

**BREAKING THE BONDS: WOMEN IN THE FICTION OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL**

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A woman can rarely lead an independent life. If she makes an attempt she has to face various kinds of problems and is looked down upon and treated as an outcaste by society. Women in our society is attributed the position of an appendage to her husband. Nayantara Sahgal is conscious of the fact that women have their existence as an individual who have their own rights and wishes. This paper makes an attempt to show how the women characters of Sahgal are conscious of their emotional needs and hence try for a change of order that starved them of individual fulfillment.

Keywords: *Postcolonial, Self-Fulfillment, Identity, Patriarchy*

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Postcolonial Indian literary scene witnessed a large number of women writers in English and in other regional languages, who instead of writing about political, social conditions focused on the inner world of women. At the core of these writers is the theme of women in search of the true identity and freedom. The female characters of these writing having gone through the gamut of different kinds of bitter experience in their lives such a physical abuse, psychological exploitations at the hands of the patriarchy feel homeless and suffer the identity crisis syndrome.

Many writers of postcolonial India being influenced by the writings of the western writers are making an attempt to portray the predicament of women. They are adequately reflecting the change, which has come in the life of Indian women who have now become conscious of their 'self'. The women writers are more successful in voicing the experience of women and in articulating a genuinely female consciousness.

One such brilliant novelist with sparkling wit, who has earned a unique place in Indian English fiction by her significant and rich contributions is



Nayantara Sahgal. She has dealt with almost various ramifications of women's marathon struggle for seeking their identity and space in this patriarchal society. In their emancipation they have not been expatiated as figures rather than the real incarnation of women with their feelings, will, self respect, a soul which wants to get an outlet and certainly with a desire of solace for their cramped souls.

Nayantara Sahgal is conscious of the fact that women have their existence as an individual who have their own rights and wishes. She fights and writes against the timid self of women as well as men's protectoral shell. In her novels women are not a 'mere goddess or an automation', they move through a process of transformation and move from weakness to strength, from indecision to self-assertion and from bondage to freedom.

Most of the women characters in the novels of Sahgal feel bonded within the so-called sacred bonds of marriage. They object to being treated as a piece of furniture or doormat. They rebel against the hostile environment in which a woman is forced to live. They question the validity of the accepted set of values and strive to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves.

These women try to seek fulfillment in marriage but if they fail to attain it they do not hesitate to break this so-called sacred bond. The main reason for these otherwise affluent women's sad plight is their dependence on men and the horrifying experience they have to undergo in their struggle to release themselves from this bondage. A woman's craving for being treated as man's equal and her longing for things like mutual trust, love and understanding have been brought out very clearly by Nayantara Sahgal.

Women characters of Sahgal are conscious of their emotional needs and hence try for a change of order that starves them of individual fulfillment. They are usually not ready to submit to the customs of wedlock if their wedded life is replete with traumas and sufferings on the contrary they choose to rebel against the humiliations and marital disharmony and walk out of such a wedlock, which locks up their freedom as an individual.

Nayantara Sahgal shows women suffering in marriage and then deciding to come out of the

stifling bondage by opting for divorce. Saroj, Simrit, Rashmi, all leave or break the marriage which does not allow them to live life in their own way. They have no faith in the traditional belief that marriage is a bond of seven births and that cannot be broken in any circumstance or situation. They do not consider it as their fate, which they have to accept willy-nilly. Although these women face shattering experiences after divorce yet they have the solace of getting out of the prison house of loveless or meaningless marriage.

Sahgal in her novel *This Time of Morning* portrays Rashmi who finds an escape from her shattered matrimonial bond with Dalip drifting towards Neil. She is hopeful for a better life in future without her husband Dalip. "Away from it she was beginning to understand that a part of life, though destroyed, could be rebuilt and then go on, incredibly, as before, atleast in bare outline" (*Morning 10*). She is a 'new woman' who drifts towards another man to fill the empty corner of her soul. She cannot accept the subjugation of her married life with Dalip. Although this new relationship brings her no satisfaction but it gives some solace to her wounded psyche.

More articulate and varied in their search for freedom and equality are the women in *This Time of Morning*-- Uma and Leela, in their reckless search for freedom utilize men but damage their own self-esteem. Ceila, Barbara and Nita, falling a victim to the 'charishma' of Kalyan, betray the failure of their search for identity. In Rashmi alone is visible the glimpse of the efforts begun in Kusum. Her search for communication takes her to the European architect Neil who "was not concerned about the tangle from which she had emerged" (*Morning 157*). She realizes the incompacency of their undemanding relationship and finally moves to Rakesh with whom she would like much to "share".

In the novel *Storm in Chandigarh*, Saroj suffers because of the brutishness of an uncompromising and fickle husband, Inder. She lives in a state of fear. She points out,

Half the time one is afraid, you know-- of saying the wrong thing or of being misunderstood-- just of being oneself and being punished for it. So one spends such a lot of time



acting, or atleast hiding and that's very tiring
(*Storm 95*)

Saroj does not feel free to talk to Inder because Inder does not encourage any communication and this is the main problem in their relationship. When Saroj tells him that she needs "people to talk to", he gets agitated and quips back, "Talk about what? What is the mania for talk?"(207)

There is no mutual understanding, internal intimacy and emotional love between them. Saroj expects equality and a liberal atmosphere of freedom but she fails to get it from Inder. The advent of Vishal Dubey becomes the liberating agent for Saroj. She moves out of Inder's house, which was like a prison where she was incarcerated--- physically and spiritually.

"Simrit's story in *The Day in Shadow*, is in many ways a continuation of Saroj" (Jain 56). Simrit, like Saroj breaks away from her husband Som when she finds the world she cohabits with her husband to be uncongenial for the development and fulfillment of her individual self. She suffers the moral brutality of her husband in the form of divorce settlement yet she refers to "bend the knee, bow the head"(*Shadow*181). She cannot continue her life with Som, for in their relationship there was no intensity, depth and devotion. She felt suffocated in the world of Som. It is the clash of personalities that leads to their separation. Simrit refuses physical intimacy with Som when she feels that there is no emotional involvement. This hurts Som's ego and expedites their separation. Simrit dares to leave her husband although she is fully aware that the society does not recognize a woman's identity apart from her husband's. She resents the attitude of the society that demands the identity of woman outside herself ; "Wasn't it odd, when you were standing there yourself, fully a person, not to be asked what you did?"(6). She snaps a meaningless conjugal relationship, a matrimonial bond that had lost all its sanctity and solidarity. Her relationship with Raj who is fighting a similar battle on the political front exists on the equal footing.

The works of Nayantara Sahgal invariably point to an inner exhilaration suggesting the beginning of a fresh awakening. Her woman strive to overcome their perplexities, sense of isolation, fear and

emotional vulnerability and find new horizons of self-esteem and liberation. They aspire to inhale the oxygen of freedom that nourishes individual self. Their concept of freedom is not just confined to the realms of social and economic freedom. It is the freedom of mental make up and emotional attitude. They desire self-fulfillment; they demand a rightful place, recognition and regard, which are promoted by an inner urge to make her existence a meaningful one.

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