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PATRIARCHY: MAN AND WOMAN IN MAJOR NOVELS OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL

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Abstract

Patriarchy is such a Society in which more importance is given to man than woman. In India society, except some parts, has been patriarchal from olden times. In Indian society which is primarily patriarchal in which men's population is around 52% and women are around 48%. Man holds all powers so he wants to control a woman but in present times of equality a woman has recognized her potential as an individual. In a male-dominated society a man wants complete control on his wife but she doesn't want to be controlled. Moreover she wants to live a life of freedom and dignity like man. She is aware for her rights as a person. A man is stronger physically so he is oppressor and a woman is vulnerable so a man tries to oppress a woman but a modern in fast changing time refuses to accept the superiority of man because she is more aware for her own rights. So she strongly raises her voice against injustice and fight for freedom, equality and against discrimination as a result conflict arises between them. The modern woman is at once different from traditional woman. The traditional was dependent on her husband in every respect and for her the husband was God or Pati-Prameshwar but for a modern woman husband is just an equal partner. Nayantara's pre-marriage life was full of happiness but after marriage she experienced inequality between man and woman. Moreover she was highly influenced by the Constitution of India which gave every Indian male and female certain rights like – rights of equality, liberty and dignity. The present paper explores the patriarchy in India, man and woman, and struggle of modern Indian woman for freedom, equality, dignity and an honored place in family and community.

Key words: Patriarchy, man and woman, India

INTRODUCTION

Indian society has been patriarchal from the ancient times. In patriarchal set up more importance is given to male than female. The condition of women, except the Vedic era, has been pitiable. The Muslim Rule is called the 'darkest age' as far age the

situation of woman in patriarchal society is concerned because a woman was not treated as a human being but as an object for man and as a chattel. Actually man is stronger so he is the master and woman is subordinate. Man being a master tries to keep woman under his control and uses her as per his desires and for his maximum benefit. The

traditional woman accepted the superiority of male without making a question and raising any voice while new and modern woman refused to accept the male superiority and started challenging the authority of man in present times and a conflict started rising between man and woman and it gave rise between two opposite sexes. At one place both man and woman are opposite to one another but at another place they are complementary to each other and one cannot survive and unimportant in absence of another.

Causes or grounds of conflict between man and woman Disrespect, Misunderstanding, incompatibility, Quest for self-identity and freedom, oppression of wife by husband, undue influence, damage of dignity and respect of wife by husband, discrimination between son and daughter, lack of communication, betrayal and disloyalty in relationships etc. Consequences of conflict between man and woman Cruelty, domestic violence, tension in marital life of husband and wife, divorce, breaking up in lover-beloved relationships, negative impact on the life of children, at last death or suicide etc.

In Nayanatra Sahgal's almost all novels we find man and woman two different beings and the struggle of modern high class Indian woman for liberation. She is one the strongest voices in Indian writing in English. She is a champion of elite class Indian women. A member of Nehru-Gandhi political and a strong person of her own rights Sahgal was highly impressed by the Constitution of India which in force in 26 January 1950 and gives every person, male or female rights to live a life of liberty, dignity, self-respect without any kind of discrimination but man in patriarchy tries to affect the rights of women which compel Indian modern women to raise their voice against patriarchy.

Nayantara was born in 1927 in the most powerful Indian Nehru-Ganghi political family. She was educated in the most advance Indian English medium boarding schools. After completion of her schooling for higher education went to America and her American education widened her outlook and attitude towards life. After completion of her higher education she came back to India and got married with Gautam Sahgal, a UK born young man and she

first time realized that the patriarchy in India treats man and woman in different way. 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 and to attain them they stand against the male dominance. Her novels deal with the emergence of rich and upper class women who raise their voice strongly and fight against patriarchy and its system which affects the life of a woman.

Sahgal's novels the central characters are new and educated women who are much conscious for their rights of freedom and a life of dignity and when male power tries to affect the rights of women then they don't feel hesitation in fighting for the protection of their rights and openly challenges the patriarchy for in order to get respect and freedom. She has portrayed a variety of women who are bold and educated. 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 hypocrite Indian society. She has created in her novels a new kind of Indian woman who is not powerless but powerful. At one place she is Sita but another place she acts as Durga who doesn't tolerate pains and sufferings but strongly raises voice and fight for her own self respect, dignity and honored place in family and society. She continuously challenges the patriarchy and constantly struggles against the powerful social forces without caring for the dire consequences. Men are less vulnerable than women in patriarchal set up as Jasbir Jain, in her book on Nayantara Sahgal, remarks:

While for it is just their relationship with men which becomes governing factor of their lives but for men it is not so as they step forward the issue and identity...but and women differ from each other not only in the intensity of their involvement but also in their sensibility. (P. 50)

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. Sahgal's women characters are not laborers or small shop keepers who struggle for money and victims of poverty and live in small and backward villages but her characters are highly educated and working women like newspapers journalists, IAS officers, politicians, or business tycoons and other eminent personalities. 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 and compels them to fight against social set up.

Patriarchy, Man and woman in the novel *A Time to Be Happy* (1957)

Nayantara Sahgal, in her first novel *A Time to Be Happy*, focuses on the liberation of modern woman. 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 battle of sexes through the story of central character Maya and Harish (husband and wife). Harish is typical product of male-dominated society. He is not ready to change according the 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 life but only duty to perform within the four walls of a house. 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 but Maya feels suffocated and at last she opens her front of revolt.

Actually 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 life demands much more. 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 to get 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 Maya is conscious for her rights and believes in equality and challenges the male defined rules and age old conventions. Maya challenging the male superiority starts visiting the village Rehabilitation Centre and does all possible help for the welfare of poor villagers. 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)

Patriarchy, Man and woman in the novel *This Time of Morning* (1965)

Nayantara Sahgal as a feminist presents Indian women in a unique way. In her novel female centric novel *This Time of Morning*, she 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. Sahgal expresses her anger on the words of Mrs. Narang when she says that we don't allow our daughter to go alone outside the homeand Nita's father is a strict man. In this novel Sahgal has intentionally created Nita a modern a modern who wants to make her career through her study and for success in life.

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 of freedom and independent choice without 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)

Actually the writer presents Indian woman in a unique way.

Patriarchy, man and woman in Storm in Chandigarh (1969)

Sahga's Storm in Chandigarh is a fine description of man, woman and male dominated society. In this novel the female central character is Saroj who is free-lance journalist and writes columns and articles for various leading Indian English news papers. 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 enough now and it is the climax of the suffering then at last she raises her voice against her husband and struggle for a free and dignified life starts. Sahgal writes:

Dignity and freedom both are more important in life which is bigger than society. It is life that can break the system that lacks of righteousness and reason. It is life's obligation to rebel and humanity. (P. 173)

Society, Man and 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 the struggle between man and woman through the story of Som and Simrit. Som is a businessman while Simrit is an educated and free lance 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 at last starts challenging the supremacy of her husband. When she finds that there is no change in the behavior of Som and things are getting worse then at last she does not hesitate to take a bold decision of divorce from Som in order to get freedom and to live a life of happiness, freedom and dignity. Sahgal writes:

.... life of liberty is a herculean task because Simrit is not an individual but a culture, a tradition, a patient and moreover enduring passivity. (P.107)

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.

Man-woman and patriarchy 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 as Sahgal declares:

...my women are strivers and aspirers for freedom, goodness and towards a compassionate world. (P.195)

Through the character Sonali, Mrs. Sahgal has depicted the image of a modern woman in contemporary times who loves a life of respect and her respect if affected then she raises her voice boldly and with full force against the patriarchy.

Patriarchy, man and woman in Mistake Identity (1988)

Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* (1988) also deals with woman's struggle for a life of dignity in Indian society. In this novel the protagonist is Ranees in 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 dreams and emotions of his wife. In her unequal marriage with her husband 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 in Vijaygarh is an unnamed character but Sahgal's idea of new woman reaches its highest point when she challenges the patriarchy in order to make her own independent recognition and freedom in age old superstitious and traditional society. In this way the author's concept of emergence of new women starts

from her first novel which was published in 1957 with her first novel's central character Maya and reaches its culmination 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)

Mrs. Sahgal strongly attacks the contemporary social system, child marriage and 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, remarks:

...man considers it a male behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside ...he becomes violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting the woman (her) (P. 61)

So in her novels from *A Time to Be happy*(1957) to *Mistaken Identity*, Sahgal has described man and woman in the present day modern patriarchal society in which woman are being victimized by the male power.

CONCLUSION

Nayantara Sahgal, a champion of upper class Indian women and their problems and predicaments and in her works particularly novels she has depicted such Indian women whose journey of life starts from bondage and ends with freedom. In her fictional world we find the women characters challenging patriarchy, breaking their shackles and asserting their individuality. 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. She is less a feminist and more a

humanist and advocates for a tension free life without any kind of discrimination.

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