



## ***The First Party: Indian and Western civilizations colliding culturally***

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### **ABSTRACT :**

This study attempts to investigate the cultural conflicts in *The First Party*, one of the pieces from Attia Hosain's collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled*. Since Attia Hosain was an Indo-British novelist, she was well aware of both the cultures and their absence. She utilizes the story of an Indian Muslim bride and her Western husband to illustrate the cultural conflicts. Culture is an essential component of any society and has a significant impact on people's lives. It is evident that the globe is divided into two regions, the West and the East, each of which faces distinct cultural issues. The study also looks at how cultural conflicts affect people's lives and how they can make people feel hateful or alienated. It also sheds light on the husband and wife relationship, showing how her Western husband disregards her in front of their friends and guests at their wedding party.

**Keywords:** Attia Hosain, *Phoenix Fled*, *The First Party*, wedding, culture, clash, Indian, Western

### **Introduction**

The term "culture" is difficult to define because it is ambiguous and can be used in multiple contexts. Sir Edward Burnett Taylor, the anthropologist, in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) gave the traditional definition of culture- "Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Sweet William p.2). In general, a group of people's combined knowledge, traditions, and habits can be referred to as their culture.

Culture is an integral part of every society and shapes people's lives. The world is divided into the two major regions of the East and the West, each with different cultural differences. Whereas Western countries, like those in South and North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, have unique cultural traits, Eastern cultures are found in Asia and the Middle East. Cultural differences cause significant differences in the attitudes and actions of people in the East and the West. These two cultures are different from each other in many aspects, including beliefs, values, lifestyle, and social behaviour. Social behaviour is one of the main areas where Eastern and Western cultures diverge. In Western countries, where people are more assertive and open-minded, individualism is highly valued. Conversely, persons from Eastern cultures are more likely to remain quiet and cherish peace within the community. In the West, people place a higher priority on individual achievement, independence, and self-expression. In contrast, the family, the community, and peaceful cooperation are valued more in Eastern culture. Eastern cultures are more laid-back and family-oriented, whereas Western civilizations tend to be more autonomous and fast-paced. There are differences between Eastern and Western civilizations in terms of values and beliefs. In Western civilization, human rights, democracy, and individual liberty are given greater importance. Eastern culture, on the other hand, values duty, social harmony, and reverence to authority. These cultural traits are evident in *The First Party*, a short story by Attia Hosain.

Attia Hosain was a British-Indian author, writer, presenter, journalist, and actor. In 1947, Attia Hosain, her spouse, and their kids relocated to England. After reading the short story, Attia's friend William Rawlinson urged her to write more. She believed she was lonely, miserable, and homesick. Because of how awful boarding was for her kids, she was inspired to write stories. She had received a lot of assistance from her friend William Rawlinson. He created a collection by properly typing Attia's short stories. In *Phoenix Fled* (1953), there were more stories than were published.

### ***The First Party* illustrates cultural clash through Indo-Western wedding**

Attia Hosain was born in Lucknow in 1913 into a prosperous Taluqadar family. Indian novelist, journalist, broadcaster, and English-language short story writer Attia Hosain was well-known. She started writing at a young age and is renowned for her works that examine topics such as partition and gender. The short stories take place in India shortly before the country was divided into Pakistan and India. Attia Hosain's debut book, *Phoenix Fled*, is a collection of short stories that published in 1953. In the story *The First Party*, Attia illustrates the challenges a husband and wife have in their marriage due to cultural differences, in addition to the conflicts between Eastern and Western traditions. Both husband and wife find it difficult to adapt to each other's cultures, especially the wife. Her spouse should be supporting and comforting her during this time, but instead, he ignores her and socializes with his guests and friends. The Pakistani-British writer said about Attia Hosain's *Phoenix Fled*:

"There is so much to love and admire in these stories ... their understanding of heartbreak, their attention to affection and love across many divides ... Long after I finished reading, I found myself still recalling the tiny moments, so beautifully rendered, that made them come to life"

(Virago News)

Migration is a widespread human phenomenon; migrating from one geographical area to another for a better future is one aspect of diaspora. There is no such definition for 'diaspora.' The term "diaspora" is flexible and subject to change. Therefore, we may claim that someone who was born in their homeland and moved to a developed nation for any reason still has an affection for his native country. Attia Hosain was one of the renowned Indian diasporic writers. Instead of focusing only on specific female classes, her feminist approach exposes the underprivileged and marginalized women from every sphere of life (Kadri 2021).

*The First Party*, one of her short stories from *Phoenix Fled*, explores the conflict between of life. Because Attia Hosain was a Muslim, her cultural background is frequently reflected in the stories. A book has a total of twelve short stories. *The First Party* is from *Phoenix Fled*, a collection of short stories by Attia Hosain. *The First Party* is a short story about a cultural collision between the East and the West. Attia Hosain tells the story of a newlywed Eastern woman who attends a party with her Westernized husband. A young woman's difficulty adjusting to her husband's affluent lifestyle serves as a stark reminder of the conflict between tradition and modernity.

*The First Party* narrates the story of a young Muslim Indian girl, who has been married to the Western man. In order to introduce his bride, he invites his Western friends and guests to the celebration. In the story, Attia introduces the characters as—'Englishman,' 'Husband,' 'Wife,' 'Tall Woman,' 'Fat Man,' etc. The story begins at a private cocktail party. The Indian Muslim bride is quite confused and uncertain. She had never attended a party before. Western social norms, such as whether it is appropriate to stand up when introducing oneself to new guests, are beyond her knowledge. It describes the first encounter between a traditional bride and her husband's Western associates. It appears from the beginning of the story that guests are there to enjoy the party and merely serve to highlight the bride's differences. Attia Hosain in a beautiful manner describes the image of the Indian bride—"she sat on the edge of the big chair, her shoulders drooping, nervously pulling her sari over her head as the weight of its heavy gold embroidery pulled it back." (*The First Party*, p.17). In the story, the guests do not understand why she wears such heavy jewellery and a saree that cover her entire body. The bride starts realizing that she does not only have a language barrier but also cannot match their attire and culture. The young bride feels uncomfortable in this strange atmosphere. She reacts to greetings in a low voice, like a child repeating a lesson, and attempts to cover her uneasiness with a smile since she doesn't know how to do it. Her husband, however, blends in with everyone with ease.

Attia Hosain attempts to describe cultural conflict minutely from every perception of the party. In Western society, buffets are typically preferred for parties and weddings unlike the Eastern society; as an Indian bride, she was perplexed and unsure of what to do, meanwhile, a little girl approached her with a small tray and said to her, "Try this sandwich and the olives are good." (Hosain p.20). The bride accepted and tried it since she had never tasted olives before; she didn't enjoy the taste and she wanted to spit it out. She carefully tucked it under a chair since she was unable to spit it out in front of everyone. . Another example of a cultural clash can be seen where Western men and women dance, while Eastern brides find it disgusting. The women's bodies were exposed by their clothing as they performed obscene close dance moves. The eastern bride felt angry, - "The disgusting, shameless hussies, bold and free with men, their clothes adorning nakedness not hiding it...." ( Hosain p.20). We observe that the husband largely ignores his wife during the celebration, without attempting to help her feel at ease in the new culture. The husband does not care about his wife, she is just a thing for him he looks her as a child and talks to his friends about her -"she'll get over it soon. Give me time" ( Hosain p.17). He only comes when he has to introduce someone to his wife except this he does not give ease or make her wife comfortable.

The party is a symbol of the contemporary, progressive thinking, and occasionally dissident social scene of the era. Additionally, gender roles play a major role in the conflict. In older societies, women were expected to adhere to rigid social norms and act modestly. These gender conventions are challenged by the protagonist's wish to go to a party where men and women mingle. The struggle between conventional gender norms and the contemporary movement for greater equality and freedom for women is reflected in this tension.

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## Conclusion

Attia was a reformist writer of her time. She belonged to the aristocratic family though she was aware of hypocrisy and contradictions of her class and social environment. Attia Hosain's unique quality to depict the Eastern and Western Culture can be seen in her short story, *The First Party*. *The First Party* by Attia Hosain examines a subtle but significant cultural conflict, especially between traditional and modern norms. The tale presents a complex environment of social and cultural conflict. The story's central theme is the conflict between the two civilizations and how prejudice can arise from cultural differences. Being an Indian Muslim bride she has modesty, shyness, religious beliefs, mannerism in her personality, in contrast, her husband is totally different from her. In the starting, the bride felt shy and a little uncomfortable and tried to hide her discomfort through a smile, but as the party goes on and she watched western cultures like men and women are smoking, drinking, dancing, women's body exposing dressing style she felt disgusted. Her uneasiness and timidity turn into hatred. In the story, there are three distinct phases for the bride: her first state of nervousness, her subsequent transformation into hate and contempt, and her final state of confusion and sadness. Attia hosain artistically describes the cultural conflicts in *The First Party* through the Indian Muslim Bride and the Western Husband.

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