

## Changing Life-Style of Indian Women as Reflected in Selected Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

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### **Abstract-**

Indian society has practiced an extreme form of patriarchy since the beginning of known history, though the relics of matriarchy were found as late as the nineteenth century in certain regions. It is based on male predominance and female subordination. It praises the wife-mother role of women but treats her as no better than the legal, economic and sexual property of her husband. Women have no liberty, identity and recognition of her own and she faces identity crises as a small thing. This is sanctified by socio-legal treatises.

It has always been discussed that woman has suffered a lot from the very beginning of the age. She participated a great role in every age, in every society and today even in every sector e.g. weather it may be the field of defense, civil, sports or households. We all are agree on the point that woman has passed a very crucial time in past and even today also she is struggling to keep up her existence in society. It is said that literature is the mirror of society and it consists all the scenario of past. Some literary figures are there who time and again projected women in every sphere of society e.g. struggling, surviving and fighting. With the passage of time she got guidance and inspiration from her hardships of her fate.

Contemporary literary figures helped women a lot through sensational messages in literary texts. We will discuss and analyse in the forth coming pages regarding the place and position of women from the very beginning of society and along with this we will discuss about their upliftment and about how today she is capable in every field. Literature has participated a great role in this so called change in life style of modern women. With the passage of time they made changes in their life styles and in this change some of literary personalities among them Nayantara Sahgal, participated a lot through her novels.

This research paper has dealt with the textual analysis of the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Apart from the analysis made above, we would like to present some of our view points about the artistic and visionary modes of the novelist in this research paper.

## **Literary Introduction : Nayantara Sahgal**

Nayantara Sahgal is a great creative writer. She unhesitatingly expresses her views and vision in her fiction and non-fiction writings. But at the same time, she does not air her views through any direct authorial intrusion. She has no prefaces, no prologues and no epilogues. She allows all her characters to have their say and it is the entire work, and not she, that speaks for her. In determining her views we will surely have to consider the characters who have been sympathetically drawn and who tend to become her spoke persons. The characters who voice her views take active part in disentangling the skein of theme and structure of the novels.

Nayantara Sahgal is concerned with the domestic disharmony caused by the disagreement and dissension among couples. This is mostly because of the clash of values and attitude of the couples. The suppression and subjugation of Indian women is a matter of unhappiness to Nayantara Sahgal and is a recurring theme in her novels. She is a supporter of the liberation of Indian women.

### **Challenges Faced by Women in Modern Context –**

As we discussed above that women has changed her life style in modern context. Although their lives do not seem so easy because the entire process of is complex as Nayantara Sahgal seems to agree with it. A girl has to show her skills and under go a long test and interrogation by parents and guardians of the potential groom. The boy is rarely asked a question or required to prove his abilities. The traumatic experience is worsened when the girl is rejected for some reason or other and has to confront interrogation teams before selection. Even then the question of dowry remains. The girls who do not have parents or guardians to arrange and pay a dowry hardly get married.

Educated people are allowing some freedom to their daughters and delaying their marriages but considerations of caste, community, and religion are rarely brushed aside even there. All these malpractices are responsible for the pitiable condition of women. They have no freedom to chose their life partner and remain confined to homes even after marriage. Though some changes has come in the lives of women, yet most of them still face identity crises throughout their lives.

Woman always claims for equality of status with man. She claims for her individual identity. In spite of the fact that our constitution has granted equal rights to all and accepts women's equality with men, in real life the equality of status does not exist. A girl child is often considered a liability and after her marriage she is considered to be the property of man she is married to. She cannot pursue a career of her choice, she cannot bring up her children in the way she likes and she cannot pursue her interests without the permission of either her parents or her husband. Her identity is always linked to somebody. Either she is somebody's daughter or somebody's wife or somebody's mistress. She cannot exist in her own right. She does not have a right to her perceptions. Nayantara Sahgal is in favour of woman's rights in all the fields. She is in favour of her freedom of choice.

One important area in which a woman has to exercise her individuality is the area of sexuality. In our society women are not allowed to have their own sexual attitudes. Man forgets that sex is not something routine and physical; it is also an emotional involvement for a woman. Emotional fulfillment is an important part of woman's sexuality. It is because of the lack of emotional support.

Apart from the above mentioned challenges, Indian women are facing the cruelties of a drunkard husbands. They are considered as weaker sex but our constitutional arrangements make them support. Now a days women have equal opportunity in every field. Today, women are stepping equally in every

sector. Congress president Smt. Sonia Gandhi, BSP chief Maya Wati, chief minister of Rajasthan Vasundhara Raje, great women writers like Arundhati Roy , Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande ,Kamla Das and Anita Desai are some prominent women personalities whose name and fame is being sung with open voice in chorus not only in India but all over the world. Now a days a hot discussion is on its peak about an eminent sports woman M.C.Marycom who herself is live deity of struggle, now an Asian games boxing champion. The story of her hard life is also filmed in the movie Marycom. In this way , it can be said that women have big challenges in their lives yet they attain strength to cross the hurdles of life. Once again we would like to worth mentioning here that the eminent literary figure like Nayantara Sahgal projects her women characters in her novels in such a way that they directly or indirectly influence society. She arouses some women' issues and their solutions in her major novels.

### **Changing Life Style (Behaviour) of Indian Women in Sahgal's Major Novels -**

Nayantara Sahgal portrays the conflict between man and woman, conflict between their values, their approaches and their perceptions. Most of her women protagonists are in conflict with orthodoxy, which represents male values and patriarchal norms. In *A Time to Be Happy* the marriage of Kusum and Sandad is full of tension because of the conflict between orthodoxy and freedom. So is the case of Maya and her Deputy Collector husband. The conflict, however, is resolved within the bonds of marriage though the values of the male dominated world are not much damaged. Rashmi in "This Time of Morning" takes her conflict with her husband to a logical conclusion and seeks divorce, something not easily imaginable in a typical Indian society. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* offers a variation on the theme of conflict between women's longing for full life and male chauvinism. She suffers at the hands of her husband Inder, but finally she rebels against him and like

Nora in Ibsen's "A Doll's House" slams the door of the house on the face of her husband and takes refuge in freedom.

The conflict apparently arises from the premarital sex experience of Saroj in the days of her ignorance but essentially it is a battle against the privileges and prejudices of patriarchy. The conflict between Som and Simrit is again the same, though their story is different. Simrit has everything a woman of her status may desire but she has no space to exercise her choice. She is well fed, lives in style but when all said and done, she is a virtual slave with no volition on her own. She wakes up to her situation and exercises her will and gets a divorce from her husband.

In this conflict of man and woman, the novelist again shows her preference for balance and harmony. There are women like Mira (*This Time of Morning*), Gauri (*Storm in Chandigarh*), Mona (*Rich Like Us*) and Nadira (*A Situation in New Delhi*) who do not walk out on their marriage. Some of her women are orthodox and do not consider it proper to challenge the laws of patriarchy. Others are unhappy in marriage but seek different kind of resolution without violating the bonds of marriage.

In other conflicts too especially between tradition and modernity, the old and the new, individual and society, which can be easily found in her novels and which are related to political and gender conflicts, her basic urge is to move towards a balance. There is much which is dead wood about the old, the tradition and orthodoxy. She would like people to cast off this dead wood. And yet she does not favor total demolition of the past. The author reflects this view in her novel *A Situation in New Delhi*:

***Surely this was the only era in history when what had gone before had been earmarked for demolition to make room for change. In other ages men had built on what they already had, made changes from where they took over. No one had wanted to wipe out the***

***previous human record. But for the current crop of interpreters, nothing apparently grew.<sup>1</sup>***

Nayantara Sahgal believes in progress but not at the cost of human values. For her society is important but individual is more important. Her novels are the novels in which human concerns, human feelings and emotions, human suffering and happiness dominate. Her novels may be political in nature but parallel to the political theme runs the theme of human love, hate, jealousy, greed and other questions dealing with man's life on this earth and is not less important and dominant than the former.

The novel *A Time to Be Happy*, in spite of its political nature, deals with the tensions of the married life of Kusum and Sanad. It exposes hypocrisy in public life and the personal ambitions of the bureaucrats in New Delhi. *This Time of Morning*, her second novel, is much more than a political novel. It is the story of Nita's quest for identity. It is the story of Rashmi's unhappiness in her marriage and her quest for communication and commitment in interpersonal relationship. Similarly *Storm in Chandigarh* is not merely a story of the division of Punjab and confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal. Interwoven in this story is the story of love and passion of Inder and Saroj and casual betrayals occasional but significant involvement.

The existential problems of a divorced woman Simrit dominate in the novel *The Day in Shadow*. It also reveals a moving relationship between Simrit and Raj. These human concerns are very deftly juxtaposed and paralleled in the novel. To quote Jasbir Jain:

***Simrit and Som are already divorced and Simrit is trying to adjust to the aftermath of the divorce. What happens in the novel is a kind of resistance building up both to the political and personal situation, which culminates in Raj's decision to resist the political decisions and Simrit's decision to continue life as if the Consent Terms simply did not exist.<sup>2</sup>***

*Nayantara Sahgal* is manifestly a novelist of human concerns. Her human concerns are part of her essential humanism, her faith in individualism. She is the supreme example of an individualist. Two things which are essential for the attainment of individuality are freedom and self-fulfillment. Nayantara Sahgal prizes freedom for the individual above everything. She is an ardent advocate of democracy and democratic values. On the one hand she is profoundly aware of the perils of democracy, on the other she fully realizes the dangers that lie before the individual in quest of self-fulfillment. They are orthodox society, conventional morality, fears and superstitions, and inequality before law and so on. Most of the women characters in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal suffer because of social prejudices, prejudicial conventions, superstitions and baseless fears. Mira in *This Time of Morning* cannot understand why her daughter should even think of divorce. Because of her orthodox attitude she makes herself as well as her daughter suffer. Mona in *Rich Like Us* and Prabha in *A Time to Be Happy* are not happy in their marriage. Madhu in *A Situation in New Delhi* commits suicide because she carries the stigma of rape for no fault of hers. There is a deep social and religious prejudice against divorce. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* is a divorcee and has to work against odds in quest of her identity which is usually denied to women in our society. Bhushan Singh in *Mistaken Identity* cannot marry Razia, the girl he is in love with, because of deep religious prejudices.

Our conventional morality asks the woman to worship her husband and there are women who believe in this dictum with all their heart. Prabha Mathur in *A Time to Be Happy* and Mona in *Rich Like Us* accept bigamy though they suffer because of it. The concept of a girl being chaste before marriage has led many a defaulting woman to feel shame and guilt throughout her life.

There are various kinds of women in her novels. There are women who are self complacent and bound by conventional morality and the ritualistic form of religion. There are women like: Pinky, Tazi and Reba in *A Situation in New Delhi* for whom pursuit of wealth is the only object in marriage however unhappy they might be. And there are women who want to suffer passively but never to break out as Simrit is in the beginning. The novelist does not lash out at such women. She is gently tolerant of them. It is seldom if ever that she dips her pen in acid while writing about them. All the same, it is clear from her non-fictional writings that she likes and admires those women who strive to leave the beaten path, those who try not to blend and merge into any background they are thrown into but to maintain their own distinct individuality. Simrit is a woman after the writer's heart. It is, however Raj in *The Day in Shadow* who speaks for her views about what a woman could be and should be:

***She could be that rarity, a woman with a profession, an independent person living her own life. She didn't need a man for identity or status. There was an intensely private rapture in making and shaping one's own life that few people recognized.***<sup>3</sup>

Nayantara Sahgal envisions marriage as a sweet harmonious relationship based on mutual understanding, depth and truth. "Women are persons not possessions" is the note echoed in both the novels. Her women characters wish to combine marriage and their individuality in such a way that neither of them is harmed. They long for their independence away from hypocrisy, double standards and frivolities of the male dominated society. Sahgal staunchly believes that the growth of individual consciousness which should culminate in self identity is possible only in candid expression of one's feelings in communication done in free atmosphere. Simrit, in *The Day in Shadow*, is Sahgal's New Woman. She confidently takes decisions, fights

against those forces that are resolved to kill her spirit. Nayantara Sahgal, through the characterization of Simrit, projects the modern woman in India.

The women, especially leading women in Nayantara Sahgal, are frank about their sexuality. They think about sex and express their attitudes about sexuality explicitly. Even here too, the novelist does not want to go to the extreme and excludes lesbianism and other deviants of sex from her consideration. Her contribution is that she makes her women to express their attitudes to sexuality in a social and cultural environment where any discussion of sexuality by women is considered to be a taboo.

Nayantara Sahgal believes in reality not in illusion. She thinks that we are more inclined towards illusion than towards reality because of our cultural and religious background. Most of the women characters of Nayantara Sahgal, however, are willing to face reality and to cope with it. Some of them may take long to come out of the web of unreality but finally they come out of it. Rashmi (*This Time of Morning*) and Saroj (*Storm in Chandigarh*) have illusions about marriage and family life. However, by a slow process they realize the harsh and unpleasant reality of their life and go to the path of their self-fulfillment.

Thus the novelist's vision is that of balance and harmony. She is not inclined towards compromises. She has preference for democracy, for the blend of tradition and modernity and gender equality. She ardently believes in a society that allows full flowering of individuality. Her attitude is clear in her novels and non-fictional works. She wants freedom but not freedom beyond limits. She wants the old to accommodate the new, she believes in the fulfillment of the individual within society. She appears to be following the time honored advice of Alexander Pope given in a different context:

***Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.<sup>4</sup>***

Nayantara Sahgal is, thus, one of the most ardent advocates of woman's self-fulfillment but in the context of Indian culture and traditions. And her vision of balance and harmony is powerful enough to learn a lasting impact on her creative works especially novels.

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