



## EXPLORATION OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S *THE DAY IN SHADOW*

Dr. M. Sivasankari

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of English, Maruthupandiyar College  
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Thanjavur, Tamilnadu

**Cite This Article:** Dr. M. Sivasankari, "Exploration of Feminine Sensibility in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 8, Issue 2, July - December, Page Number 34-38, 2023.

### Abstract:

Nayantara Sahgal is the best known feminist novelist in Indian English Literature. Nayantara Sahgal novels primarily deal with feminism. She is a writer of feminist perspective and her women characters are different from other women. She imposed her emotions on the characters. Nayantara Sahgal weaved feminine sensibility through her novels. Nayantara Sahgal was made keenly aware of the public forces that shaped her future existence. This paper attempts to explore feminine sensibility in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*. *The Day in Shadow* deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring Indian woman, Simrit trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement. Through the character of Simrit, Nayantara Sahgal projects how a divorced woman lives her life with agony and unhappiness and the difficulty she experiences in the hands of a cruel and unjust male-dominated society in India. Finally in the study of Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* is discussed about her female characters and dramatization of feminine sensibility. Nayantara Sahgal felt strongly about female exploitation and male mockery towards the issue of women's identity and her women characters undoubtedly revealed her feminist ideology.

**Key Words:** Feminism, Ideology, Patriarchal & Exploitation.

### Introduction:

Feminism means the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Feminism aims at liberating women from various manifestations of gender-based discrimination and exploitation. It is an expression that refers to a movement for securing equality between the sexes in all walks of life-social, economic and political. It broadly intends to secure womanhood freedom in all aspects. A feminist postulates that women should be on par with men. Toril Moi comments, "The terms 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s." The movement for women's equality with men is achieved to an extent. Yet, a woman is treated as a subordinate. Simone de Beauvoir aptly says: The situation of women is that she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures-nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other. (Tirupathi 8-9)

The concept of feminism end plates from time to time and place to place. Feminism means different things to different people, ranging from a wish to change and challenge the whole existing order of things to the desire to bring about more balanced and equality between the sexes and achieve respectable individual liberty for women with their instincts and characteristic instinct. Though equality with all its implications at various levels of society is a major issue, one of the fundamental areas where this equality matters and is desired even by the most conservative standards of feminism is in the area of marriage. The female categorization as a sex object is vehemently opposed. Women who were troubled by sexism within the family or their personal lives were attracted to feminism. The goal of feminism became for some to eliminate sexist oppression by the patriarchal society.

Nayantara Sahgal artistically uses the theories of Feminism and New Historicism side-by-side. This is obvious in all her novels. She analyses interprets and ideological constructs the historical events that had passed through the country, thereby narrating them combining the feminine concept. A close link between Nayantara Sahgal's life and the subject of her novels is borne out by her preoccupation with politics and also by her constant examination of marital problems. The political themes are often combined with the theme of man-woman relationships, their marital problems, their temperamental incompatibility, the problems arising out of their ego or submissiveness and finally, the problem of the status of women in society are skillfully woven in her writings. She is the first woman novelist who has linked the theories of Feminism and New Historicism in her writings.

*The Day in Shadow* deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring Indian woman, Simrit trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement. Through the character of Simrit, Nayantara Sahgal projects how a divorced woman lives her life with agony and unhappiness and the difficulty she experiences in the hands of a cruel and unjust male-dominated society in India. Simrit, the protagonist of the novel finds herself suffocated with her husband Som. Therefore, she seeks divorce from him. However, she realizes that it is the too appalling and cruel a situation to live as a divorcee in Indian society. The novel revolves around the life of Simrit who constantly faces torture from her husband Som. He blindly imitates the Western style of life. He likes to be modern in every manner. With this Western imitative lifestyle, he treats his wife in the same lines. He

feels that her support is not at all useful to him in any way and comes to the conclusion that woman is not fit for any business except confining herself to home.

The present study seeks to evaluate and examine how Nayantara Sahgal a prominent Indian English woman novelist, through the portrayal of variegated female characters and dramatization of real life conflicting situations, dichotomies, marital tensions and domestic traumas, undertakes the quest for female identity in her works. The problem is significant in that she is not only a sensitive woman with artistic imagination, but has also been subjected to these problems in her life, thus lending the quest theme a peculiar note of authenticity and immediacy.

Similarly, when Nayantara Sahgal takes up any feministic theme, she does deal with only the questions of marriage and divorce, sexuality and woman's equality with the man but also the cultural, religious and social environment in which a woman lives as well as the question of love, hatred and jealousy and certain other human emotions and values. She also dwells on the significance of essential humanism, the question of freedom, the growth of individuality, the quest for self-fulfilment, the impact of religion on man's life, various human values and the antithesis between idealism and pragmatism, illusion and reality. An interesting aspect of the modern Indian enlightenment has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility women in modern India have not only shared the exciting but dangerous responsibilities of the struggle for independence but have also articulated the national impulse and the consciousness of cultural change in the realm of letters: "The feminine sensibility has achieved an imaginative self-sufficiency which merits recognition despite its relatively late manifestation" (Rao 1).

Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* is studied with social and political criticism of the state of affairs in post-independence India. This research underlines briefly the novelists' constant preoccupation with exposing the state of affairs in India, particularly in Delhi which happened to be the hub of social and political activities. But the major thrust is on showing the feminist concern which underlies the social and political criticism contained in this novel.

One major theme of *The Day in Shadow* is the continued domination and exploitation of the woman by her husband despite the constantly increasing awareness of the need for liberation felt by every educated person following the achievement of independence and abolition of slavery to the British. The continued tendency toward exploitation of the woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system and reconstitute on her terms "*The Day in Shadow* marks the emergence of the new type of woman who can present her terms on which harmonious and dignified family life may be possible now and in future" (Tikoo 239-240).

Nayantara Sahgal's women refuse to be acquiescent suffering and sacrificing a lot. They are women who are conscious of their emotional needs. Hence cry for a change of order that starves them of individual fulfilment. *In Storm in Chandigarh* continues to live with Saroj in spite of her confession of pre-marital but harbours the thought of Saroj's impurity. "The existential struggle of Nayantara Sahgal's women is not confined to the emotional plan. It extends to the materialistic plan too. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* cannot continue her life with her husband Som" (Bai 136).

*The Day in Shadow* gives a sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society when she opts to dissolve a seventeen-year-old marriage. A divorced woman is stigmatized forever and she is curiously watched by others, was studying her solicitously, as if divorce were a disease that left pockmarks (DS 4). 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. Simrit feels that only her intellectual needs but her emotional needs remain unfulfilled in her status as a happily married woman. She, however, never ceases to wish for their fulfilment. Her desire for the kindly attention of Som leads surprisingly enough to her frequent pregnancies. Simrit did not especially want a boy-or another baby. . . "She never told him she felt reckless, not fragile, during those months" (DS 25).

Though Simrit's decision of divorce lands her into multifarious problems her independent, bold, self-reliant attitude separates her from the traditional women who religiously follow the footsteps of their husbands and worship them like God. Overburdened with the responsibility of children and home, she struggles hard to maintain her life. There are no basic amenities like a regular supply of milk, or a phone connection, however, she tries to overcome her problems with her characteristics, "She was basically tough, with the toughness of undivided integrity. And she was in his view exceptional for a woman. She had understood when she had to act, at least in that one crisis" (DS 38). At this time of desolation, Simrit was consoled and encouraged by Raj, who was a politician. She developed an emotional relationship with Raj who gave her the moral support that she needed in life. Simrit shares with him her decision of taking a divorce from her husband Som. But, he discourages her: "I'm going to get some advice on it then and see how we can find a way out." . . . "You don't understand," she repeated listlessly. "This agreement I've signed in his pound of flesh. He won't let it go" (DS 39).

Simrit appeared to Raj something like a child lost, patiently waiting for somebody to say or guide what way or what to do. But she knew that she was tough; a toughness out of integrity. She had known how to act. Raj was like a quality of strength she deserved help. He could do what he could do to believe the situation. Simrit was trapped and maimed even after her divorce because of the settlement terms. Som imposed such cruel

penalties on her to the taxation. He could have done it some other humane ways. When Som explained the treachery, Simrit could not understand why Som should be so cruel and revengeful upon her. Som said it was more than a life sentence. Life sentence ends after a period of time. It was a real life sentence and it would be upon her until she died. Simrit had been having nightmares with a frightening clarity since her divorce. What wrong had she committed? Was it because she fought his injustice so stoically with self-composure? Did it exhibit his moral inferiority? Nayantara Sahgal describes her feelings thus, Som could have forgiven her if she had been a weaker being, unsure, dependent, even receiving. But that beneath her docility she was none of these things was unpardonable. "And she could have loved him despite of everything if only sometimes she had fought him" (DS 53).

Simrit divorce leads to problems not only in coping with her irrational fears and tensions but also with the society which does not recognize a woman's identity apart from her husband's. Her thoughts: "This is what an overloaded donkey feels like standing there as large as life with its back-breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can't see it, but because it's a donkey and loads is for donkeys" (DS 56). Simrit's several pleas to relieve her of one tax onus go quite unheeded not only by Som but even by the society at large. She feels her life with Som to be no different from her present existence: "May be she had always been an animal; only a nice, obedient, domestic and sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told. And in return, she had been fed and sheltered" (DS 57). Feminism is an aspect which expresses women's rights in all walks of life. Nayantara Sahgal novels primarily deal with feminism. She is a writer of feminist perspective her heroines are different from other women. She imposed her emotions on the characters she created in her novels. In *The Day in Shadow* there is a change in the character and attitude of her heroines in these novels. "The heroines such as Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* grow bold enough as Nayantara Sahgal did in her life, a reform is felt necessary in the code bill conferring some basic rights to women" (Prasath and Ambika 220).

In reality, it was Som who has not spent enough time with his wife. Simrit always longed for an intimate relationship with her husband where there is freedom as an individual and at the same time confining herself as a wife. But their intimacy was never shared due to the domination of Som. She had to spend a suffocating married life with Som. Though the mindsets of Simrit and Som are different from each other, she longs to communicate and equate herself with that of her husband's mind.

Moreover, Simrit is an educated woman and naturally liked to share ideas on life and business with her husband which is not at all accepted by him. He ignored her ideas. Apart from this Som was not able to give love and affection, warmth and comfort, freedom and understanding to his wife. Disregarding her feelings for him, he views her just as an object of lust for satisfying sexual desire. Som's unfriendly attitude towards Simrit paved way for the destruction of their marital bond. She has two children in marriage with Som. Yet, the torture of her husband continued which was not tolerable and thus, she walks out of the marital bond just to assert and free herself as an individual.

Taking divorce from Som does not solve Simrit's problem. She at the time of divorce did not want any of the property or shares of her husband. She only wanted her children. But, cruel Som made a brutal divorce settlement where the property and other shares worth six lakhs were transferred to Simrit's name and these were later inherited by Brij. He has done so that he can escape paying tax on those holdings and enjoy the income from it. "It's just that I don't want them in my name. I get nothing out of them. So why should I be taxed at an exorbitant rate because of them?" (DS 55) Since then, Simrit unwillingly had to pay the heavy taxes levied on the holdings without having any right or income over the property. Living on her own was a burden to her.

Moreover, this divorce settlement shocked Simrit both emotionally and physically. Many of the arguments with Som to relieve her from the tax burden were deliberately ignored. Even society supported Som. Apart from this; the desire of keeping her children with her after divorce also was not satisfied because the children themselves didn't like to stay with her. Nayantara Sahgal goes deep into the inner world of Simrit showing that she attained from her husband yet, it is only on the surface level for she is more tortured as a divorcee than as the wife of Som. The authoress writes what Simrit feels as a divorcee: "The tissue of a marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on. And Skeletons could endure for a million years. Just living together, daily routine produced that uncanny durability" (DS 64).

In *The Day in Shadow* Som blindly imitates the Western style of life. He likes to be modern in every manner. With this Western imitative lifestyle, he treats his wife in the same manner. He feels that her support is not at all useful to him in any way and comes to the conclusion that woman is not fit for any business except confining herself to home. "Woman in the home was a good, sound idea. Europeans even had nostalgia for it, as they had for the glamour of so many institutions they had thankfully dispensed with themselves" (DS 77). Som's domination does not end there. He tries to make a mockery of their marital relationship saying: "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 me to spend more time with myself" (DS 77).

In Simrit's marital relationship, she does not receive love, understanding, candour, and companionship from her husband who treats his wife as a priceless object, "She's quite mulish about everything being just as good here" (DS 78). For an educated and sensitive woman, her husband's indifference is extremely inhuman,

particularly when she wholeheartedly desires a deeper relationship. She only craves for some goal, and meaning beyond the world of self-advancement, "I want a world whose texture is kindly, she thought. Surely there is such a world" (DS 89).

For Simrit, love means complete emotional involvement with her husband. Contrary to it, Som looks up sex as a means of self-gratification, sensual pleasure. Kate Millet aptly says, "It is an arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (74). Som divorces Simrit on the plea that, "you know damned well why it's happening. When a woman freezes up every time her husband touches her it's time to call it a day" (DS 98). While Simrit finds that the physical act no longer, "He lay down beside her, compelling her with his urgency, but it could no longer transport her unresisting to a comfortable place" (DS 90).

Simrit realizes that talk is the missing link in her relationship with Som and tries in vain to engage him in any meaningful dialogue. She is isolated and ignored like a piece of furniture, but used for physical comfort whenever needed by Som. She suffers marriage, therefore, like solitary confinement of the human spirit instead of enjoying it as communion and union of two human minds and spirits. Som's failure is, therefore, basically, of a bestial nature and forgivable insensitivity. Som is drenched in his affluent arrogance, sensuality and utter lack of refinement. Culture is beyond the ken of his understanding sensuous response to the bounty of nature is beyond his experience. Success and money at any cost are his goals in life: For example, Simrit recalls the days of his association with Vetter: "Simrit looked at Som during those days not always recognizing him. He had German phrases on the tip of his tongue and Vetter's mannerism" (DS 91).

In marriage, there are essentially only two partners and this institution collapse either by one or the other or by both follies and foibles. Simrit's world in *The Day in Shadow* collapsed because she found her husband's world of wealth and ambition devoid of the personal touch. Even sex with her husband became a problem because she could no longer identify with him and sex could not be kept in a compartment by itself. If marriage was distasteful to the novelist, the divorce was equally a torn flesh, bleeding. Simrit the novelist in disguise bled over the terms of the divorce. She had longed for financial independence whereas the terms of the divorce. She believed in equality and harmony between sexes. Nayantara Sahgal's women characters, her women are educated, self-thinker and urban. Her women involve in extramarital relations but do not sulk either with shame or guilt. Her women relate their sexual acts to the feeling behind the act.

Raj not only supports Simrit psychologically but also tries to solve the problems she faces. Society does not support her but supports Som who has laid the burden over her. Raj helps Simrit to come out of her problems. He even discusses the tax settlement of Simrit with Ram Krishnan: "There must be other ways for the husband to save tax" (DS 167). Raj constantly battles to make Simrit free from the burden of brutal tax settlement. He along with Ram Krishnan tries to work out to solve her problem by writing and requesting the tax officials to relieve her from the burden. He supports her so much that he even wants to marry her. Simrit rejects the plea considering that marital bond is a vicious circle: 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 hundred and one other hurdles had been crossed. Besides, all these earth-shaking decisions were supposed to be hers to make, of her own free will, in her own good time"(DS 231-232).

Simrit was struggling to find her individuality and identity in the material life of Som. Som feels in the physical relationship but now Simrit emerges out as new woman in the relationship of Raj where she fined her love respect, equality, identity and individuality. Raj shows his love towards Simrit without any expectation they made their bond together. Every woman can fulfill herself wholly in the loving and harmonious with a man. *The Day in Shadow's* female protagonist seeks women hood freedom in all respect the ultimate goal of feminism is to make women have identity, freedom and live a life of her. Nayantara Sahgal wants to bring out the rule that man-woman relationship with perfect equality. It is an essential for women to lead an honorable and dignified life, and she portrays Simrit as up her unbearable compliant role.

Nayantara Sahgal exposes the problems of women suffering in the bond of marriage and the struggles of living as a divorcee through the character of Simrit. Thus by projecting the problems of Simrit in *The Day in Shadow*, Nayantara Sahgal tries to seek a society with better attributes to love, morality, sex, marriage, education and religion which in turn provide immense possibilities of living, especially to the divorced women.

#### **Conclusion:**

In *The Day in Shadow*, Nayantara Sahgal seems to be deeply concerned with the need for freedom for women. Simrit in this novel wants to land on her feet and enjoy individuality, self-expression and self-confidence. It is Simrit's longing for freedom and individuality that urges her to take divorce from her husband. Simrit does not want to be known as her husband's wife but as herself. The novel exposes Simrit's existence with Som and the cruel construction of the male society. Thus, Nayantara Sahgal presents a new dimension to Indian English fiction through the exploration of the troubled sensibility, a typical new Indian phenomenon. Nayantara Sahgal felt strongly about female exploitation and male mockery towards the issue of women's identity crisis. She demanded social justice for women, her focus being individual freedom. She represented new morality, according to which, a woman is not to be taken as a mere playing, an object of desire for

temporary satisfaction, but man's equal and honoured partner. Her women characters undoubtedly reveal her feminist ideology.

**References:**

1. Bai, Meera K. "Feminism as an Extension of Existentialism: Woman in Indian English Fiction." *The Commonwealth Review* 6.1 (1994-95): 135-140. Print.
2. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983. Print.
3. Prasath, K., and G. Ambika. "Portrayal of Feminism - Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)* 6.1 (Jan. - Mar. 2018): 220-223. Print.
4. Rao, A.V. Krishna. *Nayantara Sahgal: A Study of Her Fiction and Non-Fiction*. Madras: N Seshachalam Publications, 1976. Print.
5. Sahgal, Nayantara. *The day in Shadow*. Gurgaon, Harayana: Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd., 1991. Print.
6. Tikoo, S.K. "The Day in Shadow: An Experiment in Feminist Fiction." *Indian Women Novelists: Set II. Vol.4*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1993: 238-251. Print.
7. Tirupathi, B. *Indian Women Writers Today - Nayantara Sahgal Vision of Life*. New Delhi: Prestige Books International, 2018. Print.