



THE PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN IN PATRIARCHAL ENCLOSURE VISUALIZED BY NAYANTARA SAHGAL

Dr. P. Kumaresan¹ and Dr. K. Karthikeyan²

¹Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of English, Sudharsan College of Arts and Science, Perumanadu, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu.

²Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan Engineering College, Perambalur, Tamil Nadu.

ABSTRACT

Nayantara Sahgal is the daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Jawahar Lal Nehru's sister. She is a gifted writer whose main concerns are human values and complex human relationships. Her novels are . . . 'The Day in shadow, Rich Like Us and Mistaken Identity.' She has been in touch with political life and political people and therefore her novels about political background are very realistic. A Time to be Happy presents the advent of Indian Independence. Here the researcher finds the enigmas of the East-West encounter. The protagonist Sanad Shiva Pal faces the problem of regaining his roots because of his English education and distance from his own culture and people. But the message is that to find one's roots is the time to be happy.



KEYWORDS : *Nayantara, Patriarchal, Feministic, Humanistic.*

INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English is the part of the literatures in India. It is now free from the shackles of the British hangover quite distinctly and it is now the expression of a distinct and fairly identifiable Indian sensibility. A large number of Indian writers have written with assurance and inwardness. Right from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to writers writing in English today, one can find a distinct quality of Indianness about them. Indian writing in English has been largely encouraged, appreciated and taught in many universities of Europe and America.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks: "The best Indo-Anglian poet have given us something which neither English poetry nor any of our regional literature can give; In other words; they have effected a true marriage of Indian processes of poetic experience with English formula of verse expression." It is an undeniable fact that not only Indo-Anglian literature but all Indian writing has been considerably influenced by the English literature to them through English. Thus Indian English literature has both appeals to Indian reasons as well as the English erased. Some people have called it parasitic literature. It is also true that the beginning of writing in Indian English was imitative and different. Sir Edmund Gosse's famous words to Sarojini Naidu's first efforts in poetry are remarkable. He asked her, "to write no more about robins and skylarks, in a landscape of our Midland countries, but to describe the flowers the fruits, the Trees, to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, and the temples, to introduce to us the vivid populations of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province."

All Indian writers writing in English thus naturally belong to Indian English literature. Indian English literature is not an extension of English literature but it is an offshoot of Indian literature. English has been domesticated and nativised in India and it is one of Indian national language. It is therefore the national

literature of Indian. V.K. Gokak defines it as a composite awareness in the matter of race, milien, language and religion an awareness leading in tolerance and broad based understanding . . . an integral awareness of Indian heritage, not a fragmented approach to it... a simultaneous cultivation of science and spirituality a passionate in involvement in the implications of Time spirit as well as of Eternity.”

One can find clear-cut stamp of Indianness in the writings of Tagore, Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujam, Kamala Das and others. Indian writers are no more imitative. They are creative and original. They have coined new words and use English in a distinct way. Indian English literature has a history of more than 150 years. Raja Ram Mohan Roy began his career as a writer writing in English. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in ‘Young India’ and ‘Harijan.’ Nehru was at ease in English and his prose is an example of his facility in English. The period of 1820-1900 is called the Indian Renaissance. It was under the influence of English education that the Indian writers turned towards writing and translating their regional works in English.

According to K.R.S. Iyengar, nationalists and patriots who were fighting for Indian Independence wrote and spoke in English. They were creating not only Indian history but a new literature too. Indian Renaissance revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse. According to Sri Aurobindo, there were three stages of the Indian Renaissance the first was the reception of the European contact and reconsideration of many elements of the old Indian culture. The Second was the reaction of the Indian spirit upon the European influence and the third was that of assimilation and new creation.

Indian English fiction has been enriched by women novelists. There are novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Jhabwala, Anita desai, Attia Hossain, Bharati Mukherjee, Geeta Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Kirna Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. they have presented women’s world very poignantly. They have developed their individual style of writing. There are elements of satire and irony at the stale and outdated customs and oppressive tendencies that suffocate women’s souls in the society. They voice the feministic concerns quite objectively and appealingly. Writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya go beyond feministic concerns and portray in wider context the themes of alienation in modern, urban city, tradition and modernity, East-west encounter and racial conflicts.

Women in India and all over the world have for centuries remained under male subjugation. All the scriptures of the world including The Bible, The Qoran and Manusmriti have defined the role of women, putting them in the “confines of the household.” But with the spread of education and the influence of a few institutions and organisations which, under the “social regeneration movement,” have urged for women’s emancipation from the age-old shackles, some signs of awakening amongst women have become visible.

Sahgal’s entire fictional corpus revolves round the twin themes, first-the political one, the India is passing through a transitional period, and so the Indians must adjust themselves to the changing times: second-the lack of communication between people, especially between husband and wife, results in unhappiness and prevents human fulfillment. The novelist herself makes it clear that each of her novels, “more or less reflects the political era we are passing through.” But along with the political theme, she also portrays the modern Indian woman’s search for individual freedom and self realization. She delineates both the motifs in a very subtle and intricate manner.

Liberal in outlook, Sahgal believes in the “new humanism” and “new morality,” according to which woman is not to be taken as “a sex object and glamour girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth, lulled into passive role that requires no individuality,” but as man’s equal and honoured partner. There is a happy blend of two sensibilities in her work-the sensibility of an artist and the sensibility of a humanist. As a humanist, she is for an unfettered freedom and “pleads for the new marital morality, based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness.” She is intensely moral in her artistic vision and has great respect for the affirmative values of life. She suggests through Mclvor: “The world is in need of a universal culture, universal language, and if not in literal terms, at least in terms of thought and values.” The delineation of the twin motif, political turmoil outside and the private torment of broken marriages within one’s own self, does not adversely affect her artistic integrity.

Five novels that Nayantara Sahgal has written so far, revolve round two themes: one- that India is changing with the times and Indian people must also adjust their thinking to these changes: two-that lack of communication between individuals, especially between man and wife, cause unhappiness and prevents human fulfillment. These two themes are not simply stated but are also woven into subtle and intricate patterns of multi-coloured tapestry.

A trenchant defender of human values, Nayantara Sahgal, in all her novels, pleads for “enduring comradeship,” frank and friendly communication, a compassionate approaches in order to untangle the personal and social problems, more particularly the problem of man-woman relationship. Sahgal has eminently succeeded in impressing this idea on the reader’s mind.

The estrangement between man and woman, in the novels discussed so far has been treated with brutal frankness and in realistic terms. One can, if one wishes, dub and damn these characters using any epithet for them, say, degenerate, corrupt, frustrated, aimless, unrestrained, insane, nihilist, infidel. But few can refute the dispassionate honesty of the novelist in treating the discordant relationships fictionally. She carefully avoids being sentimental, nor does she evade facing the situations and destinies. She has also been careful enough not to pronounce her value judgement from the ethical heights. She has only written stories of relationships-especially of incompatible or ill-matched couples, which were earlier considered taboo for the Indian writer, particularly when the writer happened to be a woman.

The Day in Shadow can be read as a sequel to *Storm in Chandigarh*. It not only re- enacts the theme of marital disharmony but also has the sustained moral vision of the novelist. *The Day in Shadow* begins from the point where *Storm in Chandigarh* ends. It delineates the emotional and economical strains of divorce on a woman.

The novel narrates the story of Som and Simrit who seem to get on well during the first few years of their marriage. But Som’s inability to understand her, except as an object of physical attraction, fit only for physical pleasure and enjoyment, compels her to seek human communication outside the marital bonds. Simrit herself says to Raj, “If I’d know you well before my divorce, there might not have been any divorce. Knowing you would have taken care of one need and my marriage another.” Som treats her not as a person but as a possession. She is not only the victim of Som’s inhuman attitude but also of a system-“the Hindu dharma which maintained that a wife is her husband’s property and has no individuality outside of that system.”

Som’s finalization of a new deal of new deal of armaments depresses Simrit further and she finds herself unable to respond to her husband’s physical needs and remains “separate, excluded and rebellious.” For her, emotional involvement is far more important than the sexual relationship and it is as an individual that she seeks fulfillment and expression, not as possession.

Greatly upset, she is left with no option but to seek divorce. She innocently signs on the dotted line of the ‘Consent Terms,’ in which she has been given six lakhs worth of shares in trust for their son. She cannot use this money but is supposed to pay tax on it so that anything which she earns would be wiped out. Thus “the divorce settlement is a continuation of their marriage, it pins her down to the role of a victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free in a positive way.”

A victim of her husband’s subtle and inhuman form of exploitation, a sort of beating where “blood and bruises don’t show,” and in a bid to build a new life for herself, Simrit encounters Raj, a liberal thinker, who not only makes her understand the enormity of ‘Consent Terms’ but also helps her to regain her lost moorings, emotional as well as intellectual. Sahgal fiercely attacks the most prevalent notion of using a woman as a convenience for tax purposes by her husband even after he has divorced her.

For Simrit, divorce does not bring freedom but confrontation with all that is orthodox in this man-centered society. Out of this struggle is born a new Simrit—a person who makes choice, takes decisions and becomes aware of herself as a person. “First the mind, then the body opens up to new responses and life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj which is an involving and an equal one”

But Simrit's divorce does not mean that marriage has failed as a social institution or that it has outlived its utility. It only means that there is the need for a mature approach to marriage as it is to be nurtured with love, care and candour. In Sahgal's world the act of living is in no way an ascetic one. Her characters inhabit a world full of desires and emotions, but they do not all abide by the conventions of the society. While most of her contemporaries treat sex without or outside marriage as a promiscuous act, and the woman who indulges in it as an immoral, Nayantara proceeds to do something different. According to her, adultery or asceticism is neither good nor bad in itself. Raj and Simrit are in love, about to be married with the prospect of life and the fight ahead of them. The world which Nayantara prescribes as the only sane and sensitive alternative to the world of power, atrocities and greed is "the personal world of Raj and Simrit, grounded in sympathy and understanding, human communication and empathy, rather than bestial sensuality and cruel insensitivity."

Rich Like us portrays Sahgal's unconventional and feministic view that the entire social set up in India supports the male domination and that the women are exploited and victimized on all occasions-in marriage, in sexual relationships, in childbirth and even in adultery. Ram, a business tycoon, visits London and runs into Rose, a British woman, Charmed by her exquisite beauty and elegant manners, he makes an unsuccessfully bid "to coax her, bully or trick her into bed." Ram proposes to Rose and they get married much against the wishes of her parents and Rose knowing too well that Ram is already married to Mona, a traditional Hindu wife and now blessed with a son. Their marriage is performed according to the Hindu rites. On their return to India Rose insists on Ram's taking a divorce from his first wife, but she is advised sanctimoniously:

"There is no divorce. Hindu marriage is not a contract. It's a sacrament." The three of them have learnt to live under the same roof and accept each other when yet another lady Marcela walks into Ram's life and creates a turbulence in the otherwise calm and placid life of the two women. Rose feels miserable; "the then sobbing sound of pure grief on one was meant to hear, froze Mona's tears into Rose's eyes." Mona had earlier attempted to commit suicide by fire but was saved by Rose. An intimacy develops between the two and Dev, the only son of Ram, is brought up by Mona and Rose, His bride Nishi, 'a doll faced girl,' is selected by both of them. On her death-bed Mona takes a promise from Rose that she would look after their daughter-in-law.

The two women make an interesting contrast. One is a Hindu wife, bound to shackles of tradition and conformity, docility and acquiescence, whereas the other is a liberal and non-conformist Christian believing in instincts. But both of them are exploited by the male domination. Both love Ram passionately. Irrespective of the fact that they suffer humiliation and self-abnegation time and again, they do not leave him. In one of the conversations with Bugs, Rose reveals that the only thing she "could not bear in any circumstances would be a divorce- I could never bear to lose Ram." Emotional and sensitive, both the women become victims at the hands of the practical and self-centered Ram.

As a foil to this relationship, the novel has another couple-that of Marcella and Brian - quite practical, accommodating and understanding. At Marcella's behest, Ram and Rose go to London and establish a boutique at Harrods. It is here that Ram unravels his mind to Rose of living separately but of course without taking a divorce from her so that he can "keep himself free so that he and Marcella could evolve the perfect companionship." Unable to comprehend his demeanour, Rose is only forced into this humiliating and tormenting situation.

Towards the end of the novel, when Rose has been got murdered by her step-son Dev and Ram is lying in comma, Marcella and Brian come to India to see Ram. They are shocked to see him in that condition. They seek the help of Sonali to recreate a period of history. Marcella and Brian make a happy and harmonious couple; they care for each other and seek their happiness in their joint ventures. They respect each other's independent identity and point of view.

In between the polarities of the two couples, they have a very touching, pure and prestige love between two young bureaucrats Sonali and Ravi, which never fructifies into marital relationships for two contrary things-hesitations to speak out on the part of one and the unfounded great expectation on the part

of the other. Ravi has been always yearning to make “uncontaminated offerings.” His taciturnity is unfortunately misconstrued for his being “so rigid, so bossy, so selfish” Sonali says: “If I married him I’d have to agree with him all the time. Of course we aren’t going to get married and I don’t think he loves me anymore, but I am, oh, I still am in love with him.”

Mistaken Identity, like other novels of Nayantra Sahgal, portrays two parallel themes: one political about the condition of the natives under the British Empire, and the colonial attitude of the rulers treating the natives like slaves who have no individuality of their own; and the other of man-woman relationship in a man-dominated society.

The playboy Bhushan Singh (Jumbo), son of the Raja of Vijaygarh, is the narrator- protagonist, who has been arrested and thrown into jail while on a train journey home to north India after long months of travel abroad. He is put in jail with other prisoners who are also charged with treason. They have not committed any political crime but it is the year 1929 when the country is torn by strikes and the jittery government sees sedition everywhere. It is the case of a *Mistaken Identity*. They all wait for the trial which never seems to come. They form “a study circle” with Bhushan as their topic. Bhushan takes up the role of a narrator and tells his cell-mates the stories of his colourful past.

Jumbo not only reveals his own life-history but also of his mother who had been “pledged at five, delivered at menstruation to this house.” She had a twin sister and both of them were married to his father, but one of them died. Jumbo does not even know of which one he was born. It reveals the condition of women. They were treated as objects and not as individuals. Female children were strangled at the time of birth. Jumbo’s father married thrice and his mother suffered till the time she left the house with Yusuf. It is a strange, unorthodox and unusual end but it “spells out both a final rebellion and liberation.”

As the story unfolds, one can learn that Bhushan at sixteen was fascinated by a Muslim girl Razia. When their affair is discovered, terrifying riots break out in Vijaygarh. As usual, many are warned and several killed and mutilated, but Bhushan stays protected from it all. A year later, ostensibly recovered, he is still in search of Razia, who he overhears has been married off to an imbecile. Even during the wonderings of his banishment-first to Bombay and then to America, he cannot escape the thought of Razia. “The hood descended like the click of a long black tongue over her face. She was sucked back entire into the monster, beyond the reach of love or rescue.”

Razia has been delineated as a symbolic creature, with “tartar cheekbones.” It is “this manifest racial impurity, a mixed belonging to the vision of future communal union” that has made her face unforgettable. The two other women with whom Bhushan has brief escapades are the easy going Willie-Many in America and his ‘sane,’ ‘straight,’ modern Parsee love, Sylla, in Bombay. Bhushan is devoted to Sylla, but what she calls his ‘monomania’ about Razia prevents him from identifying wholly with Sylla, marrying her and settling down. Further in the course of the novel it is made clear that they do not share a common space-she belongs to the trend-setting Bombay, he to medieval Vijaygarh. Nauzer Vacha, gifted with intellectual brilliance and legal acumen, ruthlessly deconstructs Bhushan’s identity. Back home to Vijaygarh, in the throes of Hindu-Muslim riots, Jumbo marries Yusuf’s daughter.

What is much more fascinating in the novel is the portrayal of Jumbo’s mother, who ever since she was twenty-two was “sentenced to that greenish light of unfulfilled desire.” Third treated and despised by her husband, she leaves the family mansion, hesitating for a second at the entrance and holding her breath before she walks out to be star in the most sensational scandal of the generation, i.e. the elopement with Yusuf, her communist lover, who, like a modern artist, has a mania for the angles and contours of a woman’s body and paints her “naked, dressed asleep, awake, front and behind, right side up and upside down, curled up, stretched out with one colossus of a breast or three little pointed ones in a row.” Bhushan’s intense, illiterate and intelligent mother provides the other side of the story. Unorthodox, unconventional and rebellious; she daringly breaks all traditional taboos and steps out of the palace for ever to live openly with her son’s erstwhile prison comrade, the urbane Yusuf, all for love “in the most sensational scandal of the generation.” It may be an unusual end, signaling both the rebellion and emancipation-an end which the

novelist has never attempted earlier but a much needed now dimension to the novelist's aesthetic and ethical vision.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion of Sahgal's eight novels it is evident that there has been a visible progression in the vision of the novelist in that the female protagonists in the earlier novels have been vaguely craving for "the air of freedom and freshness," and struggling "to break off the orthodox Indian conventions and moribund tradition," which make people fear each other whereas in the later novels one can see that the women of Sahgal's fictional world have come out of the shackles of bondage in their struggle to regain their self-abnegated identity. Moreover, their freedom is not restricted to the superficial aspects such as in the matters of dress, eating habits, smoking, drinking, etc. but something deep inside the individuals, which can be attributed to the author's deeply rooted humanistic attitude to love, marriage and divorce-aspects so central to the female world.

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