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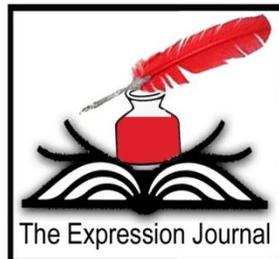
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## **GENDER MARGINALIZATION IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S**

### ***THIS TIME OF MORNING***

**Dr. Vipin Singh Chauhan**

**Assisratant Professor of English**

**Ram Lal Anand Collge, University of Delhi**

#### **Abstract**

Nayantara Sahgal, the winner of Sahitya Akadami Award is a significant voice in the literary tradition of women in Indian writing in English. She is a woman who wrote not only about the sufferings and humiliation of women in India due to the rigidity of male patriarchy but also depicted the changing images of Indian women in the society in the post Independence era. This highlights that how both of the writers have successfully portrayed the devaluation of women under the rigidity of social norms in traditional Indian society. Through the female characters such as Nita and Rashmi in the novel *This Time of Morning*, the novelist has raised the unheard female voices in the male dominated Indian society. The novelist has depicted the female characters as silent sufferers and all of their attempts to find source of joy and happiness are crushed down under the heavy burden of societal norms and customs. Their marginalized status is the main theme of this paper.

#### **Key-Words**

Gender Marginalization, Sexism, Male Patriarchy, Exploitation, Mental Slavery etc.

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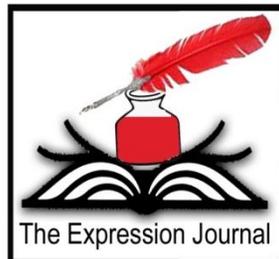
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Nyantara Sahgal uses the voice of fiction to bring to the fore a story of the socio-personal entanglement. However, the manner in which the lattice of her narration treats a variety of themes including the life of the present day sophisticated woman speaks much more than that. The struggle of the woman protagonist of her tale is synonymous to the position Sehgal is in, in her professional life burdened by the weight of her status. The portrayer of imperfect truth that she is often blamed as, comes with the baggage of her being a woman. Being a woman, that too from the higher strata of the society has its own limitations. Hence, a double marginalisation of the author who in her own stylised grace attempts to make the unsavoury truths of life appear a little more delectable when served in her platter of well garbed fiction. It is however, an important aspect to be noted when it comes to Nayantara Sehgal; apart from the allegation imposed upon her as the unfaithful portrayer of human sorrow her ability to represent the repression of the other in terms of gender escapes the significance in all scrutiny. The significant novels by the author such as "Rich Like Us", "Plans for departure", "This time of Morning", "The day in Shadow" seem to be canopied by the singular most striking criticism attributed to her by dint of her social standing.

Manikamma and Radhika M.K write in the article "Women Exploitation in Indian Modern Society": "It is realized that the long run supremacy of male over female in all respect in the patriarchal society in India is highly responsible for arresting the empowerment of women." (01) The Indian women writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya speak about the dilemma of Indian women's sufferings and humiliation at the hands of male patriarchy. Both Nayantara Sahgal

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and Arundhati Roy depict the images of women that show women's subordinate position in the society. Ranga Rao, in his famous article "The Book of the Year" rightly observes, "Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English, which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things, children and fourth, woman and untouchable" (17) Nayantara Sahgal in her *This Time of Morning* throws light upon the sufferings of a woman who is educated. Here Sahgal wants to show how the education itself is unable to change the mentality of the society. The female character Nita is from a well-to-do family. Nita is the young beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang. Mr. Narang is a queer blend of Eastern and Western cultures. In his Western life style, drinks, dance and bridge are part of his culture. However, he treats his daughter, Nita in the most traditional manner. It indicates the double standard of Indian male dominated society, which exploits women.

He imposes severe restrictions on the movement of his ambitious daughter. The Narangs never send their daughter unescorted to parties. Mrs. Narang says: "We don't allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it" (30) The Narangs's concern for the safety and protection of their daughter illustrates their conformity to traditional values. In *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal explores the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage, in the character of Nita M. Selvanayaki writes: "Sahgal seems to expose conventional narrow-minded Indian society through the character of Nita. In Indian society, the parents choose life-partners. The parents arrange for the two young souls to live happily ever after. Sahgal strongly attacks this social convention and names this kind of marriage "just organized rape". (qtd: 274) In *This Time of Morning* Nita's parents would not allow their daughter Nita to smoke, to have drinks or to attend club dances until she gets married.

It comes like a shock to him when she learns about her parent's decision to marry her off to a stranger. In her essay "Women Persons or Possessions" Nayantara Sahgal criticizes the wrong attitude of the patriarchal society towards women, which consider women as commodity. "When I heard someone remark we never allow our daughter to go out or I cannot do that, my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar, alien jargon. As if, I thought, women were property, not persons." (68) Nita has a thirst for doing something, and does not want bound herself to any conjugal knots as yet. She requests one of her friends Rakesh to influence her parents in the matter: "I don't want to marry at all just yet. Now you are back, Rakesh, do persuade Mummy and Daddy I should have a job. It's ghastly doing nothing". (32) Later her parents allow her to take up a job, but for a very different reason. Kalyan, a Minister, had offered the job and they simply did not have the heart to refuse a Minister's offer.

However, Nita looks for something more than merely a job; she strives for independence and her individual identity. She thinks: "a job was never enough [...] A job led

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to money and freedom, and freedom demanded a flat of one's own away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices" (148) of men and women who do not permit women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfillment. Sahgal has tried to give voice to the voiceless in this novel where the silent sufferer Nita sees a new hope in Kalyan. She gets attracted towards him. She finds a strange comfort in his company and visits him frequently. Once she refuses to go home and expresses her love for Kalyan, she tells him: "You gave me the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I'd never have known it but for you", (219) and she finally admits: 'I've been so happy with you' (220). This is her attempt to find solace in the male company. A woman whose existence is denied by the family members tries to find happiness in a man of her choice. There is nothing wrong in her attempt to seek comfort in the company of Kalyan. As Jasbir Jain opines about Nita's sexual involvement with Kalyan, "With Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally to her not because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by convention." (42) Here Sahgal tries to convey the idea of sexual freedom for women.

Nita, a woman who is burdened with her parents' wishes feels suffocated sees a man of her choice in Kalyan but unfortunately her parents don't agree with her. Apart from Nita there is Rashmi in the novel who too like Nita searches for happiness and freedom. Being married, she finds herself in the narrow confines of societal bonds. Eventually, she is ready to divorce her husband after her encounter with one foreigner, Neil. He is portrayed as a man by Sahgal who makes Rashmi aware about the meaninglessness in marriage. Her mother resents with her after knowing about her decision which shows the attitude of mothers in patriarchal Indian society who don't allow their daughters to live a life of freedom. Thus, the characters of Nita and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* stands for the unheard female voices in the male dominated Indian society. They are the silent sufferers and their attempt to find source of joy and happiness is crushed down under the heavy burden of societal norms and customs. Sahgal attacks on the age old ideology of marriage which kills women's freedom and individuality. As Purnima Bhardwaj writes: "As we find in patriarchal society, a woman is driven on verge of deprivation and marginalization of her existence; it does greater damage to the emotional life of a married woman who as a victim of wrong marriage continues to be subjected to persistent persecution of male tyranny and ego." (39)

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