

FEMINISTIC APPROACH IN THE NOVELS OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Nayantara Sahgal (1927) is a well-known Indian writer of English and her fiction deals with Indian elite responding to the crises engendered by political change. She is a member of one of the country's most high-profile political family viz. Nehru- Ghandi family, the second of third daughter born to Jawahar Lal Nehru's sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Her fiction's themes recur in all narratives on modern India. Politics, Colonialism, Nationalism, Partition, Nationalism, Communalism, Religion and Feminism and man-woman relationship are the important. Like Anita Desai and Shashi Despande she also comments on the freedom of females. Her voice is louder which the result of her unhappy married life was. The typical male isolation that she encountered there as well as the gross injustice to females in social life that she observed made her voice strident in protest against exploitation of women. After a critical overview of these novels we become aware of certain them can of the novelist. Her novels present the variegated picture of Indian womanhood. Women are the centrifugal force in all her novels. Sahgal's women from *A Time to be Happy* to *Mistaken Identity* portrays women's struggle against subversive forces and continue their journey towards self- discovery. This search for identity begins with her very first novel. The important point about Sahgal's narrative trajectory is that it does not hesitate to incorporate gender narrative within its ambit. Her female character highlights the different positions available to women in Indian society.

A Time to be Happy (1957) is the first novel in which she present many faces of women i.e. the narrator's mother who is the symbol of "eternal women hood ". She presents the pictures the picture of the traditional Indian women-Sacrificing her dreams and desires, adjusting to the point of compromise and in perfect bliss. Her happiness came not from satisfactory circumstances of life but from her acceptance of it. Maya, Shivpal and Kusum are the other female character in the novel. Here Maya seems bolder then Kusum, who becomes important as she in sharp centres to the traditional, self, negating ideal Indian women. Here use can observe that Maya's quest for identity is very much like that of Rashmi's in *This Time of Morning* like Uma fails to get any response in marriage. Like Uma, Maya is childless too. But quite unlike Uma this tragedy does not make her weak. Other women like Savitri and Prabha Mathur seem to be cast in traditional way. While some of them are educated and modern like Deviaki and Kusum. From the archetypal women of *A Time to be Happy*, Sahgal portrays the women like Devika and Lalita of new generation who dare to look beyond marriage.

Her next novel *This Time of Morning* (1965) presents the contrast between elder generation and younger one. One side, there is Mira who is the devoted wife of Kailas. She has experienced a rare marital bliss. For her identification with the cause of her husband is the proper way to reach to her own identity. But her daughter Rashmi naturally gives Mira cultural shock when she tells her that she would like to get divorce. Rashmi is a strong woman who loves life and believes in living it up. But Rashmi's search for self is delayed because of her indecision. Her relation with a stranger Neil Berenson serves as a remedy and relieves her of all tensions females, though any to temporarily. The portrays of Rashmi certainly does not adhere to the concept of new women. On the other hand and or more then Rashmi it is Nita, whose search for selfhood is more pronounced and overt. Her character clearly explores the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage. She is the symbol of modern women, who is an open minded woman who simply hates old traditional establishments. She is a fun loving girl who is also fond of cigarettes and loves dancing in clubs. But her parents act as opposing forces against her efforts towards self-realization. Her concept of her life partner is quite obvious. She hates the idea of being a parcel bride. On the other hand, she wants a soul-mate than a room-mate. But her parents choose Vijay for her. The very idea of her having to share a bed with Vijay is repulsive. During this situation she feels attraction towards Kalyan Sinha. It is as if she has taken revenge on her parents as well as Vijay after their marriage. In this respect she is very much like to Leela who also comes from an equally orthodox back round. Uma Mitra is another woman, a victim of such confused notions of her life. She is the wife of Arjun Mitra an official's who is much older than she and his too much involvement in his official work tends him to forget the

emotional as well as physical needs of Uma. Arjune, instead understanding her feelings, cuts her off his life. In fact she is the victim of social system which she leaves no scope for her for individual freedom. And it is the emotional vacuumness of her which forces her to seek physical fulfilment from outside this meaningless marriage. Here Sahgal says-“Uma was a woman with appetites that her husband could not satisfy, so she indulged then elsewhere, man does it and there is no comment” (p.91).

Her next novel *Storm in Chandigarh (1969)* is the statement on the need to redefine virtue and morals. The protagonist shows first time that women have a right to live as they wish to. Saroj and Meera are the important female characters in the novel. Saroj is the wife of Inder, who is typical male chauvinist who believes women should have no reason to complain about their freedom. Saroj is tortured by her husband for pre-marital affair of hers. He treats her merely as wife in orthodox tradition. As a result she developed a relationship with Vishal but it never reach to its satisfied culmination. Inder's world is a world different from that of Saroj. Though he himself had several experiences with Mara, wife of Jit. Infact, Saroj is a forlorn soul with Inder as he makes her believe that she is unclean and pervert. On the other hand Vishal tells her that true partnership consists in accepting an individual as a whole with all his or her shortcomings. Saroj finally succeeds in shaking off and breaking free from her marriage because it was choking her. She throws away the burden of bondage and feels free. Her final departure from Inder's home symbolised her breaking off from the sense of guilt which Inder had infused in her. Here we can observe that if Saroj search for selfhood takes her away from home, Mara instinct for self realisation and self determination brings her back to its folds. Though Jit gives no reason for complaint his passivity frustrates her deeply while Inder aggressiveness fills her with life. But when Jit tries to amend their relationship she comes back to him realising truly and finally that Jit is perfect partner in her journey to the discovery herself.

Simrit, in *The Day in Shadow (1971)* is a projection of Sahgal herself and her search of her identity run parallel to Sahgal's search for self-assertion. The very first chapter shows that Simrit has left Sam's world who is a traditional male and to him Simrit is merely a lovely showpiece of his house. He has belonged to a world where women for use had been the rule to long. His chauvinism is seen everywhere, not only in his interaction with his wife but also with his children. Now she simply wants to exit from this socially imposed bondage i.e. their marriage. But freedom becomes impossible within the marriage. She finds that marriage is one mistake which has to pay for all her life. Divorce then seems the only way out from all this. Luckily from Simrit-Raj breathes life into her again and like the phoenix she raises from her ashes. Raj lets her be. She has the silent assurance that “she would be the part of the process”. Now she feels that she is not weak and also have the existence like other human beings. Pixie is the other female character of the novel and her mental and physical exploitation by Sumer Singh also shows her quest for identity. She is a widow with a child. Sumer's character is the resemblance of Sam's character. The difference in the story of Simrit and Pixie is part accidental part character related. Gauri is not a typical woman of Sahgal. She is fashionable yet docile woman. For her materialistic pleasure of life are so important that she had no aspirations and ambitions beyond them. She is much like Pinky of *Rich like Us* -happy with her life simply because it is smoothly going on. As far as the question of identity concerned, she is blissfully ignorant of it.

Devi, is an important female character in *A Situation in New Delhi (1977)* is an exception not only among Sahgal's women but also among the majority of women we came across. She has truly achieved the dream of equality of sexes. She enjoys freedom and can have a number of affairs with men but also among the majority of women we came across. She has truly achieved the dream of equality of sexes. She enjoys freedom and can have a number of affairs with men. In her character, Sahgal has tried to bring out the conflict of two aspects of a woman –the woman and the cabinet minister. As a politician she searches for satisfaction in the mass movement led by Usmaan. In her case we can observe that neither Usmaan nor Michael could give satisfaction to a woman within her. Men desire her but she likes to live in shadow of her brother. She in fact coexists with her brother. And soon after her brother, she becomes too much of a minister, and ignores herself as woman. She admits that the presence of Michal is like a soothing therapeutic marriage. If Michal is a clear friend, Usmaan gives me courage. In other words Michal and Usmaan are two strong pillars which support the being of Devi. Madhu is the other important character in the novel. It is the story of a girl whose very existence is crushed simply because she has become a victim of male lust. Even she is not allowed to shed tears, to complain and to appeal against her persecutors. Even parents are not at all bothered absent her mental anguish. In sharp contrast with Madhu's doomed life is the contended and happy life of Pinki in *Rich like Us*, who is a truly feminine woman. Her type of women is thinking women- sensible, defiant and intelligent. Pinki is a submissive character who has independent personality.

Sahgal's next novel *Rich like Us (1985)* has her first woman who is a foreigner and it also has her second and last career women Sonali. The imposition of Emergency in 1975 has been used as the backdrop. The story is the

presented through the conscience of two women Sonali and Rose who are the specimen of modern women. Sonali who grows up with a dream to fulfil a new tradition to create for own independence. Her job requires her to compromise a many issues. She has been an independent girl since her collage days. At oxford she felt a new found freedom. Sonali is not only mentally and economically free but also emotionally strong. In her rejection of Ravi Kachru, his childhood friend she rejects the borrowed order and security of home. She learns from her family history, she is not the only victim of the system. In some respects Sonali is a continuation of Devi. Both are single, free and independent. Sonali's struggle for self-determination is somewhat different that of other women. Another female character is Rose; a friend of Sonali is facing such like problems at home front. Rose the foreigner is as much a picture of victimization, as is Sonali the Indian woman. Rose left her people, her company and even her self-respect at times for Ram. It was only for love that she defied her family her parents, and her religion and come to India for Ram at his wife. Forgetting herself she comes with Ram in order to search for her new existence as a living being. Her submission is a result of her strength and her pride. Sahgal says for her-"a woman's instinct to cherish and preserve". Mona and Rose the two wronged wives of Ram explores the concept of sister hood. These two women then present the supreme example of love and sharing. Their relationship is based on natural sympathy trust and mutual sympathy and trust. During the time of Mona's death, Rose promises to look after Dev her stepson and his new bride which helps Mona to die in peace. Here the writer exploits the possibility of co-operation among women which may many lead to freedom.

Her next novel *Plans for Departure (1987)* is primarily a female's story. Like Rose the protagonist Ann Hansen is the second female foreigner in the Sahgal's fiction. But there is a difference between the words of these two women. Hansen is a Danish woman and her sojourn to Indian for a few months. She is unmarried and relatively free and she has come to India in search of hr existence. She breaks away from the cosy comforts of her home only to be herself. This journey with the aim of soul searching is undertaken by many a women of Sahgal. Actually Anna faces identity crisis which is the tragedy of women in male -dominated society. If she wants to fly free, she is forced to love all such relation behind. Anna loves Nicholas but she loves herself as well. The very thought of her life ending at the altar of marriage is so horrifying that she cannot bear is she has two thoughts about her priorities in first life and then freedom. She is not like her predecessor Rose. She left Nicholas behind when she feels he may create hindrance in her path of self realization. During her stay in Himapur she gets an acquainted to Henry Brewster the D. M and develops and intellectual rapport with him. Then she developed a personal interest in Brewster by then still without wasting a second thought she leaves him. Because his integrity is doubtful to her she suspects. Henry has killed his wife. So she cannot see herself marriage a murderer. She also takes keen interest in Indian struggle for independence. Tilak, who is a bold male which wins Anna's appreciation. On the other hand she is full of sympathy for the defiant freedom khudiram. Being a women she has faced threats to her existence, hence she knows the value of freedom. Lucille croft and Stella Brewster are other female characters in the story. Lucille though a daring even hostile spirit married Marlowe, a missionary with fanatic zeal. For Marlowe's Lucillies existence is meaningful only in as much as she is good faithful wife and she loyal to his cause when this bond breaks Marlowe's discards her like a hot brick, Lucille or Lulu decides to walk out of this marriage. She plans a Journey to freedom. But not every woman's dream came true she is found dead before she could undertake this journey. Her dream of self-determination remaining unfulfilled and goes to the grave with her. Stella Brewster, the estranged wife of Henry Brewster, is another woman like Lulu realises that Henry thanks her life partner could never identify with Henry and gradually she gets dream towards Pryor. Stella however is not like Lucille. She does not hesitate in breaking the bond once she finds it suffocating. With Pryor she marches ahead to a new world when she will be allowed to remain what she really is.

Sahgal's next novel *Mistaken Identity (1988)* is written in the backdrop of Indian National movement. No doubt the hero of the novelists is made the fame like Zeal of the novelist has not died down. The destiny of Bhusan Singh, the hero of the novel is dominated by two important female in his life, first is Razia and second the queen of Vijayagarh, who is his mother. His mother is traditional but not ready to accept the traditional ways. Here is an ever thirsty soul looking for horizons beyond her reach. She finds it difficult to accept her husband's second marriage but she does not forgive his third marriage of her husband. Defying all conventions, she engrosses herself in her son, forgetting the very existence of her husband. In the novel mother's desire to snowfall is symbolic of her longing to break free of all norms. Parallel to the story of mother is the story of Sylla a Parsee girl. She is comparatively free and uninhabited. This woman is refreshingly aware of herself as a person. She has male friends and with them she is not only involved physically but also influenced on them. Another woman in search of her identity is Bhusan Singh's school teacher whose meta-morph sis is incredible. From being a school teacher, she has become the head and guardian of the "fallen sister". They take active part in the national movement seems to provide them with an opportunity to discover one. Sahgal's women are not hostile to men but they would certainly not settle for a subordinate position. Sahgal tries to make plainly clear that no relation is good or bad in itself; it has to be free from all ladles. Even extra marital and pre-marital relations are not only

“Entirely Immoral” if they tend to fulfil the person as individual. That which saps individual of their individuality is immortal and that which cures them of all frustrates in wholesome and ethical. So we can assume that the concern of feminism is the need society of freedom in the context of feminism of Indian Sensibility. She has many disturbing questions to deal with the agony and pain of women in her novels. Marriage according her is a traditional basis for men-women relationship may or may not provide the conditions necessary for individual growth. Arranged marriages ensured a minimum affinity of back ground but it is not an assurance to Nayantara: “There’s only one safety in India, for same time to come, and that is to marry in your own state into a background you thoroughly understand... that kind of a things endures.” Further she opines that in India women are not always taken into confidence by their men. Men take decision first and then impose it on women, who by then have no choice but to submit it. In fact marriage for her is a lifelong damage which made women “restless” and “uneasy” and his code of social bondage opens up or imposed on them a range of demands- demands of motherhood and sacrifice. No Doubt here are some female characters in her novels i.e. Devi and Sonali who chose to live their achieving lives like males. But the stereotype rules most women's lives. Even the T.V serials like Ramayana and Mahabharata have done nothing to dispel it, and a good deal to refurbish it. They have stimulated no debate about why Rama who threw out his beloved wife Sita, is the example of perfect manhood, or why Gandhari who has moronic enough to keep her eyes bandaged because her husband was blind. It is clear the epics can only be re-examined when women take charge of their lives, when they dissect the stories of the female sacrificial examples they have been taught to worship, and ask "Could she have done this of her own free will?" and if so, what manner of horrifying social pressures created such a will? Through the rewriting women do, new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. So overall Nayantara Sahgal is a bold, realistic and a courageous woman writer in Indian English fiction with a practical approach and her rebellious intent want Indian women to be free from her chains. She infect stands for the new humanism and a new morality according to which women are not be taken a mere a toy, an object of lust and momentary pleasure, but men's equal and honoured partner, in word and deed, as against the inhuman, traditional postures, 'old, impossible ideas', taboos and prejudices' which were getting obsolete must be cast aside like old, worn out and torn clothes. Thus we can observe here that Sahgal's fiction has golden touch of feminine sprit. In fact she has given her women a “Voice” with primal intense energy.

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