
Nayantara Sahgal is an outstanding English novelist and established political columnist. Before proceeding further it will be work while to give a biographical sketch of Nayantara Sahgal. Born in Allahabad on May 10, 1927 she is the second of the three daughters of Ranjit Sitaram Pandit and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. All her childhood days were spent in Anand Bhawan at Allahabad with her parents, her maternal uncle, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and her cousin Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Her father Ranjit Sitaram Pandit was a lawyer by profession, but he left practice to join the Indian National Movement and later died of a serious illness soon after his release from jail in 1944. All the members of her family occupied all the centre-stage of Indian politics. They discussed and formulated political and moral ideas. In all this the girls also took part. Nayantara

Sahgal was also deeply influenced by the gentleness and courage of her father. She remembers her father as a generous and understanding father who never allowed the inhibiting forces of society to enter into his family life. The father offered companionship to his daughters, treated them as equals and explained to them the complexities of contemporary political and social values. She has inherited from him her love of scholarship and sense of history. She remembers him, his looks and his spirit and temperament in her books. As a result, she has developed a different personality of her own statements:

I was conscious of being continually stretched in mind and spirit of being encouraged to be venturesome, of doing the daring rather than the timid thing, of taking risks rather than playing safe, and I was keenly aware of the joy of being myself like every other person – a unique human being (Nayantara Sahgal 15).

She grew up during the national movement for independence. After some years of schooling at Woodstock, a school run by American Missionaries at Mussorie, she, along with her sister, went to America and did her B.A. in History from Wellesley College, Massachusetts in 1947. Education in America was a rich experience for her. The death of her father in 1944 gave her a tremendous shock, the full impact of which was felt on her return to India in October 1947. After sometime she met an ambitious youngman called Gautam Sahgal who was employed in a British company. She despites a series of differences in their

background. Gautam Sahgal and Nayantara were married in 1949 and they had three children. It was love marriage but it failed. The marriage cannot be called a happy and successful one. There was a lot of tension in the family and also a lot of efforts at adjustment. Everything in the life and world of Gautam was new to her as a wife. The marriage was something like a sudden shift of values from the world of a social crusade to one of commerce and business. Nayantara Sahgal writes:

For the first time I came across a shocking assumption of inequality. A man's ego and ambition. I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict the man's will and desire must prevail ... I was uneasy and restless, adjusting to demands of a personality and an environment whose goals and texture were different from anything I had known or been comfortable with (15).

She was trying very hard to make a successful relationship but she failed. She divorced Gautam in 1967 because of an unhappy and incompatible marriage. Reacting to that unhappy experience in life she expressed the feelings that she should not have married at that time. She felt that marriage should not take place without proper and mature decision. Unhappy marriage is also perhaps a result of getting girls married off at an early age a tradition prevailing in Indian society. Here an important point will have to be noted when we studies Nayantara's novels. Failure in marriage, personal agonies, and traumatic consequences of

disharmony in marriage become some of the major themes in the works of Nayantara Sahgal. After getting divorced she met E.N. Mangal Rai, a brilliant bureaucrat. She found an ideal companion in him. In 1979 she married again an I.C.S. officer E.N. Mangal Rai, after many years of living together. For her second marriage was not a case of love affair but a revolution and a kind of self discovery suggesting that life had to be lived more fully to make it meaningful. It was part of a new life. Regarding the untraditional marriage Nayantara Sahgal says:

Neither of us were at all interested in getting married. But in 1979, the Janata government appointed me ambassador to Italy and that forced me to marry ... Fundamentally, there is not much difference between living together and being married. If you are loyal to each other, it does not matter. If there is loyalty and trust, one does not need marriage (Dutt & Baweja, 17).

Remarriage is the kind of freedom, openness, self confidence and trust of others which brings another phase of new life. From the beginning of her life she felt the hunger for freedom in a big joint Hindu family. She saw politics from inside and was immensely influenced by loving, sacrificing refined and bold personalities of her father and mother and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. She gave a memorable account of childhood impressions on her tender mind in her two

autobiographies, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, published in 1954 and her second autobiography *From Fear Set Free*, published in 1962.

Nayantara Sahgal's literary production consists of nine novels as given below: *A Time to be Happy* (1957), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1987), *Mistaken Identity* (1988), *Lesser Breeds* (2003), Two Autobiographies, some non-fictional works, and several articles and short stories published in leading newspaper magazines. Her novel, *Rich Like Us* and *Plans for Departure* have reinforced her position as one of the foremost Indian novelists on the contemporary scene. Her talent can be seen in full in her *Rich Like Us* for which she has received the prestigious British honour the Sinclair Prize for Fiction; subsequently she was honoured with a Sahitya Akademi Award for the same novel. For her *Plans for Departure*, too, she has been awarded the Common Wealth Writer's Prize for Eurasia region.

Nayantra Sahgal appeared on the Indian fictional scene in the early nineteen fifties. It has been noticed that women writers mostly focus on women characters, on women's lives and experience in their writings. Nayantara Sahgal's novels have strong feminist interest seeking independent existence of women. She sees women as victims of conventional Indian society engaged in

their quest for identity. Like other feminist writers, she revolts against the stereotypical depiction of women in the man-dominated society. A woman always holds the centre stage of her fictional world. A woman's desire, her efforts and failure in her relationship with man in the tradition oriented Indian society are the main issues of her novels. Women characters in her novels rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. An analysis of her novels reveals that she is feminist with a purpose. Her investigation and presentation of a feminist consciousness is mainly directed towards an objective account of women's emotions against the background of the Indian Women's emerging awareness of her identity in male-dominated social and moral orders.

Sahgal seeks freedom from traditional norms and ways of life. But, the Indian woman has been for years a silent sufferer. While she plays different roles as wife, mother, sister and daughter in their novels, she is often emotionally hurt and crippled through man's arrogance, cynicism and indifference. Indian women are always seen in terms of self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. A traditional woman is always expected to subordinate all her wishes and desires to someone else, apparently, a husband or a son. In this connection, Simone de Beauvoir has this view:

The majority of women do not escape from the traditional feminine world; they get from neither society nor their husbands the assistance they need to become in concrete fact the equals of the men (*The Second Sex*, 690).

Nayantara Sahgal clearly articulates her deep concern over gender oppression in her world. Though she has been hailed chiefly as a political novelist, her feminist concern is quite overt and her spirit of challenge is quite vocal in her fiction. Her fictional world shows her deep concern with the parlous state of women in the patriarchal society.

Women suffer not only as a result of physical violence, but they are often emotionally hurt and crippled through man's arrogance and indifference. However, men wield power over women through terror. This blocks the way of communication between the partners in marriage. Loneliness, suffering and frustration in marriage sometimes cause disintegration and make women rebellious.

Nayantara Sahgal opines that conversation or discussion is very important for harmonious marital relationship. Due to lack of communication, response and mutual understanding a large number of Sahgal's characters suffer from the private torment of broken marriage. The spouses live together under the same roof, but still they experience loneliness mainly because of deeper emotional

differences, lack of appreciation of the feelings of women by men. For example, Sahgal's woman characters Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit are quite often fully smothered in marriage and cannot have healthy love relationship in their married lives. Therefore they decide to opt for divorce rather than live a suffocating life of injustice and agony. Most of Sahgal's women remarry because they want to live with men who understand them. It is not that they are willing to return to oppression within marriage; on the contrary they see a full and organized world in marriage. This kind of novel writing by Indian women can be seen in the post Independence period. The emergence of women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was only after independence that they could make solid contribution to Indian English fiction. The post Independence period has brought to the forefront a number of noted woman novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. The woman has been the focus of many literary works in this period. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have achieved recognition in this time. All these women novelists have treated women problems as they have known intimately women's lives and experiences in Indian society.

Nayantara Sahgal's novels have attracted little favourable critical attention from the feminists. As a woman writer she is least concerned with the traditional

way of life with social problems; she confines herself to a particular social class, namely the upper class, and the aristocracy. Being a radical feminist Nayantara Sahgal analyses the true reality of human relationships in which women are the sufferers. To liberate the women from the male supremacy, she attacks the male through sex within or outside marriage. Every character of the novels indulges in love relation and love affairs for one purpose or other. In her depiction of women characters, she makes a departure from conformity to non-conformity. Her world consists of two types of women characters. The first group consists of women who are happy in confinement of Hindu orthodoxy, and the other, those with a strong sense of individuality and an analytical mind but shuttling between traditional and modern values. Some of her women are void of traditional values. To notice the sharp contrast between the conformity and non conformity view, it is worth noticing what N. Sarda writes about traditional marriage and sexuality:

The concept of honour plays an important role in the repression of the girl's sexuality. Any misbehavior on her part would bring shame both to herself and her family, resulting in decreased chances of a good match. She is groomed for the fulfillment of the desired goal of her existence-marriage. All the prayers and rituals of a girl's life are directed towards the procurement of a husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through the birth of male offspring (Iyer, 46).

Marriage is a most important thing in traditional society. For a traditional woman whose livelihood and career chiefly centre round the roles of a wife and mother. Thus marriage is the most important event in her life. It is necessary and unavoidable event for a traditional woman in Indian society. For women the right marriage often means good life, the wrong marriage a hard one.

Finding the right man and marrying him is the chief hope and concern of most young women. It is a destination in the life of every woman. Veena Pani Pandey gives an account of the pitiable situation in a girl's life in her book *Problems of Woman's Marriage and Violence*:

When girls are about ready for marriage, it is like being auctioned like a heifer. Women come and look them over to see if they will make fit wives. This Indian method of exhibiting a girl does lower her concept of herself as a person she is being weighed against money property, her accomplishments, her fair skin but not against her character, her personality. This concept of self becomes a negative one. She is the efficient server of the family, not a thinking individual (Pandey, 231).

Nayantara Sahgal focuses on the deconstruction of the traditional values and concepts related to man-woman relationship. In her novels she makes a grave attempt to shake off the chains of the patriarchal conventions and morality that diminish the female personality. She criticizes, marriage and religious

institutions, politicians, the hypocrisy, husband-wife relationship, dual personality of the upper, middle and the lower class of Indian society. In Sahgal, the struggle is for abolishing gender discrimination and seeking reciprocity, mutuality and harmony in life. Man-woman relationship, conflict between tradition and modernity, love, lust, infidelity, failure in marriage, divorce and remarriage tend to become the major themes of her novels. She explores the issue of marital disharmony, its root-causes and the bitter consequences prevailing in the patriarchal society and thus makes a fatal attack on the traditional institution of marriage in the male dominated Indian society. Sahgal has nine novels but the analysis is made only on her eight novels, namely, *A Time to be Happy*, *This Time of Morning*, *Storm in Chandigarh*, *The Day in Shadow*, *A Situation in New Delhi*, *Rich Like Us*, *Plans for Departure*, and *Mistaken Identity*. In them the issues of husband-wife conflict, man-woman relationship, conflict between tradition and modernity, failure in marriage, marital infidelity, suffering of the alienated partners, divorce and remarriage are present.

For the sake of convenience the thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter-I is the introduction to the whole thesis. It gives a brief introductory note on the author and a comprehensive picture of what the thesis is about. Chapter-II is Nayantara Sahgal's views on Man and Woman Relationship in Indian society. Indian society has some weakness and deficiencies such as the caste-system, the

oppressive behaviour of the higher class people towards the lower class people, victimization of women under the prevailing marriage system etc. The social structure as a whole also affects the man-woman relationship greatly. Mention may be made of man's regard for a woman or a girl as a sex object. Since this thought is there in the mind of a man, his valuation of his wife is purely based on sex. This base treatment for a wife frequently leads to the husband's desire for more women. Due to the husband's lust for a new wife, his relationship with his former legitimate wife is badly affected. Nayantara Sahgal bitterly and seriously criticizes such understand treatment of a woman by a husband since she is a woman who hates man's domination over his wife. In her novel *This Time of Morning*, she, on behalf of the Indian Society, strongly mocks the fictitious man-woman relationship between Rashmi and Dalip in which the woman has decided to divorce her husband. She wants to get full freedom and get determination of her own heart. She is an example of a woman who is strong-minded, independent, and courageous. In *The Day in Shadow* Simrit has entered into marriage with Som as an act of infatuation because Som is everything that she is not. Simrit, the educated woman, gets three children but she thinks that her choice of Som as husband is a wrong one. Som treats her as his lovely possession not as a person. He ignores her feelings, sentiments, wishes as if she is a lifeless doll that only decorates his home. There is no companionship and sharing of

ideas in personal or business matters between Som and Simrit. The world of husband and wife is sharing and understanding but Simrit cannot get anything like that from Som. Lack of understanding, communication gap and temperamental incompatibility make Simrit get divorced from Som. The novelist has depicted two kinds of husband-wife relationship in her novel, *A Situation in New Delhi*. In this novel, Michael has a brutal relationship with his wife Devi while he has praiseworthy relationship with his wife Nell. After Michael had divorced both the wives but Nell used to come to him occasionally as she was sticky about her relationship with Michael. At that time, Michael took some of her parcels and they talked with each other. This proves that although a husband neglects his simple, good and honest wife, his wife can sacrifice her life for the betterment of her husband. Since Nayantara Sahgal has personally experienced this kind of life, she exposes it clearly in some of her novels. In her novel *Rich Like Us* also Sahgal has depicted such kind of man-woman relationship between Rose and Ram. Since Rose has a deeper love for her husband Ram than he has for her, she is able to marry him with full knowledge of his first marriage and the existence of a son. Besides this, she is able to abandon everything for her Indian husband Ram. On the contrary, she had been betrayed by her husband Ram.

An analysis of the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, shows that Sahgal places her women characters mostly with good educational background, and they are in

conflict with the patriarchal society. She depicts their struggle for their own potential right. Regarding their relationships with their husbands the novelist has clearly and frankly expressed that the educated women occasionally divorce their husbands in the same way in which their husband divorce them. Even if a woman and a man become a couple after their love marriage, either of them may practice adultery at times. It may be due to deteriorating man-woman relationship. Such deed of theirs becomes the cause of their divorce very frequently. Besides, in terms of liberty a married woman wants to get the same as that of a married man since a man frequently indulges in that kind of sexual liberty than a woman.

In Chapter-III, the Indian women and the institution of marriage have been analyzed. Some women in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, are happy in the Hindu orthodoxy while many others have a strong sense of individuality and an analytical mind. It is a fact that women's duties as good daughters, good wives and good mothers are well-defined in a patriarchal society. However, Nayantara Sahgal is very critical of culturally constructed norms that make women objects of men with added traditional virtues and graces. So, she criticizes such attitude which under value women's potential by treating them as just property at the cost of their individuality. Although 'marriage' is considered to be the greatest goal in the life of a girl, Nayantara Sahgal exposes the conventional narrow-minded Indian society in which life partners are usually chosen by the parents. In fact,

'marriage' is very important for a woman in the patriarchal society. However, Nayantara Sahgal strongly attacks the social convention that makes marriage as just an organized or sanctioned rape. In *This Time of Morning* Rashmi feels that marriage can be very unhappy at the same time it can also be happy with the right ingredients. That's why comforts come to her not from Rakesh but from Berensen who is a stranger. In the meantime, Nayantara Sahgal asserts that the right ingredients for a happy marriage are communication, honesty and respect for each other. She talks about the unstable marriage of three young couples, namely the marriage of Vishal Dubey and Leela, the marriage of Inder Mehra and Saroj and that of Jit and Mara as a result of lack of proper ingredients in her novel, *Storm in Chandigarh*. She depicts the miserable marriage of Som and Simrit Raman in *The Day in Shadow*. It is true that Nayantara Sahgal's women like, Rashmi Saroj, Simrit etc. frequently feel smothered in marriage and miss the elements of 'desire', 'friendship' and 'affection' in their marital relationship with their husbands. This chapter deeply deals with the current problems of marriage and marital disharmony in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. For her novels woman are at the centre of various issues of which marriage and marital disharmony are prominent. Failure in marriages, divorce and remarriage become important issues. As a novelist she presents almost all her characters as non-stickers to their spouse and marriage. However, she shows her heroines'

indulgence in the extra-marital relations as a compulsive act to go parallel with the double-standard of their male counterparts. It is the man who invites his wife to jump into the bed of another man by his indifference and lack of communication, sharing and understanding the emotional and physical needs of his wife. Neena Arora in her study of Nayantara Sahgal's novels thus views:

The basis for a happy and harmonious marriage is the feeling of sharing, equality and true partnership. But in the patriarchal division of values, equality is not possible because all the superior and positive qualities are attributed to men and the qualities associated with woman are considered to be inferior (Arora, 65).

Man is the superior in the patriarchal division of value and the quality of woman is very low. This inequality in the personal valuation between man and woman irritates women who then seek equality in getting the same rights men are enjoying. Simone de Beauvoir also gives the reason in her book, *The Second Sex*, as to why women are having promiscuous relations outside the wedlock. She opines that the gender bias and the superior feeling of men in doing whatever they like without considering the sentiments of women make way for the enraged wives to launch counter attack against their husbands and to liberate themselves from the bondage of unhappy marriage. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

For loyalty and friendship to exist between man and wife, the essential condition is that they both be free in relation to each other

and be equal in concrete matters. Since man alone possesses economic independence and since he holds by law and custom – the advantages attached to masculinity, it is natural enough for him often to appear a tyrant, and this drives woman to revolt and dissimulation (*The Second Sex*, 488).

Truly enough, the love marriages of Saroj and Inder, Rashmi and Dalip, Simrit and Som and the arranged marriage of Neeta and Vijay, Devi and Iswar break down irrevocably. Outwardly everything seems to be smooth and clear, but inwardly, they suffer the trauma of marital disharmony. Even though the husbands and the wives live together in the same house, their lack of understanding, lack of communication and the feeling of alienation keep them wide apart from each other. Neglect of woman's desire is perhaps the most important cause of alienation. So Nayantara Sahgal creates characters, both male and female, who are neither faithful lovers nor devoted wives. There is no marriage of true minds in her novels.

The picture of marriage Nayantara Sahgal presents is one of frustration, despair and gloom. Be it arranged marriage or love marriage, all marriages fail in almost her novels for one reason or the other. The endless conflict between disagreeable husband-wife and its resultant breaking are discussed in this chapter. Gerald Mc Nichail in his article entitled "Why Most Marriage Fail"

gives some reasons that contribute to the failure in marriage. He says that lack of proper communication between husband and wife, financial problem and even the circumstances of the marriage lead to the failure in marriage.

Love may conquer all but sometimes even love is not enough to save a marriage when there are significant financial concerns. Even the circumstances surrounding the marriage can lead to its failure. A marriage of convenience is often not a healthy marriage. When the decision to marry is based on something other than true love, it is likely that the marriage will fail (Geral).

In Chapter-IV, the conflict between tradition and modernity is examined thoroughly. In a traditional society, a young girl's movements are restricted by her parents when she reaches puberty. In *This Time of Morning*, the parents of Neeta won't allow her to smoke, to have drinks in parties or attend club dances until she is married. Even if she is a young, beautiful, modern girl, her father, Dr. Narang, who is a queer blend of the Eastern and Western culture, will act in the most traditional manner by imposing severe restrictions on his daughter the moment she tries to imitate the Western style of life. Since Dr. Narang is a part of the Indian traditional culture, he makes plans for the marriage of his daughter, Neeta. At this time, Mrs. Narang, who speaks English fluently, and her friends will gather around the card table and discuss the marriage plans for their daughter although the Narangs are becoming modern some possible manners.

However, Neeta tries to choose her lovers. In the book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir gives her opinion:

Doubtless the choice of a lover is also limited by circumstances, but there is an element of liberty in this relation; to marry it an obligation, to take a lover is a luxury (*The Second Sex*, 564).

The conflict of tradition and modernity is further exposed by Nayantara Sahgal in her novel, *The Day in Shadow* also. This novel not only deals with the struggle of a beautiful and daring Indian woman trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she has experienced in the hands of cruel and unjust male dominated Indian society but also exposes the lives of the political leaders, business barons, journalists and free thinkers in the flow of the daily living in New Delhi since the novelist tries to expose the social lives of these people living in India in the early sixties during which India was on her way to progress after she had got independence. Nayantara Sahgal expresses that even if the India got freedom as yet it is only on the surface level in their attitudes towards love, marriage, sex, morality, and religious. That's why they are still the slaves of the western culture. In *The Day in Shadow*, although Som, Raj, Simrit, Summer Sing, Brij and Ram and Krishna have to be modern for sometimes, they can't isolate themselves completely from the age-old traditions of their own country. In fact, this conflict of tradition and modernity is observed

in their attitudes towards morality, education, eating habits and man-woman relationship. Since vulgarity is considered to be a sign of modernity, Som can kiss his wife in the presence of his friend Lalli. But, Shaila, who is quite traditional in her views, requests Raj not to hold her arms by saying that he is creating a modern scene by holding her arms in the presence of the public. Briefly speaking, although the extra-marital relationship was considered to be immoral in the traditional society, they are becoming quite common in the modern Indian society. Again in *The Day in Shadow*, Simrit and Raj are having an affair even though Simrit is a divorced mother of many children. Earlier Raj had a love relationship with Shaila, and even after her marriage with another man, he wants to meet her. Like this, Summer Singh has also physical relation with Pixie and many other girls.

In Chapter-V, Nayantara Sahgal's feministic consciousness is discussed. Since she is a feminist novelist, she always speaks of and searches for identity, and makes an effort to understand the inner dimension of the female characters. In some of her novels, she portrays the sorrows and sufferings of women which result from the uneven power-division in marriage, privileging one sex at all times and marginalizing the other. It is a fact that most of the women of Sahgal's novels have broken the bond of marriage in order to fulfill the needs of their own self. Even if the divorce laws have made it easier now for women to take off the

yoke of an unhappy marriage, it doesn't put an end to the problems of the women still now. In her novel, *The Day in Shadow*, she exposes the experience of Simrit who has after many years of her married life decided to put an end to her unhappy marriage.

The last Chapter is but a summing-up of the preceding chapters of this thesis. Here, the different points of the above chapter are refreshingly put together. In brief, Nayantara Sahgal is burdened with the strange and many sided dimension of women's problems face women changing attitudes, mind and preoccupation of both men and women, rights and privileges of women as those of the men-folk of her society. It is true that Indian women are mostly suppressed by the Indian men after their marriage. In the present world of equality and globalization, this bondage system is not appreciable. In order to attain this aim of life the position of Indian women will also be uplifted in the present Indian society.

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