

The mutiny of Nayantara Sahgal's the day in shadow

¹ M Banu Krishna, ² T Jegatheswari, E Jeya Indhu

¹ M.A.B Ed, Assistant Professor of English, Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

^{2,3} M.A., B.Ed, Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal a prominent and one of the great Indian English women novelist. She began writing when she was very young and became a professional writer in the post- independence year. Her novels depict on the premise of multicolored female characters, marital tension and domestic traumas undertakes the quest for female identity. Sahgal's novel deals with men and women, 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 character in her novels, such as Simrit in Sahgal's fourth novel "The day in shadow" (1971). Sahgal entire fictional corpus revolves around the twin themes one was political and the next was lack of communication between husband and wife within modern Indian women's search for individual freedom and self-realization and self-identity relatively permanent self-assessments such as personality attributes knowledge of one's skills and abilities occupation and hobbies, all these qualities can see in Nayantara Sahgal's "The day in shadow" present the theme on freedom for women to become aware of themselves as individuals along with tradition and modernity. The protagonist emerges from the shadows to find happiness. It explores the women, how she came out from the patriarchal society. This novel intent to study the protagonist refuses to reconcile with Simrit the patriarchal and male governed society and tries to establish her own individual identity.

Keywords: Nayantara Sahgal's, shadow, mutiny

1. Introduction

Women character in many of the novels that had appeared during the 1990s takes women's search for self-fulfillment and a better place within family and society into deeper psycho cultural levels of experience. There were chances in social and political circumstances; there were new form of awareness and experiences. She presents in their novels the new woman who was assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her true self. Identity was a state of mind that was granted by the interaction and acceptance with fellow beings in society. And a woman's identity crisis was that where she struggles to achieve goals as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society which bind her in chains and reject her as a being in comparison to a man. Earlier, woman sought her identity in the roles of a wife, mother and daughter. She accepted this identity willingly. But now time had changed and a woman rejects this relational identity. Now she was able to understand the duplicity of this imposition on her feet as a full human being, equal to man in society. She doesn't want to be known as someone's daughter, wife or mother, rather, she seek separation from these relations and wants to make her own identity one that shows her individuality. She also does not like the support of man in this creation of her own identity. And this quest for identity makes her revolt against the traditional image of the Indian woman in words and deed. The present article traces the threads of insurgence in Nayantara Sahgal's the day in shadow look at the varied manifestation of rebellion. There will be an attempt to see how death and silence can be a form of rebellion as well. Nayantara Sahgal portrays the acute sense of entrapment and suffering of women of the upper and lower middle classes. Education encourages women to nurture ideas of western style self-hood, identity

and equality among sexes. Sahgal depict young, sensitive women becoming victims of a social situation that first encourages and then punishes them for such ideas of self-development and fulfillment. Nayantara Sahgal present women's struggle for selfhood and fulfillment as human beings within family and societal relation. Among the eminent Indian novelists in English, Sahgal was one of those who were more interested in presenting the interior landscape of the mind rather than in politics or socio-political realities. Sahgal's protagonists were women who had reached different stages in life but were yet fragile introverts trapped in their own skin. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to a violent death. Besides, the central theme of her novels was the existential predicament of woman as an individual. She projects this phenomenon through the incompatible couple's sensitive wives and dutiful but insensitive and un-understanding husbands. In each of her novels, one can sense the novelist's urge towards a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearning of the Indian woman for self-emancipation and self-identity the man women relationship was a recurring motif in Nayantara Sahgal's novel's. This relationship was as old as the universe itself. In her novels they meet women protagonists who are not happy with their husband and in them one can study the ways in which a married woman could "liberate" herself.

Nayantara Sahgal had presented in her novels Indian women's search for self-definitions about the self and society, and the relationships were central to women. She portrays in her novels how the "new women" was trying to search for her identity and create for herself a new place in society. She was conscious of her existence as an individual who had her own rights and wishes. She firmly asserts that these women were

the ones who had the guts to raise their voice against injustice, hence creating awareness for the rest. In fact these characters were reflection of their own emotional perplexities and disturbances which they want to come out of and find new horizons of self-esteem and liberation. Nayantara Sahgal's leaning towards feminism even though mild, was quite marked in her novels "Storm in Chandigarh," "A situation in New Delhi" and "the day in shadow". The fact came to light when one studies the undeserved ill-treatment a large number of women character in these novels had to undergo in society, and tries to know why they were driven to committing suicide or to seeking divorce, or to undergoing torment defenselessly when it became inevitable. In Sahgal's portrayals of the relations between the family and society, she brings forward a new perception of the use and abuse of power in the different forms of human bond. The day in shadow gave a sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society when she opts to dissolve a seventeen years old marriage. The novel also exposes the cruel face of society and the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes himself to be liberal minded, educated but considers his wife as a commodity, as a possession and not as a person. Simrit, the heroine of the novel was a writer. She had written one book, was planning another and in the meantime works as a freelance writer. The mother of the four children, Simrit had just been divorced from som at the beginning of the novel. The "consent terms" of divorce, drawn up by som and signed by a naïve Simrit, had completely impoverished her and call for a greatly reduced standard of living for her and her children. Adjusting to life in a small flat without a phone and the other comfort that she and her children had grown accustomed to, Simrit was wearied by the everyday difficulties of establishing a home in urban India. In renewed anguish, while talking to Som's lawyer she sees her life with som as no different from her present one:

"Maybe 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 shelter". (57)

Simrit had experienced a suffocating environment with her husband som, and had therefore, sought divorce from him in order to be free but after getting a divorcee she realizes that it was a truly appalling and cruel situation to exist as a divorcee in society. A divorced woman was stigmatized for and she was watched curiously by others as if divorce were:

"A disease that left pock marks"

It clearly shows the wretched condition of women in society when she had no husband in her life, she was not worthy of respect. A woman was never regarded as an autonomous being since she had always been assigned a subordinate role and relatively lowers position in society. A woman was held to represent the "othernesses of man, his negative. It was ironical that in the patriarchal setup women are considered to be physically weak and to venture into society, they need protection from males. This is the root cause of apathy of women in society. The day in shadow reflects this social hypocrisy in the backdrop of political corruption. Simrit appears to stand out alone and separate in such a social atmosphere. Her marriage to a businessman against the will of her Brahmin parents was on the rocks owing to the

uncompromising character of Som, her misfit husband whose sole aim was to earn money, power and glory---by hook or by crook. Som was a materialistic person. He lives more importance to money and power than human feelings. For a man like Som, money is the most important thing in life and this love for money becomes the root cause of his separation from his wife. 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". (38)

Simrit's dissatisfaction was a combination of shock at Som's uncaring attitude towards the product he will make his profits from and disgust inarticulate unhappiness, Som tells his German friend and business partner, Rudy Vetter:

"She doesn't need me to spend more time with her---she's very complete with the children and her writing and the rest of it---she wants now sit me to spend more time with myself. You know sit and contemplate about goals and so on..... Think with a capital T, and about matters not connected with what I have to do from morning to night. Tell her she's got more to give children because of the business and life I lead---more money, more extras---and it's just so much water off a duck's back, she just doesn't care".(77-78)

Som wants Simrit to act as a traditional wife and according to his ideal of subdued womanhood. It was tradition in Som that urges him to believe that woman has to live under the control of man. Simrit finds it a suffocating experience. She had no voice in the ordinary decisions of everyday life, not even in the choice of curtains or chair covers. Her life with Som lacks continuity and war and warmth. She feels isolated. It was an act with a beginning and an end with nothing in between or every afterwards. This was what was missing in the relationship of Som and Simrit. Simrit always desired a proper life partnership in their matrimonial life but som does not render adequate cooperation and understanding. This was the reason why Simrit rebels and takes the decision to walk out of a marriage that was seventeen years old. It was difficult to begin a new life for the past lives on in the present in the memories of the shared years and the lives of the children. The mere habit of living with someone for many years makes it difficult for Simrit to accept the idea of living alone, all by herself. The frightening dream that she has gives an idea of her inner disintegration where in pain follows her like a shadow never leaving her even for a moment. But when divorce comes it is definitely not easy for her. After her divorce, Simrit was at first oblivious of the monetary implication of the "consent terms" of her divorce. Outraged at the brutal implications of the "Consent Terms", Simrit feels diminished and humiliated. The huge amounts of tax she will have to pay on an income she cannot even use re staggering and she feels like "an overloaded donkey".

"I suppose, she thought, this is what an overloaded donkey feels like standing there as life with its back breaching, and no one doing anything about it, because

they can't see it, but it's a donkey and loads are for donkeys". (56).

The female protagonist's struggle for freedom derives directly from the novelist's personal experience: the study of the deathly Struggle that combine with the economic dependence to exercise a crippling power over middle-class women was marked with intense indignation as well as sensitivity and compassion. Sahgal confesses this in an article:

In this book, they tried to figure out something that had happened to me the shattering experience of divorce.....they wanted to show how even on a free county like ours, where woman are equal citizens, a woman can be criminally exploited a without creating a ripple. In the same way the divorce settlement terms deliberately aimed at leaving Som's funds intact for his son at the cost of making Simrit a financial wreck, shock her. Her friendship with Raj provides her the anchor and helps her come out of the shock and stupor sand establishes a life of her own. Cast as the progressive Christian, Raj was irritated as well as attracted to Simrit's unworldly disinterest in her own financial situation. He associates her lyricism with some with something deeper than her affinity with certain school of English poetry---- her membership in the Hindu race. It was through the delineation of the character of the male protagonists that Sahgal introduces her ongoing freedom. All male protagonists of for novels were heralds of freedom. They not only sympathize with the women in their struggle for emancipation but also provide the needed support at critical times when they desperately need it. Raj, the Christian friend of Simrit in *The Day in Shadow*, was also a crusader of freedom who protects and nourishes the spirit of freedom with all care and patience. By means of love, mutual trust, sympathy, dialogue, discussion, understanding and humanism, Raj finally wins her. He believes that woman was not only an object of sex. He supports permissiveness in society only prove that sex was but a fraction part of the relationship between a woman and a man. Like existentialists, he treats freedom as the exercise of personal moral responsibility and believes that the individual had a social responsibility. Simrit was helped in came to terms with her new life by this young idealist politicians who was at first a friend and soon her lover. When Simrit complains of the daily tensions in her life, Raj consoles her:

"Be patient, Simrit, it's how we'll have to live in this country for years yet, in a bit of a mess, with things not in their places, and not nearly enough of them to go around. And we'll have to learn to love the process, to get something out of it and go on giving something to it. There are no magic formulas. We can't make coaches out of pumpkins except by our sweat, and that takes time". (18)

Simrit was a strong new woman in the sense that she dares to came out from the periphery of marriage. This was her awareness that she does not yield before male domination. She was conscious about her identity and to achieve it she leaves her husband even after seventeen years of marriage. Simrit's walk out was a denunciation of male pretence. It was Simrit's rebelliousness, her willingness to change that helps her in releasing her from the hold of the past; the old world where she had watched injustice prevail on the basis of gender and class makes way for a new one, where the possibilities of

equality and opportunities are promised to all, irrespective of class, caste and gender. Therefore she accepts divorce to make herself free from the wealthy business husband and walks out of a suffocation life to carve out her own destiny. She leaves Som and moves elsewhere with elsewhere with her children, learning to cope with things on her own. Her divorce, then, was her first step towards self-discovery, for she had managed to break out of the enclosure; her next step was her learning to cope with things on her own through reaching out to Raj and fulfilling her own sexuality. Raj's entry into Simrit's life changes her course, turning it into self-realization instead. Raj came as a ray of life in her dark life. His belief that living was "acquaintance with things in the raw.....and with human beings at all levels" gradually penetrates into her towards taking action before it was too late. Initially Raj appears to be a liberal person:

"Simrit and Simrit's problem had become a daily business. He had kept turning it over in his mind for a hint of romantic or sexual involvement. Those were but are yielded most of all a strange necessity. It was not a question of Simrit for himself--at least not until he had got some sign from her. It was Simrit for herself, he wanted, Simrit to forsake her shadows and begin to live". (167)

But patriarchal attitudes were so deeply ingrained in him that they have become a natural part of his personality. He constantly maintains a stance of superiority towards Simrit. Anything that she says or does is inferior, faulty and unimpressive. She quotes from Aurobindo but he is not "impressed" (34). His infuriating assumption is that Simrit has not lived simply because so far she has not lived the way he thinks life should be lived. He almost bullies Simrit with his intellectual superiority. For all this claims of concern for Simrit, one wonders whether a person like Raj can understand or share her agony and tensions. Standing on the high pedestal chosen for him, can he ever be a partner or companion to Simrit? Simrit fails to see Raj's prejudices, biases, and superficialities. She blindly adores him and feels exhilarated in his company. She easily gets subdued under his over-confident postures. The climax of Raj's chauvinistic attitude comes with his one-sided announcement of marriage before Ram Krishan. Raj who had claimed to retrieve Simrit for her own sake ironically does not even ask he about marriage, a decision even Simrit feels was supposed to be at least mutual; "we are get married," he announced.

"Simrit's questioning glance leapt to his. They had not even discussed it. What in the world was he talking about? Marriage --that was still a barrelful of problems away. She had expected they would come to it later, after taxes and children and a husband of other hurdles had been crossed. Besides, all these earth shaking decision were supposed to hers to make, of her own free will, in her own good time". (232)

She was taken aback by the abrupt announcement of marriage, yet surprisingly no protest came forth her. Despite all this, Simrit continues in her euphoric admiration of raj;

“Men like him were born to lead and educate, sometimes to triumph just when it seemed fortunes could go no lower. Raj would be all right”. (236)

She does not even realize that she who believed herself to be a woman who had:

“Never accepted a world where men did things and woman waited for them”, (6) has in fact once again become the one who will take orders. Only this time, the one to give orders may not be as directly opposed to her tastes and value as her first husband was. She in fact just passes on from one man's world into another man's there was marked difference in the way Simrit rebel in the day in shadow Sahgal gives a vivid account of a single woman, Simrit's suffering in society. Simrit looks like a liberated woman who had the courage to break a long relationship which had become meaningless with no sense of companionship between husband and wife. Ironically, she opts for a divorce when already another male support was awaiting her outside marriage. She walks out of the sheltered world of som not to live a life of her own but to step into the shadow of another chauvinist, raj. Simrit thus remains only a stereotype submitting herself to raj's idea of patriarchy.

2. References

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