

MARITAL STRUGGLE IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL

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Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal , Anita Desai, Ruth Parawar Jhabwala have dealt with the marital discord and husband wife estrangement as well as depicted the conflicts and frustration with insight and understanding.

Even if the marriage is between two persons with the same cultural and traditional background, difference in temperaments and attitude might lead to alienation and estrangement. The trait of the individualization especially in women, lead to clash of personalities and breaking of the age old institution of marriage. For Example- Nayantara Sahgal's 'The Day in Shadow' and 'Rich Like Us' deal with the attitudinal differences leading to the clash of personalities and final disintegration of marriage.

She, therefore, strongly pleads for the new marital morality based on monumental trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness. Nayantara Sahgal has inherited from the father's view the ideas of equality of woman which she has strongly advocated in her novels. Loneliness, suffering and frustration in marriage sometimes cause disintegration and create problems in man-woman relationship. Sahgal says that "dialogue" or "discussion" is essential for harmonious marital relationship. The need for "talk" and "dialogue" is very much stressed in her works. Due to lack of communication and mature understanding a large number of Sahgal's character suffer from private torment of man-woman relationship. The spouses live together under the same roof, still they experience emptiness, loneliness and alienation. It is not physical loneliness that Sahgal talk of, but deeper emotional and spiritual voids created by egoism.

Man- Women relationship plays an important role in the novel of Nayantara Sahgal. Simrit, heroine of the novel was married to Som but her husband shows cruel face of domination in our society where he tries to be modern in every manner and blindly intimate the western life style but he thinks that his wife should be a traditional one. He is such a person who is not in favour of freedom or liberty of the women. He says that woman has to live under the control of man and these points creates obstacles in the relation of man and woman.

Som thinks himself to be modern in every aspect but when he talks about man- woman relation, he becomes traditional and blindly trusts on traditional rules. So, he does not feel herself free to speak in such a suffocating atmosphere and this becomes the cause of hindrance in their relationship.

Money plays an important role in everything. The same happened with man-woman relationship because Som is materialistic person and he gives more importance to money and power rather than human feelings. For man like Som , money is the most important thing in his

life so man- woman relationships are generally affected by money and it becomes the main cause of his separation from his wife, Simrit. Simrit feels-

“Money had been part of the texture of her relationship with Som, an emotional, forceful ingredient of it, intimately tied to his self- esteem. Money was, after all a form of pride, even of violence.” (Nayantara Sahgal, *The Day in Shadow*, 38)

“Excessness of everything is bad,” this proverb is suitable for Som because to earn more and more money, he loses his relation not only with his wife but also with his friends. He breaks the relation with his friend Laili and Vetter. Even Brij is more fascinated by this materialistic world so he decides to ignore his mother’s side.

The daughter of Som and Simrit also lives in the world of dreams and imagination and was much affected by the rich advertisements published in magazines. It is true to say that no one pays attention to values, emotions, involvement and attachment and only the superficial acts of life engage their attention.

Simrit did not believe in arranged marriage fixed by her parents that’s why she wants to marry with Som, a businessman, against the will of her Brahmin parents. Although Simrit is a Brahmin girl and Som is Punjabi, the caste of both not being the same still she gets married to him because she loves him deeply. Thus she says that she does not agree to fact that the traditional marriage which takes place in Indian society in the same cast, makes a person happy. She is very happy with the person who is not her caste, so she marries him and gets satisfaction in her marriage but after sometime her dream of happy marriage life broke and she remains unhappy with him and finally takes a divorce from him after seventeen years of her married life. Indian society still considers divorce as if it were disease that left spots and scars. In such an environment Simrit feels forlorn. She struggles to build a new life for herself as writer and for her children. Simrit finds that past continues to impinge on the present. She finds her present situation as a divorce not easy-

“It was painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The "tissue of a marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on..... It made the question of whether one had loved or not, been loved or not, been the transgressor or transgressed against trivial by comparison.” (Sahgal, *The Day in Shadow*,64)

After her divorce, she plans to marry Raj, who is a converted Christian. This decision shows that she does not believe in caste and traditional factors which are considered necessary for traditional marriage. Commenting upon the triangular relationship of Simrit, Som, and Raj, K.Meera Bai makes a relevant point-

“Lack of understanding and inability to strike sympathetic chord in each other leads to divorce in the case of Simrit in *The Day in Shadow*.” (Meera Bai, *women’s voices- The Novels of Indian women writing*, 35)

Extra marital relations take an important place in Sahgal’s concern for deteriorating values in human relationship. Raj and Simrit are having an affair though Simrit is divorced and a mother of a children. Earlier Raj was having a relationship with Shaila and even after her marriage with another man he longs to meet her. Similarly, Sumer Singh has physical relations with Pixie and so many other girls. This novel also shows that there is no proper communication and harmony between partners where as it is advocated that marriage should be on the basis of mutual understanding and proper respect to each other. In marriage woman is not supposed to be

treated as a secondary creature so for the equal rights she raises her voice against the slavery of her husband.

Simrit seeks Raj Garg's assistance to set out of the legal morass created by the divorce settlement. The determined and desperate Simrit does not grumble about her responsibility of looking after her children even in this frying situation. She retains the mother inn her despite the pecuniary stringency imposed on her shoulders by some transference of tax burden. Besides this, she has even to withstand the psychological pressure which Som puts on her by giving Brij glimpses of his bright future which awaits him after his visit to Europe and the release of the shares money in his name. Simrit refused to accept that position followed by her resistance to Som's sensual advancement towards her in their married life. As an intellectual being she tells Som that they may show mutual respect for one another as friends and not as husband and wife. The condition of both Som and Simrit is very critical and expression of Simrit's mind gives an ultimatum to Som and asks her either to be docile wife or else finish off the farce of their married relationship forever.

Women are still regarded as playthings for man and only for looking after their children. Som could not accept woman as a professional or an independent person living her own life. Simrit's life with Som lacks continuity and warmth. She feels isolated. It is an act with a beginning and an end with nothing in between or even afterwards. Som's recapitulation of his cruelty to his wife proves that cruelty to a woman is an external manifestation in man's life, even in the modern world, woman is the symbol of Victorian womanhood – an embodiment of service, slavery and sacrifice. Though the law has changed yet the attitude of the man remains same and it creates problems in the man-woman relationship.

Simrit finds her life disrupted and herself in the midst of a peculiar financial problem. The divorce is a new beginning of confrontation with the old tradition and faith. Som is cruel to her. We realize the victimhood becomes psychologically as well as economic reality. Raja Rao himself a product of two cultures of the east and the west, explores the marital discord in contest of marriage between an Indian Brahmin and a French lady in *The Serpent of the Rope* is extended to the relationship between Rama Swamy and Madekaine too. The difference between expectation and reality proves too much for the highly intellectual individuals when the hope for marital harmony and happiness appear to be an illusion; their separation becomes inevitable as it happens in *The Day in Shadow* in which Simrit marries Som and feels happy but when he tries to dominate her, she comes to know the reality of the married life and the different thinking of the two persons creates isolation.

The alienation between Rama Swamy and Madeleine in *The Serpent and the rope* and Macro and Rose in *The Guide* seems to be the result of unequal equation between the couples, the same we see in *The Day in Shadow*. Madeleine is highly individualistic and her inability to get involved in Rama Swamy's sense of values leads to the estrangement between them. In spite of her professed love for India, she cannot achieve consonance with the Indian spirit all the way. Rama Swamy's concept of marriage is not something concerned with the two individuals but the bond should be strengthened by family tradition and spiritual and cultural ethos and in *The Day in shadow*, simrit is highly individualistic but Som is not.

Som loves her very much but blindly follows the tradition. In man-woman relationship, woman is considered as prejudiced because India is a male dominated society where male chauvinism has ruled over woman. As it is vividly remarked in Manu- Simriti below-

“Woman is an advisor in work, slave in service, partner in noble deed, an earth in tolerance, other in affection and friend in enjoyment. Even Shiva is like when separated from Shakti – woman.” (Manu, The Ordinance of Manu, 130)

To maintain man-woman relationship, there should be equality between man and woman. Since then Hindu culture believes, that woman’s role is to maintain home, take care of children and at night to act as a sexual toy, beyond these if she thinks it is an offence and cannot lead to an improvement in man-woman relationship as it is the main root of problem man-woman relationship. If the partner is still disgusting she has to live in the cruelty, dependability and humiliation of her husband. She has no other choice as religious and social rights. She is always supposed to suppresses her desires and feelings and has to console herself as it is her fate. After this if the woman seeks divorce she gets humiliation everywhere in the Hindu society. Although the rules for woman have been made yet all these are not executed, those are only in papers. So by this, the situation of Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* can be understood properly.

In *Rich Like Us* also, the male superiority over female in marriage can be seen through Ram. Ram marries Mona, then falls in love with Rose and finally in love to Marcella. There are no qualms of conscience in him and gives the example of Lord Krishna who has many wives. It shows that he has no guilt in his heart having his first wife in the one hand and marries second time as well as carries an affair with Marcella. When Rose asks him about this matter he explains Rose that he feels intellectual love for Marcella and feels pride for it. But his attitude gets changed when she goes out with Freddie, with the whom she was engaged before he met Ram. Rose feels some relief from the suffocating experience which she got after marrying Ram. He does not approve her meeting with Freddie and becomes annoyed at her brutally. It shows the male dominance over the female.

Rose is an English girl from a working class background. She had broken an almost settled engagement with Freddie in order to marry Ram, a Lahore business man, when the British were still ruling India. She had enough knowledge of Ram’s first marriage and existence of his son yet she ignores all views of a traditional Christian marriage and avoids her mother’s warning. It is her great love for Ram that she marries with him and avoids her mother’s warning. It is her great love for Ram that she marries with him and leaves Freddie, a good lover of her, for Ram and could not get Ram’s dubious nature in courtship. She believes what he tells her. Therefore, Ram does not tell her in the beginning of love that he is already married and having a son. Despite his two marriages, Ram is infatuated with Marcella and falls deeply in love with her. There is no communication between Ram and Rose for four months but to her it seems she has been suffering for years-

“her anguish and rage, fought for outlet and gathered like a gale inside her without a word said.” (Sahgal, *Rich Like Us*)

Earlier Mona was suffering because of Ram’s love for Rose and Rose also suffers in the same manner but like Mona, Rose is equally helpless to do anything. Thus both the women feel cheated, lonely and insecure. Sahgal strongly condemns the attitudes which reduces women to an object. In her study of Sahgal and Dorris Lessing, Neena Arora observes-

“Man considers it as normal male behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and physical level outside marriage while at the slight hint of any deviation on her part which may not involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts prosecuting her.” (Arora, Sahgal and DORRIS Lessing, *prestige books*, 61)

Most of Sahgal's women suffer in marriage because their husbands don't recognize the fact that love is necessary for happiness. The communication gap ruins the relation and it becomes the main cause to the break of man-woman relationship. Rolly May, a psychotherapist rapidly observes-

“Communication recovers the original “we- ness” of the human being on a new level one relates to another not as receptacle for the expression of one's own sexuality, or as a being to be exploited for assuaging of one's loneliness or in any other way as an object, but as a human being in the full meaning of that term. Communication leads to community that helps to understand intimately and the mutual valuing that was previously lacking.”(Power and Innocence: A search for the source of violence,247)

Rose had never had the advantage which accompany family background or education, or even marriage but she proves herself quite capable of bridging in equalities where Ram has all the advantages. She is able to do because she is conscious of herself as an individual and compels others to recognize this. Life is harsh; her parents die, there are moments of doubt, of being and remaining an alien; one country's division, shift to Delhi. Still she is capable enough of reaching out to people and extending sympathy and warmth.

Sonali is contrasted with Rose. She is an I.A.S Officer in a free country and has all advantages- parental support, education in abroad etc. when ram first met Rose, she was twenty-year-old, lower class, very little formal education. She is the daughter of a factory worker and is set to marry Freddie yet she cannot help being attracted to Ram. She adjusts to be the second wife without losing her sturdy sense of values.

Rose inadequacy is almost pathetic in the presence of Marcella, an upper class English woman, whose remarks are woven together in the most provoking manners. Her superior air sets her apart from the rest so that Rose helplessly stands on the sideline watching Ram ensnared by Marcella's beauty and wisdom. Sahgal here has evidently tried to suggest that being the English in itself does not automatically help one to effectively deals with one's personal relationships. After all the simplicity of Rose and innate goodness at heart bring her close to Mona. The fact that rose saves Mona's life even when her death may be benefited her. Though she may have often wished Mona's death, she could never have callously watched it happen.

Rose is at best evacuated when London had been bombed, willing to accept the consequences. Rose cannot live without Ram so she accepts him for what he is. She even very nearly accepts Dev's treachery. He forges his father's signature- depriving Rose even of herself-respect something she had held on to right from the beginning of her relationship with Ram. She had not succumbed to going to bed with him until they married, not because she wanted to guard her virginity but because it was the only way, she could show him that she had a mind and feelings of her own. Ram being a man who appreciated the flesh when her mother's prophecies might have come true “he is going to throw you out when he gets tired of you”, if he had not learnt to respect the woman like Rose, is shaped by her background.

Mr Sahgal would have nothing whatever to do with the “Dead Wood” of old ideas and concept, handed down from ages and still advocated by the decadents and fast decaying bourgeois society. She regrets that-

“In the atomic age when monumental problems have been resolved by science and research, the human relationship still seems largely unsearched.” (The Hindustan Times- Sunday World,11)

Apart from Mona and Rose, Maya and Kusum are also portrayed by Sahgal. Maya was married to Harsh when she was sixteen years old and Harish was a well to do civil servant in the

service of the empire but the lack of communication between husband and wife aggravates misery and loneliness.

Besides it, in Rich LIKE Us, the marriage of Bimmie , who is a girl of sixteen, is going for wedlock. Bimmie is younger than Sonali and Kiran and still she is going to marry. She even does not know the meaning of marriage except that she will get good clothes, heavy ornaments, jewellery and a good house. She has only a romantic idea for her marriage and cannot see the suffering behind it, therefore she is unaware of the problems of married life and feels herself happy in the new role as a wife and mother. The description of Bimmie as a bride shows her ignorance about marriage. It makes only a show to people. Sonali tells-

“Kiran and I followed her into the room where the bride waited, looking like a tent. I could not see her face under the crimson and gold sari pulled so low over her forehead.... A busy body relative drew Bimmie’s sari aside from her face to show my mother tiers of gold chains below the red and green stones flashing at her throat.... but I was hypnotized by Bimmie’s nose ring, the sandal paste dots on her face, eyes down cast, and those manacled hands resting submissively in her red silk lap.” (Sahgal, Rich Like Us)

The marriage of Bimmie makes Sonali sad. She does not feel good. She expresses great sorrow at her marriage rather enjoying it. She feels pity for Bimmie’s early marriage may cause a great suffering in personal life. But Bimmie is not aware of this fact. Even the parents do not think her good and Sonali who is not Bimmie’s own person, feels great pain for her and she reacts in the novel-

“This was never Bimmie ‘Hey Bimmie’. I hissed. She looked up and it was in the tent and the chains and the dots nobody else. The busy body bustled up, while other busy bodies fussed around Bimmie, tilting her head, fiddling with her bangles and chains, praising her sweet docile nature which made it clear they knew nothing about Bimmie and captured and tented her by mistake. My wailing protest did nothing to keep Bimmie’s future at bay.”

Thus the concept of marriage in patriarchal society makes a woman a helpless creature, a deprived soul, unaware of her own desires. It creates great damage to the personal life of the woman who becomes the victim of wrong marriage and continues to be used by male because of loneliness, continual haunting of this unpleasant situation makes her position more vulnerable. These types of woman are wonderfully portrayed by Nayantara Sahgal in her novel.

Man woman relationship has been formed for a long time. It can be said that in the institution of man- woman relationship, marriage plays an important role as the modern society in changing people have made certain things in marriage according to their desires.

For a woman, life is always a challenge and she must not accept the things as they are, she must challenge them if she does not find herself comfortable in that situation. And for many years she had been subjected to the many challenges thrown by society, customs, tradition and man but even then woman is always relegated to the background and she is supposed to subordinate her interests and desire to the collective will of her community but in the case of marriage, both man and woman should be mature so that they may understand the concept of marriage to maintain man-woman relationship but Sahgal has shown in her novels that female characters are not aware the crucial points of marriage.

Physical appearance is important in the case of marriage but to maintain this man-woman relationship only this factor is not enough but in our traditional society the notion of beautiful girl works but very prominently, as man prefers beautiful girl in his marriage so if a girl is

beautiful it is considered that she will be married to wealthy groom, which is a symbol of her complete happiness. It shows that our traditional society is male biased in marriage, she should be beautiful in look, in other words, she has no freedom to appear as she is. Desire for self-beautification, is a massive concession to what a man dreams and long for. There is a tremendous preoccupation with physical appearance which work with a girl as well as her groom and his family. We find this notion working in Dev's marriage in Rich Like Us, arranged by Mona, his mother. She prefers snow fair complexion girl for her son Dev for his marriage. Mentioning her priority, she says-

“Now for his son....., said Mona. We want a beautiful home loving girl of good disposition with the domestic virtues and excellent social background.”

The selection of a girl by Mona to her son's marriage is beautifully portrayed by Mrs Sahgal in which her deep insight into traditional marriage and attitude of society and man are wonderfully narrated. At last she selects Nishi for Dev because she is a fair skinned girl. By choosing Nishi, she thinks that she will be a suitable girl to cure Dev as she would bind him by her beauty so that he will remain with her in whole life. For maintaining man- woman relationship there should be harmonious relation between husband and wife so that they may understand to each other.

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