

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.1.08>

Human relationship in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

Neha Kumari

(M. Phil Scholar)

Department of English

Dr. C .V. Raman

University, Kota, Bilaspur

Dr. Om Prakash Tiwari

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Dr. C .V. Raman

University, Kota, Bilaspur

Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is an Indian writer in English. She was one of the first female Indian writers in English to receive wide recognition. Her concern for women is based more on humanism rather than that of feminism. Her feminism does not go beyond treating women as an individual. During 1950's period, Nayantara Sahgal emerged as one of the most significant voices among women writers in the contemporary Indian writing in English. Nayantara Sahgal is a prolific writer who has eight novels to her credit, two biographies, two political commentaries and a large number of articles in various newspapers and magazines. She is a recipient of the prestigious 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for her novel 'Rich Like Us' (1985), the 'Sinclair Award' and the 'Common Wealth Award for Eurasia' for her novel 'Plans For Departure' (1986). Her fiction is closely interwoven with the fabric of interpersonal relationships not in the political and social milieu of India. Various dimensions of human relationships, man-woman particularly are the main thesis, we do find in all her novels. Man-Woman relationship holds a vital place in these relationships and the novelist deals with this dimension of relationship with full concern and broad perspective.

Keywords: Feministic perspective, Indian English fiction, Women in society

Introduction:

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the great Indian novelists in English. She has published eight novels, six books of non-fiction, and some short stories. She spent much of her childhood at Anand Bhawan, the ancestral home of the Nehru's in Allahabad. One could say that politics

is in her blood. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, was her mother's brother, while her father, a Sanskrit scholar, died of an illness contracted when he was jailed for participating in the struggle for freedom. The novelist's mother, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, was an active member of the Indian National Congress, and went to jail several times. Her novels deal with human relationship, especially women struggling against oppression and injustice heaped upon them in the name of tradition and culture. Nayantara portrays the inalienable right of freedom for women in many of the characters in her novels. As a writer with feminist concerns, Nayantara Sahgal progeny of the tradition where in power itself is defined as goddess ' Sakti ', a female symbol.

Nayantara's first autobiographical novel 'Prison and Chocolate Cake' which was published in 1954 contented the accounts of her parents' imprisonment during the freedom struggle. She dedicated her second novel 'From Fear Set Free' to her husband Gautam Sahgal while she was trying to save her marriage. 'From Fear Set Free' is her second autobiographical novel in which depicted every minute detail to the picture of Gautam's world which was new and very different to her. Parents want daughters suitably wedded and sons established in good jobs.

Kusum unhappiness in 'A Time to be Happy' reflects her own and the coming together of Sanad and Kusum. Kusum is perhaps a wishful projection of her own desire. In the next novel 'This Time of Morning' Rashmi feels smothered in her marriage to Dalip and in the end they are separated. Nayantara also decided to make a life with Nirmal Mangat Rai without the conventional prop of marriage a decision forced on her ironically enough, by economic consideration. The need to be her own account is the major cause for the change in her attitude to writing. After her divorce she plunged simultaneously into two different kinds of writing fiction and journalism. They are almost "Irreconcilable spheres" but she has succeeded in reconciling them and has established herself both as a creative writer and a political columnist. Her novels express both her involvement with politics and the men and women behind political ideas and action. With 'A Situation in New Delhi' she has entered a new phase of her creative career. In this novel she has succeeded in going beyond the personal to the universal. In her personal life Nayantara refuses to believe that non-violence was a spent force even when she was confronted by the partition of India and its aftermath. Its failure at a critical juncture revealed not its inadequacy but the weakness of the human material.

In her next novel 'Storm in Chandigarh' Nayantara Sahgal is concerned with an India which is bewildered in its retreat from Gandhi's values. The retreat has penetrated in to the personal world and while on the one hand it is a confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal, on the other, it is one between Saroj and her husband Inder. Saroj was not happy with her husband Inder. She likes freedom, which Inder doesn't like. On the other hand Vishal likes freedom; he thought it is a necessary thing for everyone, as plants freely grow towards

the sun. If plant have freedom to grow to live then why not woman? Vishal said -"But there's a yearning for freedom in everything that lives. The way plants grow towards the sun, no power on earth can prevent that happening. And in people since time began, sooner or later, in one way or another, the yearning bursts out and spills over. We haven't begun to realize that yet. Freedom is just an isolated political achievement. It hasn't become a habit of mind or a way of life.

Nayantara Sahgal believes that freedom is very important for every one whether it may be women or men. Freedom is not a gift. It is "An achievement" and every generation has to do its job well in order to continue and preserve the tradition of freedom. Saroj likes freedom; she always goes here and there with Vishal which Inder doesn't like. When Inder makes a barrier in her freedom she doesn't care for it, she starts caring of her children. "Feeling strong and serene", unmoored against loneliness and most of all against futility. "There was a child to be born, a life to be lived, hers its mould. "When she was married with Inder, she was very innocent but Inder was totally person of different culture, he doesn't like freedom. On the other hand Saroj comes from a family or atmosphere of freedom. According to Saroj woman have right to prove herself individually.

In 'The Day in Shadow' Simrit was not happy with Som. She was no longer able to follow the goals Som had set for herself and the inability seemed to be spreading though her veins affecting very womb of her desires. There is no understanding between Som and Simrit. So they want divorce but divorce is not easy. It was painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The issue of marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on. After all, Simrit and Som are divorced but their divorce doesn't prove that marriage is not a social failure. It is an understanding between men and women. They both are responsible for its success. If they understand each other and pay equal attention to each other then divorce is an impossible matter. Marriage is not a bond or slavery for any one: it may be man and woman. It is just a mutual understanding. If there is an understanding between husband and wife then this is a bond made from heaven. In our male dominating society there is very least position in female, male thought women an adjusting object but it is woman. As Man and woman have same emotion, feeling, and sensitivity. She is same and more than a male. As she is a centre point of a family, things start from her and end from her. So she has written to demand full attention from the society i.e. her relatives. In every case in Nayantara's novel when she is neglected, it may be home or society, she raised her head for against her husband, her relatives and her surroundings. On the other hand in 'The Day in Shadow' Raj and Simrit loves each other and they have a good understanding, so they want to marry. They thought that a permanent place and happiness comes just after marriage. According to the novelist a mutual understanding is very necessary for marriage. In our society, men can be as unhappy as women but women suffers much because women cannot express herself, her feelings, her emotions are buried in this man dominating society.

‘In Mistaken Identity’ the narrator Bhushan Singh's mother when she was 5 years old, she got married with her father and after a great waiting she gave birth Bhushan. She loves Yusuf- a comrade as she doesn't pay proper attention and communication. It is a fully political novel and the whole novel there is a description of love of affairs of the narrator and his mother. The narrator loves his mother very much and she understands her son's everything. As she was married in very early age so was not literate, she was very intellectual woman. She knows very well that she is not good in nature and that is why the society doesn't accept her. At the end of the novel the narrator saw his mother in very adverse physical and mental condition. He writes, “Early one morning she left the family mansion. I saw her hesitate for a second at the entrance and hold her breath before she walked out to star in the most sensational scandal of the generation. Society has not forgiven this liaison between an illiterate Rani and her communist lover, and the shameless public exhibition they make of it. But mother and Yusuf are so love mad, they haven't noticed their notoriety. I can't say any of it surprises me as far as mother is concerned. As I said, this is the Ganges heartland where we breathe the air of Miracle”.

In the novel ‘Mistaken Identity’ her concern is with her religion and religious attitudes which she feels go a long way to explain political and emotional stances and also personal relationship. Her concern has been a consistent one though it has received scant attention from critics bogged down as they are by conventional approaches to her work. Sahgal's work cannot be divided in two themes like tradition versus modernity of east-west encounter and I should think the some should be true of most other writers-for the simple reason that is amounts to a crier- simplify action.

Tradition in India is mainly a religious one, for Hinduism which is the religion of the majority is not confined to temples or others places of worship. The duality of Hinduism is touched upon in her very first novel ‘A Time to Be Happy’. The central philosophy of Karma can itself be interpreted to support two ways of life. If on the one hand it encourages passively for man's present life as the result of his past actions. On the other it is a challenge for it lies within human power to create a better future for himself. The narrator in ‘A Time to Be Happy’ explains that it places responsibility on the individual.

Man woman relations and attitudes toward marriage, divorce and other related issues are governed by religious view by the examples set by the characters of the religious scriptures. Sahgal's works are not easy to define, for the very simple reason that its continuity is deceptive and the experimentation is woven intricately into it, at many levels. There is a great deal of continuity in thematic concerns where personal and political freedom is concerned, and the individual relationship to social structure is important. But there are differences in points of view and perspectives. The political novels also expand and change it to accommodate other subgenres.

Nayantara Sahgal shows her acute awareness of the dependent status of women in society. Not only as a woman who had an unsatisfying experience of marriage, but also as a perceptive and sensitive observer of the social scene, she realizes that their status in India is like that of a second-class citizen. She is aware of the confining role of marriage as an institution for women. Her sympathetic portrayal of women like Maya in 'A Time To Be Happy', Simrit in 'The day in Shadow' and Saroj in 'Storm in Chandigarh' leads one to the conclusion that she would rather have marriage as a contract wherein both the parties have duties and responsibilities rather than as a "sacred" institution in which fore-determined roles have to be believed out. Of course, the novelist is not blind to the other aspect of the problem. That is why men like Vishal are tormented by the female-automations. She is fully aware that men can be as unhappy as women when the relationship is not a satisfying one. Nevertheless, she seems to stress the point that ordinarily it is women who suffer more and are denied the right of self-expression.

The work Nayantara Sahgal not only constitutes an impressive segment of the Indian-English novel but also sums up the saga of India's struggle for freedom and the changes it has brought about in the traditional social set-up in India. Although Mrs. Sahgal is unique in her artistic manner of possessing the resources of national experience. The major legacy of cultural change in modern India has been the new historical sense, containing in itself a feeling for the past as well as awareness of the future. Humanitarianism is much more than a mere 'undercurrent' in Nayantara Sahgal's fiction. She believes that no amount of material progress can be a substitute for the individual instinct to realize itself in a free environment according to its own potentialities. The Marxist interpretation attempts to obliterate the individual by emphasizing the economic aspect over every other. "A country battered into conformity or confined by ideological prejudices" can never inhabit individuals. There is a crying need for a change. It is perhaps natural for people to turn violent when "idealism and integrity have yielded to unscrupulous ambition in national life." We are urgently in "need of revolution, both social and economic. It becomes of terrible and crucial importance what kind of human material leads this revolution and in what manner". It becomes incumbent upon the intellectuals to involve themselves with the people and see that the "human essence" is not abandoned. "To see that justice is done is not an optional task of the intellectual. Rather "it should be the essence of his functioning" Steward D. McBride in his interview with Nayantara Sahgal for the "Christian Science Monitor" reported how much the novelist felt "frustrated with the failure of India's intelligentsia" to resist the Emergency repression in India. Individuals have to come to their own selves for "no human problem will be understood or solved unless human beings regard one another as equals". Guarding freedom is a common cause, for freedom is not a gift. It is "an achievement" and every generation has to do its bit to "continue and preserve the tradition of freedom".

Sahgal's intentionally delineated the man-woman relationships with various dimensions. Some relationships are happy and cherishing the conventional values without taking forefront the injustice and cruelty of Hindu orthodoxy to women particularly. In the other type of relationship, there is a strong sense of individuality and an analytical mind, and ready to break the imposed social and traditional walls, accepting modern western values. In her novels, Sahgal reveals the changes in relations with women before and after marriage. In short, Nayantara Sahgal's women are of the view that they should move with the time and they should not compromise with the issue of their individual freedom in our male-dominated society. The feminist in Sahgal always insists on women's equality at par with men. While delineating the relations, the novelist has given the soft corner to women and has considered the women as the victim and man is responsible for her degradation. Woman suffers not only by man's act of physical violence, but she is often emotionally hurt and crippled though his arrogance, cynicism and indifference.

Mrs. Sahgal's work has a certain dialectical quality. Her work affirms the life-giving quality. But unlike some other Indian novelists in English, she seeks to excoriate the disease of the Indian tradition. She is thus neither an out-and-out conformist nor a thoroughbred non-conformist. She is neither too submissive to the dictates of an orthodox tradition nor too much in love with revolutionary romanticism. She accepts the composite character of the Indian tradition and affirms its catholicity which allows for the human being maximum freedom. She, therefore, achieves for her protagonists an identity of Indian tradition.

References

- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1963
Sahgal, Nayantara, *Storm in Chandigarh*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1969
Sahgal, Nayantara, *The Day in Shadow*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1976
Jain, Jasbir, *Nayantara Sahgal*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1978
Sahgal, Nayantara, *A Time to be Happy*. New Delhi: Jaico Publishing, 2002
Sahgal, Nayantara, *Mistaken Identity*. Harper Collins Publisher, India, New Delhi 2003