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NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE FICTION OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL

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ABSTRACT

Nayantara Sahgal emerged as one of the great Indian Novelists Writing in English. She is one of India's for most socio-political novelists and her novels present an authentic picture of independent India. A close study of her novels reveals that her two dominant themes – social and political are always braided one with the other. She is the only novelist who employs politics as a background for her social themes. She takes up women's problems as the core to which the political issues form a back drop, a thin veneer. Her concern for women is based more on humanism rather than that of feminism. Her feminism does not go beyond treating women as an individual. To put it briefly, the novels of Nayantara Sahgal deal with a wide range of themes ranging from personal dilemma and problems, joys and sorrows, fulfillment and frustrations of women protagonists to the political upheavals, that India has experienced since independence. This article focuses on the narrative techniques of the novel of Nayantara Sahgal which is an important aspect of her fictional presentation.

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INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the distinguished Indo- English Writer who writes in the stream of national consciousness. She is a novelist and political commentator who has published nine novels and some non-fictional works. In all her novels, there is a juxtaposition of two worlds- the personal world of man – woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. Besides politics her novels also focuses attention on Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self realization. Novels bring out Sahgal as a writer with feminist concerns seeking independent existence of women. She recognizes that as a woman novelist, her primary obligation is that of advocating the emancipation of women. She describes in her novels how a woman is exploited during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. She tried to portray the sensibility of women that how a woman looks out at herself and her problems and feels that women should try to understand and realize herself as a human being and not just as an appendage to some male life.

Theme of the Novel:

The novel is a fine example of the Female Literary Tradition in Indian English Language. Though the main theme of the novel is politics, yet the problem of divorce and disintegration of Marriage in a typical Indian Setting are also beautifully dealt with. In almost every novel Sahgal has a central woman who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs. This novel deals with the struggle of a young beautiful and daring Indian woman "Simrit" who is trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and the unhappiness she experiences in the hands of cruel and unjust male dominated society of India.

Portrayal of man – woman relationship:

Most of Sahgal's novels deal with the theme of man – woman relationship especially women struggling against social injustice and oppression heaped upon them in the name of tradition and culture. As Krishna Rao describes as :

She has inherited and cherished a certain
Set of values and attitude towards life,
which can be best described as a complex of
political liberalism, social sophistication, economic
moderation in continual interaction with
Gandhian Idealism...

The achievement of NayantaraSahgal as a writer is quite an impressive one. The portrayal of man – woman relationship in her novels revolves around two dominant themes a changing India with the times and the communication gap between individuals especially between husband and wife, She portrays her women characters to bring about their self hood assertions in the changing social milieu. Her main concern is not just the anti-male issues as we find in other feminist writers. She seeks the freedom of women through the reformation of society which is male-oriented. Her concern for women who are caught in the dilemma of liberty and traditionalism or stability and protection of marriage is exhibited in almost all of her novels. Society consists of men and women and happiness is achieved through understanding, cooperation and sympathy from both sides.

Male chauvinism:

NayantaraSahgal brings out the male chauvinistic tendencies in Som. What he could not forgive is Simrit's moral superiority. To make up his deficiencies in the finer spirits he imposes his brutal force upon her Simrit trapped maimed even after the divorce because of the adverse divorce settlement terms. Som imposes cruel penalties on her to save himself from taxation. Simrit finds that she has to pay tax for six lakhs worth of shares in her name. Som controls her shares. Most of her earnings are lost in paying the taxes. Som plans everything in such a way that simritdoesnot enjoy the benefits of the shares. She loses everything . She is not able to give anything to her children except her own self.

Som could have done it in some other way. As it is sheer butchery. It is malicious. It is ligo like male violence, with shylock's temper for revenge. When Som explains the treachery, Simrit is not able to understand why Som should be so cruel and revengeful towards her. Sahgal describes Simrit's painful feeling thus.

Som could have forgiven her if she has been a
weaker being, unsure, dependent, even deceiving
But beneath her locality she was none of these things;
was unpardonable. And she could have loved
him inspite of everything, if only sometimes
She had fought him

Technique of Stream of Consciousness:

The Western Wave of Stream of Consciousness technique affected the writings of the novelist and she also plunged deep into the inner world of her characters. She adopts an interesting method of creating her characters in the novel in order to promote her theme of women's suppression and revolt in the socio-political set up in modern India. Her characters are not so much individuals as types pointing to constructing theme. She creates such contrasting pairs as Som and Raj, Sardar sahib and Sumer singh, N.N.Shah and Ram kishan.

The writer reproduces the thoughts and the vision of the future India dreamed of and put before the nation by its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, according to Nehru, Science and Technology were the means by which India could realize its dreams of a better future in the science-dominated world.

Technique of Flash back:

In the novel, a clinical analysis, of social issues has been attempted much at the cost of their artistic values. In handling the flashback technique Sahgal displays remarkable expertise. She uses inevitability about the flashback, The novel "The Day in Shadow" opens well after Simrit has taken divorce and her past comes alive in flashback, which sustains reader's-interest throughout the fiction. Here Sahgal says that woman reflects her creator's love for individual freedom.

Active evil over passive good:

When Brij goes to his father in order to get money for his mother, he stays with his father and gets groomed by his father into a shrewd business man and his mother's concern does not matter much to him now. He knows that his future would be better if he is in the custody of his father. His betrayal of Simrit is interpreted as the victory of active evil over passive good. The plain truth, however is that he is guided by realistic considerations. Simrit softening her pain and concern remarks "All right, darling" (75)

Auto biographical touch:

In *The Day in Shadow* which Sahgal calls her most personal novel, she tries to describe the struggle of a woman trying to establish her identity against her husband and family, which is unacceptable to society, especially the Hindu society. Her heroines rebel against social inequalities and Hindu ambivalences. She vehemently opposes the practice of sati. The heroine of this novel, Simrit experiences a form of sati at the hands of her husband, SomAsJasbir Jain points out, "The Day in Shadow gives a sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society"(The Aesthetics of Morality : Sexual Relations in the Novels of NayantaraSahgal, The Journal of Indian Writing in English).

This novel portrays the agonized experience of a divorced middle – aged woman, Simrit. Her marriage with Som, an industrialist turns out to be a disaster. In this novel, Sahgal projects her real life through the character Simrit. She says that lack of understanding between husband and wife leads to divorce. The parallels between the life and circumstances of Simrit and those of Sahgal are so unmistakable that the novel has caused some genetic confusion. Which many reviewers have termed it an autobiography, Meenakshi Mukherjee treats it as a novel and judges it by intrinsic merit. Jasbir Jain resolves the controversy by terming the novel, "The Day in Shadow" as "NayantaraSahgal's Emotional Autobiography" (Rajeshwar M 90)

Superficial Modernity:

People in India think that they can become modern just by imitating the western lifestyle the people in New Delhi love organizing parties, drinking wine and flirting with women other than their wives. They enjoy late night dinners and ballroom dancers. The novel opens with the glow and the glitter of the modern society of the capital city of India.

Self-realization and call of new found love:

Simrit realizes that lack of communication is the reason of their separation and she tries to engage him in meaningful dialogue. But she is ignored in such situations, for Som gives importance only to physical comfort, whenever Som needs her. And Som's attraction for Simrit runs on these lines, "It was a power he would happily have disposed with at this movement for plain animal attraction"(158).

Simrit does not like to be a mere sexual object of pleasure for her husband, Som. She is an intellectual writer who has different roles to play. She feels more at home in intellectual circles and in the association of Raj. Raj's constructive thinking on nations issues attracts Simrit. She endeavors to find soft emotions in him. She finds herself desperately in need of fulfilling her emotional needs. So She finds the right man in Raj, who is sympathetic, understanding and a good friend. The affair between Simrit and Raj becomes romantic, ironically making som, the villain of the piece. It is not physical incompatibility instead it is temperamental incompatibility which makes Simrit to break the bond with Som and go in search of new life.

Sahgal's marital morality as revealed in her works are based on honesty, mutual trust, consideration, understanding and freedom. She attacks selfishness and pretence that subsequently result in marital breakdown.

Graphical description in a Freudian Manner:

Sahgal graphically describes how Simrit feels when Som methodically begins to torture her, mentally. At nights, she dreams of the incredible cliffs leaning lower and lower over her car; preparing casually to crush it.

Simrit has been dreaming with a frightening clarity since her divorce. She is clinging to a balustrade sky, when her fingers are wrenched loose one by one, and she is hurled on to the pavement below. The queer thing is that no one takes notice of her fall. Cars and people are going by. A deafening scream, her own, goes on and on. She can hardly hear the traffic through it. But no one else hears it. A man selling slices of watermelon, at the corner, crisp, pink, crescent with juice looks indifferently at her and goes away again. Two men sitting on the ground near her, their legs poked forward in the listless waking sleep of poverty, talk in monotonous murmurs.

This is a graphical description of Simrit mental agony in a Freudian manner. Every detail brings clearly with a telling effect of her mental agony, her feeling of insecurity and uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the novels of Nayantara Sahgal are unified, first by their background of recent Indian politics, then we are aware of her division of the world into the aggressors and the non-aggressors and finally growing out of both of the need for women to become equal partners in the struggle to protect those values which allow human beings to live together in mutual respect.

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