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## **IN SEARCH OF SELF-EMANCIPATION: A STUDY OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S SELECT NOVELS**

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### **Abstract**

Woman is the most beautiful creation of God. Society is responsible for creating gender stereotypes. In the male-dominated society, a woman is always considered to be inferior to man in every aspect. In a country like India, patriarchy is flourishing so much from the Ancient times. A woman is born to toil throughout her life. Hardships, discrimination, and suppression are the ornaments for her which she has to wear with a smile on her face in this orthodox Indo society. It is very evident that Indian society is male-centric. Nayantara Sahgal's novels are based on the images of a modern, self-reliant, strong, independent, and self opinioned woman who breaks the shackles of traditional societal norms. In the modern scenario a woman who is challenging fetters of patriarchy with the help of the education and her changed perception towards life is proving herself as an equal participant of society. In the novels of Nayantara Sahgal women characters are independent, educated, bold, and rebellious against evil instead of meek and submissive. In today's modern world, a woman is not only self dependent in the terms of money but also able to choose the career, life partner, and job for her. Traditional Indian society looked at woman like a Doormat and Abla Nari which means weaker sex but now a woman has transformed from ABLA WOMAN and become ABLE WOMAN. So through the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, this paper will focus on woman characters and their quest for self-fulfillment and journey of a woman from traditional to modern. Women characters are shown helpless in the novels of other writers and they are thrown into the hard realities of life where they are fettered everywhere in shackle. But in the hands of Nayantara Sahgal women characters have become daring and fighters for their rights in the society. These women characters have acquired 80% aptitude in their life.

### **Keywords**

Quest, Self-reliant, Discrimination, Identity, Women Characters, Novels, Traditional, Stereotype, Patriarchy, Suppression, Modernism, Nayantara Sahgal.



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Nayantara Sahgal is the member of the most renowned Indian political Nehru Gandhi family. She developed a reputation for maintaining her independent critical sense. Her independent tone led to falling out with her cousin. In her work *Rich Like Us* Nayantara Sahgal has shown the dark streaks of Indira Gandhi as a human being. Through the portrayal of her characters in novels she is trying to reveal the hard-, ships, pain, struggle, submission without will of a woman of lower strata. In a society of patriarchy marriage is an umbrella term for a woman. Woman is not supposed to have an identity, dignity, and self respect of her own. She has to keep a man's name above her name. A man is going to define a woman and her individuality; his name will be carried forward by his wife, daughter or mother.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most famous contemporary Indian writers in English literature and niece of our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru .She realistically portrays struggles of woman through her novels. Her characters of novel are modern and educated. Authoress created the virtuous women towards a compassionate world where virtue is a quality of heart mind and spirit, a kind of dern Sita, women are strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness untouched innocence and integrity. Nayantara Sahgal has feminist concern through her writings new Sitas and Savitris all arise stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. She criticizes Indian mentality which values women as "property" disrespect her by considering her as a "possession." This paper discusses the institution of marriage. It analyses the institution of wed lock from the social point of view, taking into account from ancient times factoring in modern developments. In Indian society marriage a bond which is non-dissoluble in life, a Sanskara or purificatory ceremony obligatory for woman. Parents of the Indian traditional society always force a girl to survive in a matrimonial alliance no matter how it is loveless, dominating and submissive. She is not suppose to make choices for her sometimes she has to follow the

foot- steps of her mother –in –law as she is a daughter –in-law, she has to be a dumbfounded, submissive better-half as she is a woman so she has to sacrifice herself as a wife, daughter, daughter-in-law even a mother has to listen the orders of her son in this system of patriarchy.

In her novels, women characters revolt against the patriarchal norms to make their own identity. Nayantara Sahgal's all female characters from her novels like *A Time to be Happy* to *Mistaken Identity* portray the journey of women for self- reliance. All the situations which create the problems in the life of Indian women after marriage can be observed through the novels of Nayantara Sahgal like *Rich Like Us*, *The Day in Shadow*, *This time of Morning*, *A Time To Be Happy*, *Strom in Chandigarh*, *Mistaken identity*. The female characters of Nayantara Sahgal's novels like Anna, Simriti, Saroj and Rashmi they all break the shackles of patriarchy and traditional norms, and also got separated from their husbands who don't support them to live happily and freely. Man and woman both are equal, but the thinking of society makes man superior to woman. Patriarchy is the reflection of Indian society. A modern woman doesn't follow the footsteps of patriarchal society. She knows how to stand for her own self. Women are undoubtedly a harbor of talent and if society gives a chance they can fly and shine in any field. Nowadays, the parents are upbringing their daughters as the successors, not only in property but also in profession. Society implements gender stereotypes which inhibits the growth of people because a man's ego becomes bigger which doesn't allow a woman to groom herself. He always wants her as the footwear. Always a woman needs man's approval for any decision. Behind this the main culprit is the mentality for upbringing of a girl child to make her a follower not a leader. Parents should bring up their child as the individuals and human beings. The female characters of Nayantara Sahgal's novels have completely distorted an image of woman who mourn or lament for freedom and equality, but the power packed characters of Nayantara Sahgal know how to fight back for their own rights. We can easily notice that every character of her novel is more powerful and aware than man. A society always considers a woman as subaltern and inferior one. Nayantara Sahgal with the portrayal of women characters in her novels tries to reveal that Indo Society is transforming slowly. People are ready to acknowledge the journey of woman from spell bounded to outspoken. Her all novels have been written against male dominant culture and strongly opposed the marginalization of women, who suffer a lot after marriage. She talks about how traditional women faced a lot of problems and now they all became modern women. But their journey was not easy one.

The condition of the women as portrayed in the novels is usually the second class native. Saroj, a female character in the novel *Strom in Chandigarh* portrayed as a dumbfounded character, when Saroj puts her feeling that she is pregnant, Inder says that "its madness to have three children nowadays" (SIC 39). For Inder, Saroj was just a sex toy or puppet. Saroj was always insulted and humiliated by Inder, because he thinks that he is superior and Saroj in inferior and treats her as a slave which gives mental disturbances to Saroj. Saroj feels sorry for herself either she is a victim or ignored. She becomes "victim" at the hands of Inder and she feels herself "ignored" because she ignores herself to sustain a loveless marriage.

In *The Day in Shadow* the writer also portrays the draconian face of Indian society. In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal explains the feeling and suffering of a female character Simirit. Simirit is wife of Som. She is the main protagonist of the novel and lives with her husband in a very suffocating atmosphere. So she demands divorce from Som. Som always wants Simirit to behave as a traditional wife and to be a marionette of his hand. But Simirit, is a modern woman who lives her life according to her own ways. That's why she gets divorce from Som and she makes her own identity. Nayantara Sahgal shows the ultra-conservative aspect of Indian patriarchal society. Nayantara Sahgal in her work *The Day in Shadow* tries to show the stagnating problems of divorced woman who are not accepted with dignity it becomes very difficult for them to stand strong. Jasbir Jain wants to quotes the moving relationship of Som and Simirit: "Simrit and Som are already divorced and Simrit is trying to adjust to the aftermath of the divorce. What happens in the novel is a kind of resistance building up both to the political and personal situation which culminates in Raj's decision to resist the political decisions and Simrit's decision to continue life as the consent terms simply did not exist." (123)

But after divorce, she faces a lot of issues, because divorce is a stigma for woman who lives in Indian society. India's divorce system is not liberal; women have to face harsh criticism why divorce is not considered as the dignified separation.

Simrit is a woman after writer's heart. Raj in *The Day in Shadow* speaks for her views "She could be that rarity a woman with a profession an independent person living her own life she didn't need a man for identity or status. There was an intensely private rapture in making and shaping one's own life that few people recognized" (139).

*A Situation in New Delhi* portrays different types violence against a girl where Madhu, a brilliant student of Delhi University is raped in the Registrar's office. Boys who rape Madhu, they consider her just a toy of their pleasure and lust. They had no feeling and emotion for a girl and her pain. So we need to change mindset of our patriarchal society to ensure women security in society, initial changes are needed at family level than society, because as family treats a woman in a same way society treats. "Surely this was the only era in history when what had gone before had been earmarked for demolition to make room for change. In other ages men had built on what they already had, made changes from where they took over. No one had wanted to wipe out the previous human record but for the current crop of interpreters nothing apparently grew" (27). It's duty of society to respect women unconditionally whatever they are wearing, wherever they are going and whomsoever they are meeting. It should not matter whether it's day life or night life women should always be safe.

The major concerns of Nayantara Sahgal's novels are the pathetic and unbearable condition of Indian women. In Indian society, extramarital affair for a man is nothing, he feels proud but for a woman, extramarital affair creates big controversy. Through the novels, Nayantara Shagal portrays the mental agony, pain, suffering, and inner turmoil of the millions of suffering women. Literature is known as the mirror of life and society. So literature also shows the condition of women in novels of Indian feminist writer. Relationship works with understanding. Family always considers women as home specific. A daughter of orthodox Indo Society is not allowed to think about her own self. When she lives with parents she has to prepare herself for her



husband's home, she is only a serving spoon and also expelled from one home and unaccepted from another home. Some men compare their wives with their mother. They think that household work is only for females. Woman has some duty towards her home but she has identity too. Silence is not good for woman because today no one would understand your silence because society only understands louder voice. Never behave like a traditional woman. Now a day's every woman wants to change the orthodox rules of traditional society and also wants liberation from the name of marriage which chains her into mental prison which bars woman to perform. She wants to get marry for love, support and respect. Marriage is not a relationship but a bar behind a bar. Indian society and mostly man thinks that woman would be disobedient if they start earning for themselves. That is why every man wants to choose a simple traditional housewife who only behaves like a puppet of his hands. It is not only husband who wants to dominate but also a mother in law who gains chair to rule. Mostly Indian husband does not understand that his wife is not a robot, she is a human like him who has her own feelings, and if husband does not want to care her feelings he should kindly refuse to marry. No one wants to suffer, so woman should not suffer as well. Every female character of Nayantara Sahgal's novels raises her voice for living her life happily instead of being a slave of her husband. Her female characters are mostly educated who wants to live their life according to their own choice.

In Indian context a wed lock is not a relationship but it acts as a medium to survive for a woman who always dreams that a man will come and her life will be turned into a fairy tale. Relationships are meant for understanding care, love, affection towards each other. Society needs to change her perception in modern age a woman is going to define a man. She is not born to be a home maker. She can be anyone a doctor, an entrepreneur several women even from different fields they are doing excellent jobs they are proudly serving their nation. The emerging problem is about the burden of professional women feeling burdened by the "should" expectations imposed on them. In fact most words chosen by women describe the emotional qualities and strength needed to cope with the duties of being a daughter, wife and mother, in other words meeting everyone else's needs selflessly. Society is stagnating under the veneer of modernity. Women have internalized these behaviors that make them weaker so men continue to be in power. There are the several steps which has to be taken to curb the violence against women how they can live a dignified life. Economic independence can help a woman to choose her own life her opinions will not be drowned by male counterparts and she can easily leave a love- less marriage. Many married Indian women can't dream to desert in-laws home as they do not have another home. She can't earn so she can't live happily. Internalization of conceptions of freedom and dignity: is necessary for liberation the basic change which has to be brought in society is the approach in the upbringing of a girl child. Society inhibits woman to live up to her own choice. Education is the only weapon which can remove gloom. An educated human being either a man or woman will be able to respect each other. Being a woman or girl we shouldn't be ashamed but must be courageous, strong, and decision maker. God made every human being whether he is a man or a woman. So why the society has divided every human being on the basis of gender, caste, and color? Marriage becomes

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beautiful journey only when both partners seek the affection, love, and respect for each other with love and sacrifice s instead of bearing up a forcible drive to remain together.

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