

SIMRIT AS A FEMINIST HEROINE IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S THE DAY IN SHADOW

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ABSTRACT

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the prominent feminist writers in Indian writing in English. She was awarded the 1986 Sahitya Academy Award for English for her novel *Rich Like us* (1985) by the Sahitya Academy. She has written eight novels, two autobiographies, short stories, several articles and some non-fictional works. She mainly writes about women. The major themes in her novels are socio-political issues of her times and also the exploitation of women in various ways. Sahgal gives an authentic picture of high-profile politicians and bureaucrats, wrapped up in their cocktail parties, worried more about themselves than about the problems that the country faces.

KEYWORDS: Nayantara Sahgal, Novels, Woman Characters

INTRODUCTION

All the novels of Sahgal truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political scene and portray the various social and cultural changes that take place in India. Sahgal also highlights the ardent freedom fighters thirst for freedom and their sacrifices for their motherland.

Sahgal's main concern in her fiction is the plight of women in Indian society. Her woman characters suffer from the format of broken marriages, loneliness, sufferings and frustration. Marriage causes, disintegration and makes women rebellious.

The present paper on *The Day in Shadow* deals with subordinate position of woman and exploitation of the woman by her husband. Marriage as a medium of exploitation in *The day in shadow*. The novel also the emergence of a new type of woman who can boldly put forth her own on compatible which dignified family life will be possible. *The Day in shadow* is also the most personal of her novels.

Simrit, the heroine of *The Day in Shadow* is a freelance writer who has the brutal punishment of divorce inflicted upon her. And the loneliness caused by divorce makes her lean on Raj for support and she is stirred into action only, because of him. Simrit is captivated by the patriotic fervor of Aurobindo Ghosh whom she quotes from memory. "The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of the rivers that stream from Indian hills" (The Quest). More or less, all the characters of Sahgal exhibit this concern for their mother land in one way or the other.

Simrit is an independent woman who can make choices. She marries Som, only because of his color, life and action, disregarding opposition from her parents and the dislike of her friends. However Simrit and Som's marriage life came to an end very soon. Simrit is a highly independent woman but Som doesn't even allow her to choose anything in her day today life. Som interferes even in choosing servants or a cook, curtains and sofa covers.

Simrit finds herself shut out of Som's world. Som never shares any matter with her. She begins to isolate herself from his world of commerce. Her loneliness is unbearable to her, though the law had changed, attitudes hadn't and Simrit feels uprooted and abandoned in a husband-centered world. Simrit's life with Som lacks continuity and warmth. She feels isolated.

At one point Simrit realizes that lack of communication is the reason of their separation and she tries to engage him in meaningful dialogues. But she is ignored in such situations, for Som gives importance only to physical comfort, whenever Som needs her. Simrit does not like to be a mere sexual object of pleasure for her husband, Som. Being an independent woman Simrit yearns for more than sex in married life. So she finds the right man in Raj, who is a loving, understanding and caring friend. It is not physical incompatibility instead it is temperamental incompatibility which makes Simrit break the bond with Som and go in search of new life. Unfortunately for Simrit, her divorce does not bring her freedom and life with Raj does not bring her fulfillment.

She realizes that woman's life is one long ordeal in a male dominated society. She is seem dreaming with a frightening clarity since her divorce. She is hurled on to the pavement. The queer thing is that no one takes notice of her fall. People are crossing, a deafening scream, her own, goes on and on. Only she can hear the traffic through it. A watermelon seller with crisp pink crescent juice looks indifferently at her and goes away again. Two men sitting on the ground near her, their legs poked forward in the listless walking sleep of poverty, take in monotonous murmurs. This is a description of Simrit mental agony in a Freudian manner.

Feminism is no doubt pro-woman but it need not be anti-man. Sahgal does not advocate female enslavement and is not anti-male. She believes that a woman can fulfill herself wholly in the loving and harmonious relationship with a man. Simrit, the female protagonist of *The Day in Shadow* exhibits courage and determination in breaking away from the bondage of marriage and opting for a better relationship. She is an embodiment of womanhood freedom in all respects.

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