



FEMINISTIC SENSIBILITY IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S NOVEL: *THE DAY IN SHADOW*

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to display the feministic approach of Nayantara Sahgal. Every novel of Sahgal is women – centric, which highlights the problems faced by women and also aware them of their emotional needs. In this novel Sahgal exposes the grief – stricken experience of divorced middle –age women. She is deeply anxious regarding the basic requirement of freedom for women. Simrit in this novel wants to land on her own feet and appreciate independence, assertiveness and self-assurance. Simrit's desire for freedom and individuality compels her file for divorce. She does want to be recognized as her husband's wife but by her own self. The novel represents the unpleasant creation of the male society. Thus, Sahgal presents a novel element to Indian English fiction through the investigation of the disturbed emotional response – a characteristic new Indian spectacle.

Keywords: *Individuality, Freedom of women, married life, divorced women,*

INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* exposes the grief-stricken experience of a divorced middle-aged woman, Simrit's marriage to Som, an industrialist, turns out to be a tragedy. This novel fictionalizes Sahgal's own experience post her divorce. She visualizes what she missed in real life. Simrit is immature and unprepared to face the challenges of life as her adolescent years were with her 'scholarly' father and 'unworldly mother', who were too pre-occupied in their own worlds and failed to have any influence on their daughter. Simrit's

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mother was an orthodox Brahmin who kept to herself. She would withdraw into her shell on any untoward incident and, therefore, failed to give Simrit a larger realistic perspective on life.

The Day in Shadow sensitively recollects the suffering of woman in married life and the scorn that she is subjected to when she is determined to end a seventeen-year-old marriage. The stigma around a divorced woman is well portrayed and Sahgal describes how the society considers divorce to be:

a disease that left pock marks.

After living together for many years, Simrit finds it difficult to accept the idea of living alone. Sahgal shows how women tend to be afraid of breaking habits. Though society tags her as 'happily' married, she finds no intellectual or emotional satisfaction. Som never pays her attention and Simrit wrongly chooses to get frequently pregnant to satisfy and gain attention. Though Som was transformed to become afraid and beautifully unsure with each pregnancy, this attitude did not last for long. After the baby came, he would go back to his usual egoistic self, but Simrit enjoyed it while it lasted.

She never told him she felt reckless, not fragile during these months.

Som principle in life was:

Be tough. Be winner.

That was his adage – no question of sentiments and feelings. He displays the same attitude with his wife. He has no understanding of the finer sentiments such as affection, compassion, empathy and attachment. He only has business acumen, and emotions are beyond his realm. Som is not capable of reciprocating Simrit's expectations. He bullies her mentally and physically. However, Simrit fails to obey to his every whim, which is a blow to his male ego. This redoubles his malicious intent, and he pours his retaliation on Simrit.

Simrit finds Som to be aloof and finds no security in the relationship as they share no empathy, understanding and especially friendship. Som never discussed his business with Simrit, considering women to be morons. He only objectified her as a sexual object.

Sahgal iterates that talk plays a major role in a relationship. Though Simrit tries to engage Som in any meaningful dialogue, she is disregarded like a piece of furniture. Som only uses her for physical comfort. Marriage, therefore, becomes a solitary imprisonment instead of a



communion. Som's failure lies in his cruel nature and thoughtlessness. Som is the typical male ego which is arrogant, sensual and lacks refinement. His only goals in life are success and money:

Simrit looked at Som during those days not always recognizing him. He had German phrases on the tip of his tongue and Vetter's mannerisms. He did most of his personal shopping in Europe. In a royal blue jacket, a French silk tie and handstitched Roman leather shoes he even looked foreign.

It is the traditional upbringing of Som that makes him believe that a woman must be under the control of a man. He dislikes women's independence and liberty and is a firm believer of male domination. He presumes his wife to obey his model of submissive womanhood. Simrit is dissatisfied with the inequality of their relationship, but Som considers it to be the right order of things. Modern in other aspects, Som is a patriarchic male. Simrit finds no voice in any ordinary decision of everyday life:

Her usefulness to him had never extended to areas of the mind.

Simrit's attempts to change him make Som furious. He states that he only wants a docile wife and if she cannot be one, she may end their marital relationship. Simrit though traditional breaks free of the mould and validates that individual freedom is most valuable, and no one must be permitted to compromise or suppress it.

Raj is everything contrary to Som. He strongly supports Simrit. The divorce terms dictated by Som are only meant to subject Simrit to further trouble. Raj cannot comprehend how an educated woman like Simrit could permit injustices to her. Simrit was tough because of her integrity and honesty. She had resolved to lead a dignified life without any assistance.

Raj was her pillar of strength. Simrit was stuck and maimed even after her divorce because of the settlement terms. Som like a typical male choose to be cruel and revengeful, even after all the injustice that he had showered on Simrit. Som wanted to subject Simrit to a life sentence. Simrit was insecure with the deal and kept questioning herself if she were to blame. Sahgal designates her emotional state thus:

Som could have forgiven her if she had been a weaker being. Unsure, dependent, even deceiving. But beneath her docility she was none of these things was unpardonable. And she could have loved him in spite of everything, if only sometimes she had fought him.

Simrit found that she had nothing to give her children expect herself. Simrit's divorce leads to difficulties not only in handling with her own illogical fears and pressures, but also with society which does not identify a woman's individuality apart from her husband's. She is an:

Over-loaded donkey [...] with its back breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can't see it, but because it's a donkey and loads are for donkeys.

May be she had always been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a Cushion, doing as she was told. And in return she had been fed and sheltered.

In spite of some feminine opinions articulated by Raj now and then, his total conduct only strengthens the patriarchal myth of male chauvinism. Raj too is uncertain and indefinite in his attitude towards Simrit. He criticizes Simrit's every move as mediocre, defective and insignificant. He almost represses Simrit with his judicious supremacy. Language, which must be for communion, becomes a tool for patriarchal domination. The novel is a classic on woman's struggle against patriarchal authority and social edifice. Simrit acknowledges her weakness and admits her inexperience. Simrit is attracted to Raj only by his language, and regards all his statements as invaluable. Although Simrit is aware of the injustices wrought by man, she is a willing hostage of manipulation and inequality because of habit. Simrit blindly pays divine respect to Raj and a smile from him, as N. Shamota says:

Radiated an atmosphere of suppressed jubilation that lapped around her in waves. (Shamota, 1966, pp. 106–107)

Loyal to Raj, Simrit thinks that "Raj had uncarved her," without realizing that Raj simply shaping her into the mould that he likes.

Nayantara Sahgal is deeply anxious regarding the basic requirement of freedom for women. Simrit in this novel wants to land on her own feet and appreciate independence, assertiveness and self-assurance. Simrit's desire for freedom and individuality compels her file for divorce. She does want to be recognized as her husband's wife but by her own self. The novel represents the unpleasant creation of the male society.

CONCLUSION

Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* depicts the tormented experience of a divorced middle-aged woman, Simrit. Her marriage with Som, an industrialist, turns out to be a



catastrophe. The novel gives a profound account of the anguish of a woman in Indian society when she chooses to dissolve a seventeen-year old marriage. A divorced woman is defamed forever and she is inquisitively watched by others. In *The Day in Shadow*, Nayantara Sahgal appears to be deeply worried with the need for freedom for women. Simrit in this novel wants to land on her own feet and appreciate independence, self-expression and self-confidence. It is Simrit's desire for liberty and uniqueness that urges her to take divorce from her husband. Simrit does not want to be known as her husband's wife but as her own self.

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