

Man woman relationship portrayed in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*

Jaiganesh. C, Shyamala Devi. B

Department Of English

Thiruvalluvar Govt Arts College

jaiganeshcnkl1987@gmail.com

shymala.devi20@gmail.com

Abstract: Nayantara Sahgal explores the human relationship in the context of the rapidly changing socio-political environment. Her painstaking strength lies in the inquisitive analysis and responsive representation of the restrained nuances of the multifaceted psychology of the marital relationship. Her novels can be viewed as substantial contributions, exploring the various dimensions of conflict, anxiety and divergence generated by changing social conditions and perceptions. In India man-woman relationship has been for centuries governed by rigid conventional order that perceptibly demarcated a superior and all authoritative role to man and a substandard and inferior one for the woman. Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* examines and stresses the urban, affluent class surroundings in an urban situation, only to bring home an equally depressing reality of Indian women's predicament.

Key Words: Conventions, Domination, Exploitation, Marital Incompatibility and Orthodox.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the great Indian novelists in English. She began writing when she was very young and became a proficient writer in the post-Independence year. Her novels deal with men and women, especially women fraught against domination and discrimination meted out to them in the name of convention and culture. Sahgal portrays the unchallengeable right of independence for women in many of the characters in her novels.

Sahgal explores the human relationship in the context of the rapidly changing socio-political environment. Her painstaking strength lies in the inquisitive analysis and responsive representation of the restrained nuances of the multifaceted psychology of the marital relationship. Her novels can be viewed as substantial contributions, exploring the various dimensions of conflict, anxiety and divergence generated by changing social conditions and perceptions. Her continuous apprehension with the theme of marital discord has been accordingly noticed in the critical circle. In India man-woman relationship has been for centuries governed by rigid conventional order that perceptibly demarcated a superior and all authoritative role to man and a substandard and inferior one for the woman. Social convention and attitude, religious accepted belief and financial dependence, had led to repression and mistreatment of women by men.

Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* gives a sensitive account of the sufferings of a woman in Indian society when she opts to dissolve a seventeen year old marriage. The novel also examines and stresses the urban, affluent class surroundings in an urban situation, only to bring home an equally depressing reality of Indian women's predicament. As the novel opens, the divorce of Simrit and Som has already taken place due to marital discord. Simrit, had herself chosen Som, because of her loving childhood days, she spent with him. She had felt that Som was an eye-catching colour of her life and achievement. But the shining of Som's personality had mistaken Simrit, as she later realizes the tragic mistake. They had created an entertainment of their own in which passion, profundity and power were never brought into play at all.

Simrit like Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* belongs to the sphere of strapping, sharpened susceptibility. She is a perceptive and insightful woman, who expects Som to nurture a warm relationship based on

admiration, attachment, concern, care, considerate, communication, equality, and honesty. For Som, however Simrit is only a valuable possession and he expects her to be conservative to his principle of subservient womanhood. Som completely dominates Simrit, so much so that she has no enunciation in the ordinary decisions of the domestic chore. Som's world of business, aspiration and power has no room for ethical norms, values and companionships.

Simrit on the other hand is an academic woman who values ethical and most well-mannered human relationships. The gulf between the marital discordant values increasingly widens gradually, as Som is caught up in a strengthening passion for prosperity. All his interaction is governed by material considerations as provoked by a sense of heartless ambition, which brooks no obstruction. He has no qualms about changing his career and throwing away even his close friends such as Lalaji on his way to the pinnacle. Som's mounting obsession with power and possession disgusts Simrit. Being an insightful writer she feels and secluded in Som's world: Talk was the missing link between her and Som, between her and his world. She had a famishing need for talk. She was driven to a quiet desperation for want of it. Good talk about books. Events, ideas, people (93).

Som lives in the male dominated world, and his pleasure of proliferation is concentrated only on his son Brij. Simrit is offended to find the daughters being discriminated by Som. Even with Brij, Som is already accustomed to the palliatives of the money world and has only these to offer as compensation. To Som however it is Simrit who is atypical. From his own point of view, 'Som finds himself a good husband as he has earned so much money' (89). Simrit longs to get a clean cold ambience where there was some objective beyond self-advancement.

Som, however, fails even to understand Simrit's sorrowfulness and anticipation. He feels that his obligation to his wife is over, just by providing a "fantastic life" of material comfort and luxuriousness. He is so absorbed in his own achievement that he fails to notice Simrit's gradual withdrawal from his world of business. The discord in their relationship, casts its shadow on Som and Simrit's sexual relationship too. Simrit needs the sexual satisfaction to be infused with the emotional love and attachment, where as for Som it is just a physical act. Simrit feels sex cannot be secluded from the rest of her life.

Som is confused at first and is then enraged by her behaviour, as if she had attacked his honour. Simrit pleads to Som, 'We don't have to live like strangers, do we?' (96). She enthusiastically asks Som to be "friends": Can't we just hold hands? Can't a husband and wife be friends? Is that forbidden?... And out of that non-insistence, that non-preying upon each other, something sweet may down (96).

Legally speaking, it was realistic that "the only thing you could get without a hitch was a divorce" (45), yet in a society, ancient perceptions and attitudes regarding women's self-governing identity had not distorted. Legal provisions were no comfort, nor recompense for social frostiness. Simrit, therefore feels uprooted and deserted in a male-centered world. The divorce agreement continues to weigh profoundly on her, not only in social-economic but also in psychological terms:

The tissue of 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. It made the question of whether one had loved or not, been loved or not, been the transgressor or transgressed against trivial by comparison. (64)

Simrit herself feels that she is unable to go beyond the middle class accessibility of Indian women deep-rooted over time. Simrit herself feels she has "offended against something old and ordained (131). Holding herself responsible feels that as if she were totally to blame for disturbing a cosmic harmony. Som even after divorce

manages to pin down Simrit in the role of a victim by the way of divorce settlement called Consent Terms. It puts shares of some companies in the name of Brij and Simrit as his guardian, and hence she would have to pay the heavy taxes till Brij attains maturity. The heavy tax payments are a venture to enslave her in every way, and divorce instead of being a new beginning is a conflict with the ancient conventional views regarding the status of women to a secondary role. Simrit realizes that the heavy tax payments are way of punishing her indirectly.

Simrit struggles to build a new life for herself and her children by recovering gradually from confusion and disturbing trauma of divorce. Simrit meets Raj, a bachelor and honest hard-working Member of Parliament. The sympathies and compassionate attitude of Raj attracts her more and more. He helps Simrit to reclaim her steadiness, both emotionally and intellectually. Raj, is cast in entirely different mould than Som. Raj unlike Som, and like Simrit, values the human values and human responses to life immensely. Raj, like Rakesh in *This Time of Morning* and Vishal in *Storm in Chandigarh* is a man of confidence with modern liberal humanism.

The relationship which begins as a friendly companionship soon blooms into a strong relationship involving both of them intensely. It was Simrit who wanted to live with Raj to forsake her shadows and begin to live a life of happiness. Raj encourages Simrit to start living with reformed enthusiasm. Ram Krishan too notices the fatal combine of love and friendship between Raj and Simrit. Ram Krishnan has his wife Vinita who had been a significant "friend and companion" (173). He had "uneducated" Vinita, his conventional bride, the society's concept of wife hood involving merely in cooking, cleaning and housekeeping.

Sahgal portrays the physical love of Simrit and Raj very frankly and freely. When both Raj and Simrit are sure of their deep intimacy and love, their relationship is consummated: physical love comes naturally and spontaneously with the reassurance "that the bond between them was reliable" (184). Simrit feels: From the beginning they had been in step, lovers from another life lime, forging an intimacy deeper than any she had ever known (206).

Man-woman relationship within or outside marriage needs to be unconventional, from conventional approach to it in order to become a satisfying and pleasing one. Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even an agreement for it is erroneous to approach in that spirit. The relationship between Raj and Simrit is grounded with compassion, consideration, human communication and companionship, rather than sexual sensuality.

The Day in Shadow is the study of the struggle that accompanies the marital discord of an Indian woman to liberate herself from the principle and public pressures that combine with economic dependence to exercise a crippling power over middle class women, marked with passionate indignation. The resentment of the author at Simrit's helplessness and horrendous situation is noticeable when she says that divorce for women is like a sin, and in compensation of her share of culpability she stays unspoken and submissive over the settlement, enthusiastic to acknowledge it as a part of her Karma. Simrit herself, is able to ascend above the middle class sensibility of Indian women ingrained over time, with great complexity and introspection with Raj's remarkable help. What concerns Sahgal most is the desire for a mature approach to marriage, the need to be apprehensive with love, care and concern.

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