



Sorrows and Sufferings of Womanhood in the Novels of Nayantara Sahagal



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Research Paper :

Nayantara is one of the most famous Indian English Fiction writers. She is one of the most prolific novelists amongst the modern Indian women novelists, and holds her unique identity in Indian Writing in English. She is the daughter of Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit and the niece of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and had differences of opinion with her famous cousin Indira Gandhi during the most critical phases of the political propriety of Indian democracy in late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. She is a very sensible, independent woman who always maintained her sense of freedom and was not easily intimidated by power and powerful people, also an independent thinker; she lived her life on her own term regardless of social pressures and criticism about the choices she made in her personal life.

The main theme of her novels is the expression of the pathetic condition of the women in

the male dominated society which is the blot on the society. In the society, the women are considered as a daughter, wife, sister, mother, she is also considered as 'Maa' in the scripture but still in the modern age she is suppressed, exploited and counted as the servant of the male. This discrimination is minutely observed and expressed by Nayantara Sahgal in her novels. She exhibited the pathetic condition of the women in the society. According to Manu, the law giver 'A woman should be under the protection of father in the childhood, then under the husband in youth and if the fate condemns her to widowhood, she must lean on her son'. The same mentality has been going on since the beginning of the civilization of the society. Here the woman is the object of gratifying sex and services to their children. She has been living in the 'cave' where the husband is a less talker to her for whom she has sacrificed and devoted the whole life. Here, in India, marriage is the institution where a woman is an object for the decoration, for possession and for man's sexual gratification.

The loneliness and violence have become the fate of the womanhood in their private life. They are living in the cave which is described beautifully in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. The importance of men and their superiority has been a part of Indian social mores for generation. Patriarchal society promoted two images of women: First women as the sexual property of man and second, woman as a chaste mother of their children. The fundamental values bind a man and woman into the bond of togetherness, the fidelity and companionship are away from social world today. Men take pride in having relationship before and after marriage. But the same thing they do not expect from the women. It is really an appalling condition of women that they cannot live without man in our society. They are considered physically weak and to venture in the society.

All these things have been expressed from the novels of Nayantara Sahgal like, *Storm In Chandigarh*, *This Time Of Morning*, *A Time To Be Happy*, *The Day In Shadow*, *Rich Like Us*, *Mistaken Identity* etc. In these novels, she exposes the true, hypocrite face of the Indian male dominated society.

Men take pride in having illicit relationship before and after marriage. But the same thing they do not expect from the women. We find this thing in the relations between Saroj and Inder in the novel *Storm in Chandigarh*. Saroj is unhappy and unable to find reciprocal involvement in her marriage. Her husband Inder is not only from a different

cultural background but also a different kind of person. He treats her very brutally like a sex object and not as a companion in marriage. Inder uses chastity as a weapon against his wife, Saroj. When Saroj tells him innocently about her affairs before her marriage, Inder considers it to be a serious moral offence. He feels that her act of relations with another man before the marriage was nothing but the crime. But, Saroj is not guilty and dishonest at all. Inder often ill-treats Saroj chiefly for her having lost her virginity before marriage. Sadist Inder, neither forgets this incident nor let Saroj forget it. Saroj who has been brought up in the liberal atmosphere of freedom. She is greatly surprised by her husband's violent reactions to a premarital affair she had in her college days. Inder could not forgive this act of Saroj and constantly exploits her sense of innocence. We have seen that Inder often tortures his wife Saroj for having premarital affair but the ironical thing is that Inder himself has lost his virginity long before his marriage, the narrator says, "There had been no such nightmare to contend with until his marriage. He had been precarious and successful in sex, robustly collecting experience where he found it". Saroj undergoes even a beating for this fault of hers, but Inder never punished himself for his fault. Inder had also the sexual relations before his marriage but in the male dominated society the guilt of man is not considered. Women in Indian society must be virtuous, chaste, passive and devoted to her husband even though the husband is having all types of evils in his character. Before marriage she must not get involved in the sexual involvement. For men it is not the crime to keep sexual relationships before or after the marriage while women are tortured for their same act. It is the inequality which is found in the male dominated Indian society. Sarala is the victim of this act and she had to face a lot of torture by her husband after innocently revealing the secret of her relations with another man before the marriage. Inder treats Saroj merely as a wife, a possession, not a person. There is no question of friendship between them. In this way, Inder-Saroj relationship exposes the cruel face of patriarchy where a woman lives in an appalling condition and faces sufferings because of strong social conventions.

The male superiority over female in marriage which finds in Inder, the same we find in Ram also in the novel *Rich Like Us*. The hero of the novel Ram marries Mona. Then he falls in love with Rose and finally fails. For him woman is a part of the heritage. For

supporting his views or attitude he gives the examples of the Lord Krishna and the king Dashratha. He tells Rose that Lord Krishna had three hundred wives and the king Dashratha, the father of Lord Rama had three wives. He claims that Hindus are more adventurous than Mohammedans who can only have four wives at a time. Claiming that Hindu marriage is a sacrament and not a contract, he rules out giving up his first wife, Mona. He has no guilt in his heart having first wife on the one hand and marries second time with Rose. And after his second marriage he carries an affair with Marcella. When Rose wants an explanation on this matter he explains to Rose that he feels intellectual love for Marcella. But his attitude turns violent towards Rose when she goes out with Freddi (with whom she was engaged before she met Ram) to get some relief from the suffocating experience which she got after marrying Ram. He even doesn't approve her meetings with Freddi and becomes annoyed at her. He also scolds her very brutally.

Sahgal, here shows the marriage institution is only the formality of binding to show the society only, otherwise it is futile. Marriage is only a system for the men to gratify their lust of sex while for woman it is the thing of devotion and sacrifice. But, the feeling of woman is not considered by the males in the society. Her sacrifice is mute. She has to live in the 'cave', which is the symbol of hypocrisy, loneliness and no communication with the husband. In the novel *Rich Like Us*, Ram enjoys life full of zest with the wives and Mona looking after the household affairs and the child, and Rose providing sensual pleasure and a company in business, whereas both the women feel wronged, lonely and insecure. Women surviving in the midst of adversity while bravely holding their fort with dignity, learning to tide over grief to carry on with life and displaying compassion and sensitivity for those around them. In this attitude the feeling of man is obvious in keeping extra marital affair but they are not casual about the women. They wanted their woman must be chaste and she must not keep any extra marital affair. Nayantar Sahgal strongly condemned the attitude of men that women are merely the object of man.

The novel *The Day in Shadow* also exposes the cruel face of society. This novel deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring Indian woman trapped under a burden of a brutal divorce settlement. Simirit, the heroine of the novel gets suffocating atmosphere with her husband Som. So, she seeks divorce from Som to be free. But after

getting divorce she realizes that it's too appalling and cruel situation to move as a divorcee in society. Her husband Som has also a cruel face of male dominated society. He tries to be modern in each and every manner and blindly imitates the western styles of life. Som wants Simirit to act as a traditional wife. She has no liberty and voice even in the ordinary decisions of everyday life. Sahgal has shown the narrowness, brutality, carelessness in the male characters of her novels. Their cynical nature has been frequently experienced by the woman characters in the novel. It resulted in loneliness, boredom, emptiness, futility of life to the sensitive women in the novels. It's a cave for them where the hypocrisy of manhood exposed. The loss of communication resulted in the separation between the man and woman. The wrong marriage suffers both the male and female but the scar of the agony is less in man because they are not dependant on the woman. Finally, the woman who does not have any place to share their emotions, they accepted the path of suicide.

Once again we see this inhuman practice against Madhu in the novel *A Situation in New Delhi*. The incident of rape on Madhu exposed the mentality of manhood in this novel. Madhu, a student of Delhi University is raped in the Registrar's office. The boys who raped Madhu regard her only as an object of lust, and have no regard for her feelings, will and self-respect. It is highly ironical situation that a situation that a society which produces such men and cannot punish them. In this matter the role of Madhu's parents is also very inhuman. They "don't want more publicity for what is already an intolerable disgrace" They think a hasty marriage is the only solution on their problems. Through this, Sahgal shows that a woman in a patriarchal set up has no place to go to once she is stigmatized.

Thus, we find that what society has created in her novels is based on the fact that society and the law are both made and controlled by man. The status of women in Indian male dominated society is really a nightmare.

References :

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