



EMERGENCE OF NEW WOMEN IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Indian women have made much progress in almost all fields and much change has come in their condition in post-independent India. The new modern women are at once different from the traditional ones. In present times the new generation of Indian women is full of confidence and multi-talented. They have recognized their rights and duties in family and society. They have stopped accepting the autonomy of patriarchy and its codes and norms which affected the life of women in ancient times. The new Indian women are more bold, educated and full of new confident, hope and energy. This has attracted the attention of almost all Indian feminists and they have focused on new women in their writings. Nayantara Sahgal is one of those Indian feminists who have portrayed new Indian women with their new thinking and perspectives. The present paper explores the emergence of new women, their struggle for freedom, equality and honor in present day 21st century civilized Indian society. Sahgal's main focus in her writings is less on traditional Indian women who are illiterate, dependent on their husband but she has concentrated more on new modern women who are economically sound, educated, career conscious, successful in life, good administrators, influential politicians but they are ill-treated and their right to live with dignity and personal liberty is affected by men in family and patriarchal society.

Key words: India, women, struggle, freedom, patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most powerful voices in Indian Writing in English. She was highly influenced by Article 21 of the constitution of India which gives guarantee to every person whether a man or a woman to live a life of liberty and dignity and no other person is allowed to affect the right of another person. The author has expressed the idea of personal life and liberty in her almost all writings through the central female characters who have emerged strong and dare to fight when their rights are affected and their respect is damaged.

A strong person of her own rights Nayantara was born in 1927 in the most powerful Indian Nehru-Ganghi political family. She got her primary and secondary education from the most advance Indian boarding school and higher education from America and her American education widened her outlook and attitude towards life. She is regarded a different kind of writer and in her works there is description of only elite class of society. In her writings the central characters are both male and female but being a female writer Mrs. Sahgal has given more importance to her female characters. The female characters in the writings of Mrs. Sahgal are not goddesses but human beings who have a strong desire for freedom and equality. Her works deal with the emergence of rich and upper class women.

Nayantara Sahgal is different kind of writer and women characters in mostly of her novels present the picture of new women. The modern women are at the centre of fiction of Mrs. Sahgal and nothing is reserved in her fiction. Her women characters fight against patriarchy for in order to get respect and dignity. She has portrayed a variety of women from the traditional and subjugated to the extremely free thinking modern and liberated women. They are daring women having much stamina to face the stress and strain to the high class society in which they live. In her novels Sahgal attacks the narrow-minded, orthodox and hypocritical men

She has created in her fiction the new Indian women who are not powerless but powerful. They are not Sitas but Durgas who don't tolerate pains and sufferings but strongly raises voice and fight for their own self respect, dignity and proper place in family and society. They continuously challenge the patriarchy and struggle against the powerful social forces without caring for the dire consequences. Sahgal, in her *Point of View*, declares:

It takes half of life to achieve personhood but there is no other glory. (P.30)

Sahgal's in her fiction has not overlooked the traditional Indian women but being a feminist with new thinking and outlook towards life and because of her broad view due to her American education she has focused on the new women who are filled with new hope and energy and their thinking is different from the traditional women. Moreover there is emergence of new Indian women like Maya (social worker) Nita (Career conscious through education), Uma, Saroj and Simrit, (journalists), Sonali Ranade, (uncompromising and honest IAS officer) and unnamed the Ranees of Vijaygarh. Mrs. Sahgal makes the patriarchy aware to recognize the power of new women but she regrets that even in 21st century civilized and advance Indian society has not still accepted this notion.

Emergence of New Emergence in Sahgal's novel *A Time to Be Happy* (1957)

Nayantara Sahgal, in her first novel *A Time to Be Happy*, focuses on the emergence of new Indian women. She believes that new women should recognize their role and potential in post-independent era which is an age of fast changing in every field. She has expressed the concept of emergence of new women through the story of central character Maya and her husband Harish. Harish is typical product to male-dominated society. He is not ready to change according fast changing time but lives in the age old beliefs where woman were subjected to social rules. As a result he affects the life and freedom of his wife, Maya. Harish thinks that a woman has no right to enjoy but only duty to perform. He thinks that it is duty of a woman to stay home, care for children and all time she should be devoted for the happiness and utmost satisfaction of her husband.

Maya is filled with new thinking, new energy, new ideas and new hope. She thinks that her limitations are not only within the four walls of the house but beyond also. Actually Maya and Harish were born and brought up in different cultures. Harish believes in superiority of man and inferiority of woman. He thinks that man is master of the family and a woman has to obey the command of her master. When Maya realizes that her freedom is affected then she raises her voice against her husband for her respect and recognition. When Harish ignores Maya then at last she struggles to prove her potential as a new woman. She decides to join the Village's Upliftment Programme' and works very effectively and with capability to prove her potential that the new modern woman is not inferior to man in any sense and she can do all works what a man has been doing for centuries. It is to be noted that her Mrs. Sahgal seems to be challenging the patriarchy and appreciates Maya's attitude and labels as emergence of 'New Modern Woman' who is conscious for her rights and believes in

equality and challenges the male defined rules and age old conventions. Maya frequently visits the village Rehabilitation Centre and does all possible help for the welfare and upliftment of needy and poor village people and she becomes a well known face among the people and emerges as a new woman. Sahgal writes:

....a new look at woman, not as the property of father, husband and son, dependent on their bounty but as valuable human.....full participation in her life and events. (P. 30)

Emergence of new modern woman in Sahgal's second novel *This Time of Morning* (1965)

Nayantara Sahgal is a different kind of writer who presents Indian women in a unique way. In her novel female centric novel *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal has presented the concept of a new modern woman through the characters of Nita who gives more importance to freedom, education and career. Nita is a twenty plus young modern girl who wants to live an independent life of her own choice and without interference of anyone. She likes smoking cigarettes, drinking vodka, and dancing at late night parties. She wants to make her career through her study and for success in life she gets ready to sacrifice her age of marriage as she says:

I don't marry till I'm forty five?.....Daddy only seems to pick midgets or men who never open their mouths.....I don't want to marry at all just yet. (P. 40-41)

Nita is a lover of freedom and equality. After her marriage with a young boy Vijay she is not happy with her marital life. She feels bored with her loveless marriage. She is a career conscious and wants her own independent life but her husband Vijay does not like it and wants to keep Nita under his complete control. There is complete mismatch of understanding and dissatisfied Nita opposes her husband's unwanted behavior and unhappy Nita develops her love with another man Kalyan and she feels very happy and comfortable in the company of Kalyan. She wants to live a life of her own choice not caring the set rules of orthodox male dominated Indian society. Similarly there is another female character named Uma Mitra in the novel who also wants her independent life of freedom and when her freedom is affected she does not feel hesitated in challenging the patriarchy. Uma is wife of Arjun Mitra who does not give her wife respect and when Uma realizes that her dignity is damaged by her husband she does not take much time in taking decision to break her relationship with her husband for a life of respect and self-recognition. She says:

....a woman should not allow orthodox thinking....with appetite that her husband could not satisfy so she indulges herself elsewhere. Men do it and there is no comment. (P. 71)

Emergence of new Women in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969)

Storm in Chandigarh is the third novel of Mrs. Sahgal. It is also regarded female centric novel. In this novel the female central character is Saroj who is free-lance journalist and writes columns and articles for various leading Indian English newspapers. Her business husband Inder does not like it and he discourages Saroj at every step. He is a perfect product of chauvinistic society which does not believe in the freedom of women. Thus Inder's behavior affects the progress of Saroj and she does not like but being a good Indian wife she suffers her husband cruelty for a long time. When she realizes that it is climax of the suffering then at last she raises her voice against her husband. Sahgal writes:

...Life is bigger than system. Life can break the system that lacks of righteousness and reason. It is life's obligation to rebel and humanity is right if it is freeit could see a long accepted light. (P. 173)

Emergence of new woman in *The Day in Shadow* (1971)

The Day in Shadow is the 4th novel of Nayantara Sahgal. It is autobiographical one in which she has depicted her own life through the protagonist Simrit. Sahgal has shown this very theme through the story of Som and Simrit. Som is a businessman while Simrit is an educated and freelance journalist. Both are different in their thinking and in every way. Som always keeps Simrit under his complete control without caring the feelings of his educated wife. Simrit tolerates mental agony for a long time but when she realizes that it is enough and the water has gone over the head, she takes divorce from Som in order to get freedom and to live a life of happiness, freedom and dignity. Som lives in a world where women do not exist. He uses and exploits women in his own ways. He has not learnt to respect women and their feelings. His heart does not move at the thought

of any atrocity on women. So Simrit is an oppressed wife of Som and she faces emotional violence every step in her daily life. Simrit is not a woman but she is representative of all high class Indian women. At last she breaks the relationship with her husband to live a life of freedom and dignity and emerges as a new modern woman.

Emergence of new woman in *Rich Like Us* (1983)

Sahgal's novel *Rich Like Us* (1983) is another remarkable in which she has concentrated on the new woman Sonali, a very capable and visionary and an honest IAS officer. She is the central character in the novel. The topper of her batch Sonali is a woman of self respect and strong decision. She never compromises if her dignity is affected by anyone. In male dominated society when feels that her freedom is being affected and her reputation is being damaged she does not hesitate to resign from her job but her resignation is not her defeat in life but her defiance against the oppressive forces of patriarchy. She never compromises with male oppression and raises her voice as a strong and bold woman. Through the character Mrs. Sahgal has depicted the image of a modern woman in contemporary times.

Emergence of new woman in *Mistake Identity* (1988)

Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* (1988) also deals with the emergence of new women in Indian society. In this novel the protagonist is Ranees of Vijaygarh. She is a rebel of society who breaks all boundaries and makes rule of her own. She was married when she just five years old and she was blessed with a son, Bhusan but her husband does not care for the emotions of his wife. She faces inhuman form of mental violence and exploitation. In her mental agony she becomes a rebel against her husband and social rules. Though the Ranees of Vijaygarh is an unnamed character but Sahgal's idea of new woman reaches its culmination when she challenges the patriarchy in order to make her own independent recognition and freedom in moth eaten traditional society. In this way the author's concept of emergence of new women starts in 1957 with her first novel's central character Maya and reaches its highest point in her novel *Mistaken Identity* (1988) Jasbir Jain, in *The New Indian Novels in English: A Study of the Novels of 1980s*, remarks:

...she refuses to accept his of pursuit of pleasure and new Ranees and says good bye to realism and this is the ending of mistaken identity. (P. 262)

Here Sahgal strongly criticizes the attitude of a man who takes women to an object of sexual pleasure and not a human being. Neena Arora, in her study of Sahgal and Dorris Lessing, observes:

While man considers it as normal male behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage ...he turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting her. (P. 61)

CONCLUSION

Nayantara Sahgal is different kind of writer and in her works she has depicted such Indian women whose journey of life starts from bondage and ends with freedom and from weakness to strength. In her fictional world we find the women characters challenging patriarchy, breaking their shackles and asserting their independence. It is also to be noted that Sahgal is not a militant feminist but she is an advocate of self respect and dignity of Indian women in 21st century civilized and fast developing society. Moreover, she demands for social justice and encourages modern women to raise their strong voice for equality and independent recognition. She seems to suggest the men to recognize the potential of multi-talented new and modern women for the fast growing society and nation and give them opportunity so that the new women for their all round development so can live a free life of self respect and dignity.

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