marriage, she may need to remain silent, swallow her tongue like her mother-in-law or look for some form of escapism like her mother who used an extreme form of religion to cope with her marital problems. As such, Sefi Atta appears to problematise nego-feminism here since it fails with Niyi, suggesting that not all problems can be solved through negotiation.

Sefi Atta's portrayal of Niyi as a man who is beyond reform raises the question of whether the novel is a radical text. Since Sefi Atta includes a good man like Grace Ameh's husband to provide a contrast to Niyi, I suggest that the text is transformative rather than radical. Furthermore, the other men in the novel are shown to have some redeeming qualities. For instance, Mike Obi has a caring attitude and Sunny fights for the rights of citizens who are unlawfully detained. Through the character of Grace Ameh and her family that is supportive of her, Sefi Atta highlights that good men such as Grace Ameh's husband exist. Grace Ameh continues to engage passionately in journalism and political activism despite being imprisoned several times. Sefi Atta highlights that it is the support that Grace Ameh receives from her family that allows her to continue to help the oppressed and marginalised even though the danger associated with the kind of work she engages is not downplayed. In contrast, Niyi's reason for discouraging Enitan to be politically active is his fear of how his family will be put in danger because of her involvement.

Despite Enitan having to leave Niyi to pursue her activism, the novel ends on a high note when Enitan receives good news that her father has been released from prison. Furthermore, Enitan's departure is not extreme or exclusive, like Ezi's discussed in the last chapter, since Enitan's daughter, Nimika, is brought up by two mothers, Enitan and Sheri and has access to her father since Niyi visits the child every day. Enitan's inclusive behaviour contrasts with Niyi's first wife who deprives him of his son by migrating overseas. The stages that Enitan goes through to consolidate her identity as an individual, a female with a voice and a Nigerian citizen who is politically active reinforce that self-formation is possible for a postcolonial female subject even though the path may be a difficult one and Sefi Atta's use of the realist form aids in bringing this out. Sheri becoming self-sufficient and leading a dignified

life without being financially dependent on exploitative and controlling men like the Brigadier also debunks gender stereotypes of ‘kept women’, indicating the possibility of women refashioning themselves to become autonomous beings. Even though Enitan’s freedom to become an activist is achieved by ending her marriage, *Everything Good Will Come* has the most positive ending amongst the selected novels. Enitan dances with abandon and spreads positive vibes in the last scene, stopping traffic in the road; when scolded by a van driver who exclaims that “nothing good will come to you”, Enitan reverses the curse with her positive acclamation that reminds the reader of the title of text: “It will be good. Everything good will come to me” (329).

In this chapter, I have traced the development trajectory of Enitan from an adolescent to a mature adult in the backdrop of a Nigeria that is plagued by a series of violent military governments headed by dictators. I have examined the journeys that Enitan undertakes that broaden her horizons and how she develops from a reticent adolescent to a self-assertive adult. I have examined how the first two parts of the novel present Enitan’s growing awareness of her sexuality, the physical and psychological changes she experiences as she deals with her adolescent identity while the last two parts focus on her adult life as a career woman and a married woman, her internal journeys and the attainment of political identity and freedom. I have suggested that the different facets of Enitan’s identity are gradually consolidated over a few stages, beginning with her self-identity as an individual and moving on to achieving a sexual identity followed by a feminist identity and finally a political identity. I have proposed that by drawing parallels between the various stages in Enitan’s life and her struggle for freedom and the nation’s efforts to establish a democratic rule amidst military coups and dictatorship, Sefi Atta reinforces the difficulty of growing in a postcolonial patriarchal society that is in a constant flux because of political instability.

I have also analysed Sheri’s life that runs parallel to Enitan’s, the impact of her rape and the circumstances that lead to her to become a mistress. In discussing Enitan-Sheri friendship, I have highlighted how Sheri is instrumental in Enitan becoming more aware of her sexuality during her adolescence and how she becomes a pillar of support for Enitan when Enitan returns from England. The role played by Grace Ameh as Enitan’s mentor in transforming Enitan from a bystander to a political activist was also discussed. I have argued that the female community in the form of Enitan’s best friend, Sheri and her mentor, Grace Ameh, plays a pivotal role in establishing Enitan’s self-identity as a woman with a voice and her political identity as a Nigerian who is not a bystander anymore. Besides the stories of the

two main protagonists and Grace Ameh, I have pointed out that Sefi Atta also portrays the lives of Enitan's mother and mother-in-law, Sheri's stepmothers and the women prisoners to show the impact of patriarchy and the military rule on women from various backgrounds.

Having analysed Sefi Atta's reconfiguration of the Bildungsroman, I have argued that although Sefi Atta adheres to the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman with the male hero in the beginning, she resorts to using feminist Bildungsroman conventions towards the end because of the limited options available to female protagonists in the traditional structure with masculine values. I have suggested that in addition to modifying the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman, *Everything Good Will Come* embraces features of other genres such as the historical novel, autobiography and the testimonial novel, exhibiting a hybrid of genres. The incorporation of features of other genres, I have suggested, expands the scope of the Bildungsroman to present multiple stories of women from various backgrounds whose lives are impacted by historical, political, economic and sociocultural transformations that Nigeria undergoes in its laborious efforts to become a republic.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the novels of a group of postcolonial women authors, specifically Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*, Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* in this order. This research project traversed from the north to the south of India, exploring the growth of female protagonists from a feudal Muslim family to a Punjabi Hindu family in the pre and post-independence periods, covering the Partition of India and then to a South Indian Hindu family in a village in the post-independence period of the 1960s. I started by considering the lives of two cousins from a feudal Muslim family in Lucknow, North India, in the backdrop of a tumultuous political atmosphere in a country torn apart by religious and political conflicts amidst the struggle for independence from the British. Next, I examined the lives of three generations of women from a Punjabi Hindu family in the backdrop of India's struggle for independence and the subsequent Partition of India, to highlight how personal history and national history combine to determine the trajectories of these women's lives. Next, I explored the portrayal of the coming-of-age stories of two adolescent sisters in post-independent India in the sixties, a period that saw urban migration and modernising changes sweeping through villages, to determine how the conflict between tradition and modernity influences the *Bildung* of the siblings differently.

As for the Nigerian novels, I began from a novel that is set in northern Nigeria to trace the difficult development of three protagonists in the backdrop of a Muslim Hausa village community in transition because of modernisation and urban migration. Next, I moved to the southeast to the city of Enugu and village Lokpanta and then to the city of Kaduna in northern Nigeria to examine the intertwined lives of an Igbo Christian mother-daughter pair and maid turned other woman and their quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfilling a prophecy respectively. Lastly, I stopped at Lagos in the southwest region of Nigeria to explore the coming-of-age stories of two best friends, one Yoruba Christian girl and another Muslim girl of mixed heritage and how they support one another in the stages they need to go through to achieve self-fulfilment. While it was not intentional to choose one novel from each region or ethnic group, the juxtaposition of these novels nevertheless highlights the commonalities in major issues the young female protagonists face and how they attempt to

alter their situations while not downplaying the differences in their background, location, and the sociopolitical backdrop. The Nigerian novels were arranged in this sequence, not just on the basis of the period in which they are set in but also in the way they reflect the feminist stance adopted by the protagonists. I began by analysing the stories of protagonists who stand up for themselves but still believe in the institution of marriage and then moved on to a protagonist who asserts herself by giving up her faith on love and marriage, resorting to an extreme form of feminism and finally to a nego-feminist protagonist who seeks self-actualisation by giving up on her marriage but not in an extreme or overdetermined manner that excludes family.

The overarching argument of this dissertation is that the emergence of Bildungsroman in India, Nigeria and their diasporas are attempts by postcolonial authors to portray the transformations experienced in the colonies during their struggle for liberation from the British and the ongoing decolonising struggle experienced by the nation states after their independence. I have asserted that the authors are concerned with depicting the social, cultural, economic, and political changes that took place when the colonies and post colonies experienced events such as independence struggle against colonial rule, communal, religious, and ethnic conflicts and clashes, economic crisis, partition of a country, civil war, military rule, and dictatorship. I have pointed out that women writers tend to pay special attention to how transformations occurring in the public sphere invade the domestic sphere, influencing gender and familial relations, impacting the development of female protagonists. I have also highlighted how the difficult journey of the protagonist tends to mirror the colony's fight for independence or the postcolonial nation state's struggle to decolonise itself.

I have highlighted how *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Difficult Daughters* and *Everything Good Will Come* focus on capturing the historical and sociopolitical transformations that the colony and/or postcolonial nation state experience/s to underscore the impact of these transformations on the main characters and their development, and their families and communities. In the case of *Two Virgins*, *The Stillborn* and *Night Dancer*, I have stressed that the focus is more on registering the impact of the socio-cultural transformations and economic issues on the protagonists and those associated with them. I have also highlighted how the novels, though in varying degrees, draw attention to how the historical past, colonialism and colonial legacies continue to have an effect on the present in postcolonial nation states.

One of the research aims of this study that is directly related to the main argument of this dissertation was to explore how the selected authors portray the impact of external events on the domestic sphere and the resultant shifts in familial and gender relations that influence the development of the protagonists and other women associated with them. The impact of modernisation is explored in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Difficult Daughters*, *Two Virgins*, and *The Stillborn* and it was noted that *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Difficult Daughters* investigate modernising forces related to reform movements and nationalistic struggle that enter the domestic sphere while *Two Virgins*, and *The Stillborn* concentrate on how urbanisation impacts the village and its residents. On the other hand, *Night Dancer* and *Everything Good Will Come* raise concerns about how certain customs and traditions that oppress women continue to exist even though it is believed that times have changed in the modern world.

It was observed that the authors presented the impact of modernising changes on the domestic sphere mainly by highlighting how the family unit, especially the joint family system, becomes unsettled and how modernity threatens what is perceived as normative femininity and masculinity and challenges gender stereotypes in a traditional society. By paying attention to the historical, political and economic contexts in which the novels are set in and positioning female characters in the sociocultural milieu of that period, I explored the novels' portrayal of what it is like growing up a female in that specific period and what is considered ideal womanhood in the society that the women are a part of and how the transforming world around them complicates their growth patterns.

In this cross-cultural study that spans from India to Nigeria, it was discovered that although transforming landscapes in the public sphere tend to impact the domestic realm negatively, they also provide opportunities for women's growth. For instance, modernisation is presented as creating opportunities for women to further their education and take on careers and changing gender roles and shifts in family and gender relations open avenues for women to empower themselves, achieve self-knowledge and autonomy and refashion their political identity as they enter the public sphere. While challenges tend to be mounting during these periods of unprecedented change, the novels affirm that self-formation for women is not impossible in these periods of flux.

All the texts give prominence to the collectivist culture of the colonial or postcolonial societies, highlighting how it can impede the protagonist's journey by holding her back from

achieving progress. The novels underscore how family and community can be obstacles to women's freedom in a collectivist culture which views women's attempts to achieve autonomy and agency as being selfish. While pointing out that a collectivist culture can be restricting, the novels go further to demonstrate that the presence of a helpful female community that aids the protagonist in her endeavours to achieve autonomy and the existence of 'good' men who are supportive play a pivotal role in the quest of the protagonists for self-discovery. As such, the novels reinforce that while gender tends to be the main factor that oppresses women, it can also be empowering when women support one another as members of a female community while navigating a complex life in a transforming world.

The emphasis placed on the collective suggests that the novels do not advocate a separationist agenda. Even though some of the protagonists are shown as empowering themselves and attaining confidence and autonomy when separated from a male-dominated environment, their isolation is not permanent. They usually return to society rather than completely break off all ties with family and society. Their return to society could be seen as "accommodation" rather than "assimilation", to use Anupama Jain's terms (50), since they reconnect with society on their own terms.

The protagonist's eventual return underscores the strong link that a female has with her family and society, given her multiple affiliations and her desire to nurture her bonds with her natal and marital families, extended family and friends. This is also evident in the way some of the protagonists negotiate with patriarchy to seek self-actualisation without dismissing or leaving their family or community. As such, the novels appear to suggest that women's empowerment and achievement of autonomy need not isolate them and make them overly individualistic since striking a balance between self-development and maintaining ties with society is not impossible. When novels present women as forgoing family and society permanently in their pursuit of their dreams, the authors highlight the negative repercussions of such extreme measures on the protagonists such as social ostracisation.

While the journey of the protagonist narrated in each Bildungsroman is distinct, the way the selected authors bring out the difficult quest of their protagonists and the lives of other women associated with them converge in several ways: complex appropriation of the Bildungsroman genre and negotiations with other genres to expand the scope of the text; dismantling of social construction of womanhood and the institutions of marriage and motherhood that restrict women; debunking of gender stereotypes in the representation of

women and men by including transgressive women who challenge social norms and ‘good’ men who are supportive of progress for females; lastly, retaining the fundamental premise of the Bildungsroman that self-formation is possible even though the path may be long and laborious for females.

One of the research objectives of this dissertation was to investigate how the selected authors modify the traditional male and female Bildungsroman and engage in conversations with other narrative forms to portray the patterns of growth of female protagonists in the colonial or postcolonial world. It was discovered that the novelists were creative in their appropriation of a genre that privileged the unfolding of a middle-class, white, male hero’s coming of age and their modification of the traditional female Bildungsroman that had its limitations in presenting the Bildung of postcolonial females who are marginalised by their gender, race, class, and nationality and oppressed by tradition, culture, and religious beliefs.

All the novels emphasise the importance of journeys in bringing about development since journeys provided exposure to alternate ways of life, different attitudes, and experiences, though the authors reconfigure the journey motif in different ways. While some journeys resemble the male hero’s outward journey into the world when he leaves his provincial town for the city, others involve travel to nearby towns or cities to acquire education or to search for one’s identity. Besides physical journeys, some novels focus on inward journeys or reflections associated with the novel of awakening. Another similarity that was observed was that the novels cover a longer period of time in the lives of their protagonists till marriage and childbirth, some twenty to thirty years of their lives, except for *Two Virgins* that ends with the adolescent protagonists entering adulthood. The open-ended closure of the novels was another commonality between the novels. This lack of a definite ending could be seen in relation to the texts’ use of the transformation principle instead of the classification principle that is associated with teleology (Moretti 80).

While the above-mentioned similarities link the novels, it is the inclusion of doubling or tripling and multiple stories of women in the texts that is prominent. The selected Bildungsromane converge in their revision of the portrayal of a single male hero associated with the traditional Bildungsroman to depict doubling or tripling and encompass stories of other women from different generations and backgrounds. Expanding the scope of the Bildungsroman this way reveals how sisters and cousins in the same household can grow up to exhibit different personalities, reinforcing that various axes that intersect to influence their

development impact them differently; it also underscores how the lives of siblings, cousins, mothers and daughters are intertwined, and how they influence one another. Multiplicity of stories reiterate the interconnected nature of the individual, family, and society in the collectivist culture of colonial and postcolonial societies.

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column* that focusses on the dissimilar growth trajectories of two cousins and the lives of women in the zenana, the inclusion of multiple women characters divulges how sexuality of women from different social classes, namely, the aristocracy, upper class and lower class, is controlled or exploited by patriarchy and how these women exercise their agency by challenging, subverting or manipulating oppressing structures. In *Difficult Daughters*, the incorporation of three generations of women reveals the intergenerational conflict while the inclusion of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata's stories that contrast with Virmati's, reinforces the possibility of women achieving self-actualisation through negotiations with patriarchy. *Two Virgins* focusses on how women's sexual identities are shaped by their class, caste and religion by encompassing stories of women from various backgrounds. The collectivistic culture of the Hausa and Igbo communities and the interconnected lives of women are established in *The Stillborn* and *Night Dancer* respectively by presenting stories of daughters, mothers, sisters, mothers-in-law and friends. The female community is given prominence in *Everything Good Will Come* to demonstrate how women are supportive of one another in navigating their complex lives in Lagos and the women prisoners' stories bring out the multi-dimensional aspect of women's oppression by patriarchy and the military.

Besides all the above-mentioned reasons, I have suggested that the inclusion of doubling or tripling and multiple women characters allows the authors to contrast individuals who conform to patriarchal expectations and undergo successful socialisation with others who refuse to comply and face the consequences of such resistance, and also to draw attention to females who negotiate with patriarchal restrictions and achieve some degree of autonomy without being stigmatised. While the use of contrast to highlight the difference between successful and unsuccessful socialisation of women was present in all the novels, it was noted that *Night Dancer* and *Everything Good Will Come* went further to bring out the ideological differences between main protagonists who are opposites through their adoption of the "convention of paired women" (Stratton 97).

Besides revising the conventions of the traditional genre, the selected Bildungsromane also enter dialogues with the historical novel, autobiography, memoir, testimonio, the village novel, quest-romance, popular romance fiction, the novel of awakening and the epistolary novel that result in the creation of a hybrid of genres. Through conversations with other genres, the limitations of the traditional Bildungsroman genre in depicting the difficult and protracted growth of female protagonists are addressed; the scope of the texts is expanded to give voice to other women characters associated with the protagonists and reinforce the collectivist nature of colonial and postcolonial societies that the protagonists live in.

Sunlight on a Broken Column, *Difficult Daughters* and *Everything Good Will Come* embrace features of the historical novel that allows them to recreate the historical past and key political events in the public sphere that impact the domestic sphere and the growth of the protagonists. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Everything Good Will Come* also adopt the autobiographical mode and it was observed that the autobiographical mode embraced was collective rather than individualistic. Besides doubling of protagonists *Sunlight on a Broken Column* portrays the lives of other women in the feudal family, their servants and their friends. *Everything Good Will Come* presents the parallel stories of the two main protagonists, the narratives of Enitan's mother, Sheri's stepmothers and Enitan's mentor, Grace Ameh. On the other hand, *Difficult Daughters* and *Night Dancer* that are framed by daughters incorporate elements of the memoir; while Ida crafts the family memoir, Mma is initiated into a self-discovery journey after reading her mother's memoir.

In addition, *Difficult Daughters* and *Everything Good Will Come* also incorporate features of the testimonial novel. The autobiographical mode used by the authors was not surprising since Bildungsroman and autobiography are linked in several ways but what was unexpected is the presence of sections in the two novels that can be related to the testimonio. While the testimonio given by Virmati's family and friends allows Manju Kapur to include the indescribable effects of Partition on the residents of Amritsar, the testimonial novel features incorporated by Sefi Atta bring out the condition of women prisoners who are doubly affected by domestic patriarchy and the military regime that punishes them in a paternalistic way.

Two Virgins and *The Stillborn* are similar in that they adopt features of the village novel and the romance novel. By engaging in dialogues with the idyllic village novel and quest-romance, *Two Virgins* critiques the inequalities that plagued villages in the sixties and

portrays Saroja's journey towards self-knowledge as paralleling the quest hero's spiritual journey. *The Stillborn* incorporates elements of the Nigerian village novel to bring out the impact of modernisation and urbanisation on the village and embraces features of the Littattafan Soyayya (love literature) to depict the romantic idealism of the three young protagonists and their dreams of achieving fulfilling marital lives and careers.

Examining the ways in which the authors indigenise the Bildungsroman, I have highlighted how their complex appropriation of the traditional Bildungsroman genre and their conversations with other genres invigorate the traditional genre, creating a unique postcolonial variant that exhibits a hybrid of genres in the process. These changes introduced by the postcolonial authors could be seen as a step forward as suggested by Fredric Jameson who views third world texts that engage in radical changes as contributing to new and enriching narrative forms (*On Literary* 186).

Another aim of this dissertation was to investigate how the selected texts challenge ideologies and dismantle power structures that oppress women and thwart or delay their self-actualisation. Patterns of oppression experienced by women characters and their response to it, be it passivity, compromise, accommodation, resistance or negotiation were identified. The level of engagement each text has in identifying axes that disempower women, in naming the oppression so that it can be resisted and putting forward solutions to alleviate women's condition revealed the type of feminism adopted by the characters and the authors. It was discovered that the feminist protest was louder and more direct in some than in others. Using a gender lens to read the texts along with a feminist framework, brought out the difficulties the female protagonists and other women in the texts face in their quest for self-discovery and self-actualisation in a masculinist world and how these characters use their subjectivities and exercise their agencies to overcome issues that seem insurmountable.

This study discovered several themes running through all the novels, but the following themes related to the subjugation and oppression of women were considered to be of significance, though the degree of importance given to each of the theme in individual novels varied: embodiment of traditional womanhood and the link between domesticity and women's identity, marriage, polygyny, motherhood, socialisation of daughters by mothers and mother-daughter relationship were themes that were noteworthy. All the novels interrogate traditions and customs that restrict women's autonomy and highlight how strict adherence to paradigms of Indian and African womanhood make women submissive and passive. The novels'

preoccupation with marriage and motherhood underscore how women are socialised into taking on the roles of wife and mother in a patriarchal society.

The texts reveal that normative femininity and traditional womanhood are social and cultural constructions and how patriarchal pressure to conform to these ideals limit the choices available to women. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* discloses how female sexuality is mystified and controlled by patriarchy in its construction of ideal womanhood and how women challenge, subvert or manipulate this ideology to seek autonomy. *Difficult Daughters* focuses on the impact of intergenerational teaching on daughters to adhere to ideal womanhood and the efforts required by daughters to unlearn the lessons and reject patriarchal values they have internalised. How women's sexual identities depend on their class, caste and religion is underscored in *Two Virgins* which dismantles the cultural construction of ideal Indian womanhood based on Pativratas and sexual respectability of upper and middle-class women, revealing that the ideal and the real are very different.

In *Night Dancer*, Rapu represents ideal African womanhood, highlighting how traditional Igbo community rewards women like her and punishes women like Ezi who flout social norms. *Everything Good Will Come* critiques how ideal womanhood in a traditional society is linked to women achieving the milestones of becoming a wife and mother, specifically a wife who is submissive and domesticated. Even though *The Stillborn* highlights that traditional womanhood can limit women, through the character of Awa who is patient, tolerant and submissive, it reaffirms patriarchal notions of female domesticity, reinforcing that the roles of mother and wife are not to be given up easily since the preservation of the traditional family unit is crucial.

Although the families are headed by male patriarchs, all the novels expose mothers or mother-figures who act as patriarchal agents, indoctrinating daughters with patriarchal values that give importance to marriage. Except for Saroja and Lalitha in *Two Virgins*, all the other protagonists get married at some point or other in the Bildungsromane considered. The novels reiterate in a variety of ways how a patriarchal society registers the importance of marriage for a woman. Laila in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* observes that from the time a girl is born, the topic of her marriage is brought up repeatedly. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* confesses to Swarna Lata that in her family nothing else was more important than marriage for the girls. *Two Virgins* emphasises marriage by highlighting the privileges given to married women in the patriarchal society as opposed to unmarried or widowed women.

The Stillborn reinforces the importance of marriage through Li's return to Habu and Awa's tolerance of Fiama. In *Night Dancer*, the significance of marriage is stressed by Ezi's family, especially her mother who disowns Ezi for leaving Mike; Rapu's idea of traditional womanhood incorporates marriage as an important milestone to be achieved. In *Everything Good will Come*, Enitan recollects how she was brought up to believe that marriage and motherhood are significant occasions in a woman's life; Enitan's mother remains in her marriage for years even though it has broken down irretrievably and this reiterates how women find it difficult to let go because of their socialisation that marriage is a sacred institution that should be preserved at all cost.

Marriage is mostly depicted as constraining and even the most assertive protagonist experiences setbacks and temporarily forgets her feminist ideals and fight for equality in her moments of "fragilization in marriage" (Mary Okolie 124). This period of regression is usually associated with the protagonist's initial struggle with infertility as seen in the lethargy Ezi experiences when she relinquishes her self-assertive behaviour, giving in to familial and societal pressure to start a family and the desperation that Enitan feels while trying to conceive and her frustration with the "fertility regime" (182) she needs to engage in to become pregnant. The authors seem to be pointing out here that years of socialisation that results in internalisation of patriarchal values has a powerful impact on women, making it possible for them to relapse in their commitment to strive for equality. However, characters like Ida, Faku, Ezi and Enitan come out from their entrapment to regain control of their lives by walking out on their marriages that suffocates them while others like Virmati and Awa remain in their marriages that makes them unhappy and embittered.

While *Difficult Daughters* touches on the practice of bigamy in the forties in India before it was made illegal, highlighting how constant fights between co-wives for space and recognition impacts them psychologically, all the three African texts explore the theme of polygyny though with different emphasis. In *The Stillborn* Alkali's focus is on how men in the city manipulate the system of polygyny, which is sanctioned by both Islam and traditional religion, and easily victimise women and how women themselves oppress and victimise other women in polygynous households. As a reformist text, *The Stillborn* does not condemn polygyny per se but draws attention to how both men and women exploit it for their benefit. As such, Alkali's critique is not on the system itself but on individuals since reformist texts explore options to improve women's condition but not at the expense of dismantling foundational patriarchal structures. Also, as a Muslim writer who engages with African-

Islamic feminism, Alkali proposes improvement to women's situation but within Islamic codes.

Night Dancer, on the other hand, deals more with the consequences of standing up against patriarchy by refusing to stay in a polygynous relationship in a traditional Igbo society. Polygyny is interrogated through the character of Ezi who uses her radical feminist ways to reject the system on the grounds that it abuses the rights and dignity of women. As a transformative text, *Night Dancer* sharply criticises patriarchy, suggesting that both men and women are complicit in using culture and tradition to justify their oppression of women. It was observed that even though the practice of polygyny is linked to Islam and traditional religion, Ezi's Christian family also endorses it, reinforcing that traditions are entrenched in the Igbo society.

It was noted that *Everything Good Will Come* paints a slightly different picture of polygyny, suggesting that while polygyny could work, it may not be the best option for women and children growing up in such an environment. Although polygyny is not a major theme in the novel, Sefi Atta brings out how Sheri's stepmothers live harmoniously in their polygynous household; through Enitan's father's secret family, Sefi Atta shows another aspect of polygyny, linking it to men's desire for a male heir. Compared with *The Stillborn* and *Everything Good Will Come*, *Night Dancer* condemns polygyny sharply. Although the literary representation of polygyny in the three novels have different emphasis, all of them converge in reiterating that the multidimensional system impacts women's autonomy and their sense of dignity.

All the novels draw attention to how patriarchy not only glorifies marriage but also motherhood since in both the Indian and African contexts the centrality of motherhood is emphasised. Some novels reinforce that the number and gender of offsprings a woman has matters in a patriarchal society. For instance, in *Difficult Daughters*, Kasturi enjoys a good status in the joint family system because she has eleven children while Ganga feels her position in the bigamous house cannot be shaken because she has delivered a son. Garba's senior wife's position in the polygynous household is strengthened in *The Stillborn* because she has nine children while Rapu in *Night Dancer* is returned to Kaduna from the village because she has delivered a son.

The authors present the trope of motherhood through different analogies; Kasturi's fecundity is not seen positively by her sister-in-law who calls her children litter while Manikkam's wife's fecundity is linked to the family's cycle of poverty, foregrounding overpopulation issues

that would plague India in the seventies. In contrast, *The Stillborn* that uses imagery related to land and vegetation to present women's reproductive capacity, describes Awa's repeated pregnancies in more positive terms; Li teases the ever-pregnant Awa saying that she has "the womb of the pumpkin" (86).

While the novels underscore the importance given to motherhood, the literary representation of motherhood by the authors is not without ambivalence. The novelists problematise motherhood by highlighting the benefits accorded to mothers, especially mothers with male children, while at the same time revealing how motherhood, fecundity and repeated pregnancies can have devastating physical and psychological impact on women, as seen in the case of Kasturi, Manikkam's wife and Awa. In *The Stillborn*, Awa chooses to be identified by her status as wife and mother and this is at the expense of her individual growth since she gives up her dreams. But then again, the novel highlights how women are marginalised when they are infertile; Hajiya who has no children is marginalised while Faku who has only one child loses out to Garba's senior wife who has many children. The centrality of motherhood in a traditional society is brought out in *Everything Good Will Come* when Sheri concludes that she would never be a wife in future because of her barrenness since no decent man would want to marry her. When Enitan is troubled by her initial infertility and the pressure to conceive, she declares that she is not the equivalent of her womb. What is reinforced by Sefi Atta here is that motherhood should not be the single factor that defines womanhood. The writers reveal how institutions such as marriage and motherhood construct women as second-class citizens and how their status as wife and mother largely define their subjectivities. While some of the novels do present motherhood in ambivalent terms it is not presented in an extreme manner as in a novel like *Burnt Sugar* which highlights the childhood trauma that a daughter suffers because of her mother's neglect.

Besides motherhood, the novels also problematise the complex mother-daughter relationship. Some of the novels indicate the need for daughters to be separated from their mothers, at least temporarily, to achieve self-knowledge and independence; others reinforce the need for the daughter to reconcile or at least come to terms with her difficult relation with her mother so that she could move forward in her life to achieve an authentic self which may otherwise be delayed. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan's ability to move forward and refashion her identity is attributed to her reconciliation with her mother before her death. The need to come to terms with difficult mother-daughter relationship is forcefully brought out in *Difficult Daughters* and *Night Dancer* when daughters engage in journeys to rediscover their dead mothers.

In their representation of women and men, the novels challenge gender stereotypes by including transgressive women who do not conform to normative femininity and ‘good’ men who support women in their endeavours. I have pointed out how the selected texts raise concerns about how women’s identities are closely linked to the ideology of domesticity. The authors draw attention to how some women allow themselves to be defined by domesticity while others actively resist such identification. Except for *Sunlight in a Broken Column* which focusses on elite women who receive domestic support from their servants, all the other novels delineate women’s sense of self as closely tied to their responsibilities in the domestic arena and their nurturing role; these women are seen as continuously engaging in various domestic chores since they have been socialised to believe that it is these duties that should define them as women. Adopting a gender lens to read *Difficult Daughters* reveals how women are metonymically linked to domesticity and how this contrasts with men whose identities are linked to their work in the public sphere. The novels also highlight how women are labelled disobedient and difficult when they challenge prescribed gender roles that restricted them. I have highlighted how Rapu, in *Night Dancer*, uses her culinary expertise to secure her place in Mike’s house, replacing Ezi who rejects an identity that is associated with domesticity. Like Ezi, Enitan of *Everything Good Will Come* refuses to become a kitchen martyr and this creates issues in her married life with Mike.

Overall, patriarchy is critiqued in all the novels and both men and women are shown to be complicit in upholding patriarchy and perpetuating sexist values that subjugate women. Surprisingly, the novels highlight that not all men are misogynist, and ‘good’ men exist, reinforcing that it is not always the case of ‘good’ women and ‘bad’ men in a patriarchal society. Even men who are patriarchal are usually not presented as wholly villainous. Furthermore, not all women are presented in a positive light since some women are described as victimising other women; mothers and mother-figures are especially targeted for acting as “intergenerational indoctrinators” who lack empathy (Cruz 11).

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, men like Kemal, Asad and Ranjit were presented as ‘good’ men while in *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati’s father and grandfather, who promote female education, are presented as patient and noble men in contrast to Virmati’s mother who is depicted as harsh and abusive towards Virmati. *Two Virgins* portrays Appa as a kind and liberal man who gives his daughters more freedom in comparison with Amma and Alamelu who resort to policing the girls to ensure they conform to traditional womanhood.

Obioma Nnameka's nego-feminism that emphasises on the collective nature of African life, acknowledges that 'good' men exist and therefore men and women can work together to improve the condition of women. Nego-feminism concedes that men and patriarchy are not monolithic, and this view is echoed in *The Stillborn* and *Everything Good Will Come* that include men who are presented as 'good' and non-discriminating. *The Stillborn* presents Kaka as a kind and patient man who is all-embracing and Hajiya's husband as a thoughtful husband who leaves a property for his wife because he knows she would be disinherited as a barren widow. Through Habu who reforms, Zaynab Alkali reiterates that men can change for the better if given time and opportunity. In *Everything Good Will Come* Grace Ameh's husband is depicted as a 'good' man who supports her political activism despite the dangers associated with it. Other men in the novel are shown to have some redeeming qualities, for instance, Enitan's boyfriend Mike Obi has a caring attitude and Sunny fights for the rights of citizens who are unlawfully detained. *Night Dancer* is sharper in its critique of men and patriarchy, but nevertheless Mike is presented with empathy despite his flaws.

I have asserted in this dissertation that despite all the revisions made to the Bildungsroman genre and the incorporation of elements from other narrative forms that result in a hybrid of genres, the foundational premise of the Bildungsroman, the possibility of formation of the individual, is not overturned in the selected texts. I have suggested that the use of the realist form in the texts helps to reinforce the possibility of self-formation for females and indicates the prospect of attaining a coherent self-identity even though the journey to achieve self-actualisation may be long and tedious. For instance, it was highlighted in Chapters Two and Six how the realist form is used bring out the formation of complex political subjectivities as observed in the characters of Shakuntala and Swarna Lata who negotiate their way to becoming politically active citizens and Enitan who engages in political activism that is inclusive after many years of apathy. Although a definite ending that is positive is not present in the texts, their open-ended closures are cautiously optimistic in that they show the protagonists ready to take the next step in their lives after successfully completing the goals they had set out for themselves.

The observation that the novels choose to retain the use of realism largely rather than engage with modernist or postmodernist techniques takes me to the next area where I highlight some of the fresh insights that my cross-cultural study brings to the fore: the tripartite relationship between the Bildungsroman, realism and the real and their link to the

presence of elements of romance novels in the texts; feminism of the characters and the authors and their political agendas that result in the reimagining of a different world in the texts, an utopian world where women can enjoy a better life.

It was discovered that the selected novels bring out the complex connection between the Bildungsroman, the use of realism and the portrayal of the real. Retaining the realist form allows the authors to accomplish several other things besides reinforcing the potentiality of self-formation, one of the basic tenets of the traditional Bildungsroman; it helps the texts to recreate the social reality of the setting and critique patriarchy and society for its oppression of women. It was observed that the social realist mode adopted by the authors is useful in recreating the historical past, evoking key political events that formed the backdrop of the novels and painting a realistic portrayal of the protagonists and their social reality. The realistic depiction of the social reality reflects the dystopian nature of the world that the female protagonists inhabit, and this allows the authors to critique patriarchy and society and pin point the political, sociocultural and economic issues in the country.

Rather than engage with simple mimetic realism, the selected texts adopt a more complex form of realism that is self-conscious, in that it is aware of its own potential as well as its limitations. While the texts draw attention to the social reality in which they are grounded as they recreate the sociopolitical milieu of their setting, they affirm their own literariness that results in self-reflexivity. This is most evident in *Two Virgins* which includes the filming of a documentary of the village to depict peasant life realistically and debates on the values of social realist movies that aim to portray life realistically. The debate on realism versus the real invites a discussion on the use of the realist form in the Bildungsroman itself, reinforcing that the text is aware of the mediated nature of the realist form in relation to its claim of portraying village life in the sixties realistically.

The authors go further to contrast the social reality depicted that is rather dystopian with the romantic idealism of the young protagonists. While the predilection of the authors is to engage in conversations with narrative forms that come under the umbrella of autobiography and the historical novel, their incorporation of elements of romance fiction is rather unexpected. Embracing features of the romance genre brings out the romantic idealism and fantasies of the adolescent and young adult protagonists. For example, Kamala Markandaya's explicit description of human sexuality and her employment of the trope of the innocent and idealist romantic heroine versus the stereotypical foil who is sexually

empowered, aligns *Two Virgins* with Western romance. *The Stillborn*'s use of romance elements, on the other hand, differs from that used in *Two Virgins* since it draws from the conventions of Hausa love literature.

Although features of popular romance novels are predominant in *Two Virgins* and *The Stillborn* which give prominence to the adolescent phase of the protagonists, surprisingly, passages describing passionate love and sentiments of young lovers are found in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Difficult Daughters*, novels that deal with the serious theme of Partition of India. At times, the portrayal of Laila-Ameer and Virmati-Harish love relationship evokes romance fiction fashioned in the style of Mills and Boons romance novels in these two texts which are otherwise preoccupied with serious matters. *Everything Good Will Come*, meanwhile, does not venture into describing youthful exploration of love relations but makes references to romance novels that are secretly read by adolescents Sheri and Enitan and how Sheri continues to read such novels even as an adult. I have suggested that these elements of youthful romance are incorporated in these novels not just to present the adolescent phase or the young adulthood of the protagonists but also to bring out the romantic idealism about love relationships in the imagination of the young protagonists and contrast them with the reality of the situation when they wake up from their fantasies.

The texts are meticulous in their portrayal of the social reality of the milieu but rather than stop with a portrayal that is dystopian, they forge ahead to offer alternatives and suggest solutions. I have reiterated earlier that the way the texts dismantle oppressive systems and debunk gender stereotypes reflects the feminism of the characters in the novel as well as that of the authors. The social vision presented and the imagining of a utopian world where women can enjoy a better life can also be linked to the feminism of the protagonists and the feminist dimension of the texts. The authors articulate their views on improving women's condition by suggesting alternative ways of life, underscoring the need for more options for women to lead autonomous and fulfilling lives.

While not all recommendations are presented in detail or clearly defined, the following utopian vision is recurrent in the texts considered: Adopting ways that are more inclusive while improving women's condition; underscoring the strong link an individual has with her family and society in a collectivist culture, especially the female community, highlighting how autonomy for females need not be individualistic or contain a separationist agenda; reinforcing the importance of retaining the family unit even though family and

gender relations evolve over time; lastly, promoting the use of negotiation to accomplish goals rather than engage in confrontations or radical feminism.

While all the texts reinforce the need for inclusive politics to improve the postcolonial condition, especially the status of women, the African texts display the tenets of African feminism when they strongly advocate the need for everyone, that is, both men and women to work together to improve the condition of women and for the progress of the family, society and nation. This message is brought out strongly in *Everything Good Will Come* where Enitan stresses that everyone needs to work together to improve the condition of women and the citizens of Nigeria, advocating politics that is inclusive. Enitan also learns from Sheri the importance of preserving the family unit by exhibiting tolerance and her parenting style is inclusive of Niyi after her divorce. Unlike Ezi whose ways are exclusive and extreme, Mma in *Night Dancer* is inclusive, in that she values her newfound family as she moves forward in life in a more assertive manner. Awa's tolerance of Fiama and Li's intention to return to Habu in *The Stillborn* reinforce complementarity between men and women for progress.

All the five novels that discuss family relations and marriage as important themes, reinforce at one point or another that a separation from a male-dominated environment is essential for growth, maturity, and self-actualisation. However, isolation from a male-dominated environment is seen as a temporary phase since a return to society is emphasised in the novels. In addition, the novels highlight the role played by the female community and this is brought out strongly in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *The Stillborn* and *Everything Good Will Come* that highlight how friendship and solidarity among women help them to navigate their complicated lives in transforming milieus.

During exile, whether self-imposed or otherwise, the protagonists engage in self-reflexivity that provides understanding, healing, development, self-confidence and empowerment. During Laila's self-imposed exile, it is the female community, in the form of Nandi and Sita, that renders its support for Laila's recovery other than Asad who is a pillar of strength for Laila. Li who works hard to establish herself through higher education and career, is guided by Hajiya and supported by Awa and Mama who care for the family including Li's daughter. Laila considers a relationship with Asad while Li expresses her intention of returning to her husband, Habu, in the ending of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *The Stillborn* respectively. While some feminist critics consider this as a return to the patriarchal setup, I have suggested otherwise. Laila's wish to start a new life with

Asad, I have asserted, could be viewed as her intention to start a relationship based on equality since Laila has attained maturity from her life-changing experiences. Li's wish to return to Habu could be viewed as an act of reconciliation for the sake of family and for progressing together as a couple in an egalitarian relationship based on the author's womanist vision. African feminism promotes complementarity between men and women and as such, giving Habu, who has reformed, a second chance is in line with the tenets of womanism. Even Faku who drifts, travelling to various cities, and engaging in prostitution for survival, returns to society. Faku who is guided by a senior social worker attains maturity as a result of her exposure and experiences.

In *Two Virgins*, Saroja returns to society after her quest for selfhood while Lalitha runs away, escaping the restrictions imposed by family and society. Lalitha's escapism is perceived as an irresponsible attempt at achieving autonomy since Lalitha's individualistic personality is shown to adversely affect her family, especially Appa and Saroja who are devastated by Lalitha's running away. The inclusive ways that Mma adopts during her self-discovery journey are contrasted with Ezi's radical and extreme ways that are exclusive and detrimental, reinforcing the connection between individuals and their families and communities. While Enitan leaves her marriage and Ida is portrayed as a lonely divorcee, they are not presented as isolated from their family or society. Enitan, who is guided by the female community in the form of Sheri and Grace Ameh during her difficult times, learns to value family relations and adopt inclusive ways. *Difficult Daughters* intimates that Ida may return to society though on her own terms after her exorcising her mother's ghost. Each novel, in its own way, underlines the crucial link between a female and her family and society.

The novels capture the changes that the traditional model of family undergoes, especially the joint family system that gets dismantled as a result of modernisation as highlighted in the Indian texts. The shifts in prescribed roles and responsibilities of men and women within a family are also highlighted. This is especially highlighted in *The Stillborn* where daughters take on the role of managing the family in the absence of sons and older patriarchs. *Everything Good Will Come* even suggests an alternative arrangement of having two mothers to bring up Enitan's daughter, but this arrangement is not exclusive. While the texts register the changes in the family unit and the roles of its members, they continue to reinforce the need to preserve the family unit.

It was observed that both the Indian and African texts suggest the use of negotiation as a strategy to deal with patriarchal limitations and some authors promote it more directly than others. In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur proposes negotiation as an effective strategy for women in patriarchal societies to bargain for options that would allow them to further their education, take on careers and even be politically active. Manju Kapur contrasts the strategies used by Shakuntala and Swarna Lata who engage in negotiation with patriarchy with that of Virmati who uses rebellion, avoidance, compromise and adaptation. While the other two Indian novels do not directly promote negotiation, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* underlines how confrontations cause family ties to break irretrievably while *Two Virgins* highlights how running away from home might break the oppressive cycle of women in the village but not solve one's problem entirely. While *Sunlight on a Broken Column* dismantles patriarchy's control and mystification of female sexuality and exposes the double standards exercised by traditional Muslim society, it does not put forward solutions directly to overcome women's condition. *Two Virgins*, on the other hand, advocates the need for women to be freed from pressure to conform to ideal Indian womanhood that limits and oppresses them.

As mentioned earlier, African feminism promotes collaboration between men and women and as such, does not advocate radical feminism through confrontations with patriarchy. The African texts in this study explore the different strands of African feminism such as womanism, nego-feminism and African-Islamic feminism. *Everything Good Will Come* establishes the different types of feminism adopted by Enitan and Sheri before indicating that negotiation should be used wherever possible rather than confrontation since it might yield better outcomes; this aligns the feminist dimensions of the novel with Obioma Nnameka's nego-feminism. But this is not to say that women should not stand up for themselves because Sheri learns to be more assertive through the influence of Enitan. On the other hand, Enitan learns that rather than challenge patriarchy head on all the time, negotiation, especially in matters concerning family relations, might result in better outcomes. However, the ending of the novel where Enitan is forced to leave Niyi in order to continue her political activism, problematises nego-feminism since it indicates that not all problems can be resolved through negotiation. Sefi Atta also suggests a feminism that is inclusive in *Everything Good Will Come*. With the guidance of Grace Ameh, Enitan enters politics that is inclusive; similarly, her feminism is also inclusive. Enitan gives Niyi full access to their daughter, Nimika, although Nimika is brought up by two mothers, herself and Sheri, when she establishes an alternative way of life for herself after her divorce.

Shirin Edwin suggests that as an African-Islamic feminist, Awa in *The Stillborn* uses nego-feminism; but Awa appears to be compromising rather than negotiating with Fiama since her condition never improves. As such, I suggest that rather than nego-feminism, it is the tenets of womanism and African-Islamic feminism that are significant in the text's feminist dimensions. On the other hand, *Night Dancer* presents Ezi as using radical feminism rather than nego-feminism that would have worked, highlighting the drastic repercussions of her strategy. Ezi who is disowned by her family adopts extreme and exclusive ways, depriving Mma of a complete family. However, at the end of the novel, Unigwe proposes a feminism that is more inclusive through the character of Mma. At the end of her journey Mma becomes more assertive but not exclusive. Although Mma is disappointed with her father, he and his family would be a part of Mma's life when she moves forward.

My cross-cultural study focused on how the selected Bildungsromane portray the obstacles to achieving female selfhood and offer solutions to improve the condition of women in the context of females coming of age in the 1930s up to the 1980s in the backdrop of an India fighting for its independence and engaging in decolonising struggles after its independence and females growing up in the 1960s up to 1990s in a Nigeria that struggles to establish itself as a republic after its independence. While India and Nigeria are very different in terms of their historical, social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances, their shared British colonial legacy, especially its continuous impact on the various ethnic and religious groups, has made the countries comparable. Reading the texts from these two countries side by side and exploring how they capture the impact of colonialism and the lingering influence of its legacies, and how these impact the lives of the colonial and postcolonial citizens, especially females coming of age during that period, has been illuminating.

Future studies could expand the comparative framework to include Bildungsromane from other African countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ghana. Another area that might be worth considering is the inclusion of Bildungsroman that have been translated from Indian languages such as Tamil or Malayalam to English, which could then be studied in relation to Anglophone Bildungsroman from India and other African countries. While my research chose to focus on women-authored texts featuring female protagonists, further research could be conducted to investigate how men writers portray self-discovery journeys of females and how the inclusion of both male and female protagonists within a Bildungsroman alters the status quo of texts by both men and women writers. The texts in this study largely retain the realist form and use a social realist mode that serves several other purposes besides

reinforcing the possibility of self-formation for females even though the journey is long and laborious. This is not to say that anti-Bildungsromane do not use the realist form since novels such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* that portray the arrested development of their protagonists employ the realist form. Further research could be conducted to compare how the use of modernist and postmodernist techniques in postcolonial Bildungsroman alter the depiction of the coming-of-age stories of protagonists.

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