

**THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL**

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**Abstract**

The common significant phenomena in the writings of Nayantara Sahgal are the ultra feminist portrayal of women. As one of the members of India's for most political family, she has espoused the unique secularist ideals of freedom movement. Nayantara Sahgal is deeply concerned with the need for freedom for women to become a ward of themselves. She does not view her women characters as wage earner of career women but mainly as married women as wives, daughters and mothers in almost all her novels. Among the women writers Nayantara Sahgal is the only woman – writer who has made an attempt to reassess the institution of marriage and its functioning in patriarchal society. She has tried to understand the male perspective too.

Thus, we can say that Sahgal's women are generally emancipated, intelligent women. Her women are not virtuous in the conventional sense but in a more real sense, because they have shed all hypocrisies and pretences with their own selves in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

**Key Words:** *Women, Cultural Pluralism, Emergency. Freedom for Women, Problem of Political Tension.*

The common significant phenomena in the writings of Nayantara Sahgal are the ultra Feminist portrayal of Women. As one of the members of India's for most political family, she has espoused the unique secularist ideals of freedom movement. She has affirmed the values of cultural pluralism, religious tolerance and non-violence in a historical Indian situation. Her stance has enabled her to criticize Indira Gandhi's emergency rule, Hindu fundamentalism and other incidents of world significance. With her accomplished writings, she has acquired the position of Vice president of the peoples union of Civil Liberties and a delegate to the UN

General Assembly. Her earlier novels endured to the deep roots of the cultural psyche of women. The paradoxical positions played by the Indian women has promoted obscurantist and fundamental intolerance. Delving into the depths of Hinduism and politics she has churned out the characters that employ different stratifies of survival. Sahgal's *Rich Like US (1985)*, *Plans for Departure (1985)*, *Lesser Breeds (2003)* have explored these dimensions in a very significant way.

Nayantara Sahgal is deeply concerned with the need for freedom for women to become a ward of themselves. She does not view her women characters as wage earner of career women but mainly as married women as wives, daughters and mothers in almost all her novels. It is in these roles that women are expected to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals and gain acceptance as equals. All this is a pre-requisite for life to have some meaning for them and the man-woman relation to be a fulfilling one.

Among the women writers Nayantara Sahgal is the only woman – writer who has made an attempt to reassess the institution of marriage and its functioning in patriarchal society. She has tried to understand the male perspective too. Women writers generally tend to adopt a feminine posture, which is understandable, in passing structure on male and analysis of the ideal and the real marital relationships. She is the leading practitioner of the political novel in India. There are a few other women novelists who use public events as a backdrop, but their work is not comparable to Sahgal's as political novels.

Nayantara's marriage with Gautam Sahgal was a failure. The values she had learnt to cherish had no place in her new married life. She divorces him for lack of co-operation and understanding. It was sometime in mid sixties that Nayantara met E.N Mangat Rai, a person with whom she could share a great deal and with whom communication was possible. What followed was, in her own words, 'not an affair – but a revolution' a self – discovery that life had to be lived more fully in-order to be meaningful.

She also had opportunities for observing the life of the Indian Foreign Service when she visited her mother, who represented, India in Britain, the U.S.S.R and the United Nations, Nayantara Sahgal has published nine novels and eight works of non-fiction. Sahgal's autobiographies, *Prison and Chocolate Cake (1954)* and *From, Fear Set Free (1962)*, throw much light on Nehru family and the affluent circumstances in which she grew up. In addition to her novels and biographies she had also written a weekly column of for the newspaper. The Indian Express, A Voice of Freedom (speeches and writings about India under the emergency, 1977) and A History of the freedom Movement (1970).

Her first novel, *A Time To Be Happy (1958)* is a fictional enactment of the growth and maturation of a young westernized and wealthy individual Indian against the back drop of India's struggle for independence on the one hand and the smug non-chalance of the British Indian officers and their wives as well as their Indian admirers, on the other. The novel contains a large on of characters. The action begins and ends on a symbolic note signifying the end of an era and a new beginning. The novel is set in immediate pre and post-independent period, the story is told in the first person by a Gandhian bachelor. Two of Sahgal's favourite themes, which of an identity, and of man-woman relationship emerge in the novel.

The major women characters in this novel are Rashmi, a beautiful lady who divorces her husband and stays in her parent's house. Rakesh is her friend. Her affair with Neli Berensen, didn't give her fulfillment, self – identity. Nita, a young and educated girl, who feels arranger marriage, as custody wants to lead a free life. She really does not know what she wants. Nita wants a job of her own and resents the idea of arranged marriage. Nita's relationship with the

irresistible Kalyan is nothing but an extended urge for this fulfillment to know herself, and experience her freedom. Another characters Uma, wife of Arjun Mitra, an officer. A Candid woman, proud of her sensuality, she is always trying to attain satisfaction and fulfillment self, Arjun Mitra's indifferent attitude has forced her to become a drunk and adventurist.

The passion of all these women is an urge, to be free in the true sense of the word free in word and dead. Nayantara's women are deeply concerned with the need for freedom to become aware as individual. Thus Rakesh and Rashmi, Arjun and Uma, Kailas and Mira, Kalyan and Nita do become integrated as individuals through the communications of love, warmth and humanity. Sahgal's third novel. *Storm in Chandigarh*\_ deals basically with the problem of political tension and violence originating from its begin; Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states the Punjab and Haryana. The characters in the novel behave like moderns and at the same time do not isolate themselves completely from the tradition. This blend of tradition and modernity can be observed in their attitude to morality, education, eating – habits, man – man relations, attitude to love and even architecture.

Chandigarh, being a new city has nothing to boast of its traditions. A new type of society has emerged in this town, and the people who have come to live in it have brought their beliefs, ideas and customs with them. This has enriched the culture of this town; this has also created a sort of confusion or cultural storm here.

Modernity in Indian is often confused with the western style of life. What confirms to the western ways of dressing, eating, drinking and social get to together is regarded as modern, the people in Chandigarh, drawing – room society confused with the western style of life. To look modern Mira flirts, smokes and drowns herself in wine. Women characters in this novel no more like to remain confined with in the four walls of their houses. They prefer to go to picnic and parties to relieve the burden of boredom and monotony.

This theme is also reflected at another level in the lives of three couples: Inder – Saroj, Jita – Mira and Vishal – Leela. Saroj belongs to a group of intensely perceptive and sensible woman. She is a maternal, innocent creature. Inder is a typically self-cantered and insensitive brusque man of double standards, who belongs to the 'He-man cult'. Both are from different cultural milieus.

*Storm in Chandigrah* also touches upon the theme of tradition and modernity in terms of ethics and morality, through interrelated and often confused, have been given distinct identities and meaning by modern educated people. In the matter of man-women relation's double standards and false, deceptive manners seem to have broken the characters away from the traditional moral-values.

Thematically, *The Day in Shadow* (1971) begins where the *Storm in Chandigrah* ends in that it concerns itself not only with the release and recognition of the individual consciousness but also with its growth and maturation. The principal characters are Raj and Simrit as well as sumer Singh, the committed minister of state in the union cabinet I – charge of the ministry of petroleum; som, the newly rich business baron and Simrit's divorced husband and Brij their sixteen year old son, among other numerous characters. Sahgal brings into sharp focus on the diversity of these human characters and enacts the variety of their motives and mottoes in the drama of life in New Delhi.

Thus, we can say that Sahgal's women are generally emancipated and intelligent women. Her women are not virtuous in the conventional sense but in a more real sense, because they have shed all hypocrisies and pretences with there own selves in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

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