

## **Feminism in Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh**

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Feminism is a range of movements and ideologies aimed at establishing, defending and achieving equal civil, political, economic, personal and social rights and equal opportunities regarding status, privilege and power for women. Feminism includes resistance to any kind of exploitation the women experience because of their sex. The feminist movements are considered under three periods or waves –the first wave feminism focused on women's suffrage, while the second on every area of women's experiences including family, sexuality and work and third's goal includes equal rights not only for women but for all people. Now women claim separate identity on all fronts. The focus has been shifted from women's emancipation to empowerment. The women's movement in India comes within the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the patriarchal society. Now they are attempting to establish a new identity with their changing gender roles.

Torudutt, Swarna kumara Ghoshal, krupabai, Sathianathan, Rockey Sakhawat Hossain, kamala Markandeya and Ruth prawer Jhabrala began their feminist movements in India followed by Nayantara Sahgal. Sahgal's women are liberal and unconventional in outlook. They reject the existing traditions and values in search for self-fulfilment, though rooted in the Indian culture and tradition, strive hard to live life free from all inhibitions and taboos. The process of selfhood which begins unconsciously in Kusum, the typical middle class girl of **A Time to be Happy** is realized by Saroj of **Storm in Chandigarh** and Simrit of **The Day in Shadow** and culminates in Sonali, the confidant ICS topper and woman officer of **Rich Like Us**. Sahgal advocates a relationship based on mutual communication, companionship and equality. Sobha Shinde remarks:

“Self-assertion and individual status will bring meaning to the life of the average Indian woman. But this should not be at the cost of our values and the best of our traditions.”

Sahgal, through her novels, tries to focus on women's role stating that woman should not be seen in the stereotypical passive roles of a sex object in the modern society or as the one who is fit only to manage home chores and children without any self identify of her own. For the smooth functioning of family and the society at large, woman needs to be seen as man's equal and honoured partner. Sahgal does not view her women characters as wage earners but mainly as wives, daughters and mothers in all her novels. It is in these roles that women are expected to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals and gain acceptance as equals. In all Sahgal's works, there is a juxtaposition of two worlds: the personal world of man – woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. Husband-wife alienation resulting from lack of communication, extra-marital relationship, existentialistic problems and temperamental incompatibility form the major themes in her novels. Sahgal's characters suffer from the torment of broken marriages. Loneliness, suffering and frustration in marriage make women rebellious. Most of her couples seem to be happy and contented but they often experience loneliness and feel discomfort in marriage like Saroj in 'Storm in Chandigarh'. Her women characters behave as normal human beings, do-succumbing to their ego, committing errors, taking wrong decisions, exposing their weakness but raising them in triumph.

Sahgal's third novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness." It deals with complex human relationships in which love, friendship, honesty, freedom and equality play a vital role. The 'storm' in the lives of three married couples, Inder and Saroj, Jit and Mira and Vishal and Leela is portrayed against the political backdrop of storm or confrontation between the newly divided states of the Punjab and Haryana over the issue of Chandigarh. The characters in the novel behave like moderns and at the same time do not isolate themselves completely from the tradition. This blend of tradition and modernity can be observed in their attitude to love, morality, education, man-woman relations and even architecture.

In the novel, **Storm In Chandigarh**, Saroj is married to Inder, who runs the textile mills of Saroj's cousin Nikhil Ray's company in Chandigarh. There is no emotional communion between them, inspite of their four year married life with two children. She represents the new woman who is trying to retain her individuality and breathe freely in the suffocating atmosphere of passionless and unfulfilling marriages and to live in self respect, thus implicitly demanding a re-alignment of the parameters on which marriage function. But

she does not consider it as a sin rather as a part of growing up. After her marriage she has been faithful to Inder to the fullest degree. She is a person who values mutual trust, consideration, honesty, communication and absence of pretence in a relationship. She is thoroughly truthful to Inder and her honesty in marital relationship can be gauged from the fact that she even confesses about her pre-marital relationship to him with the intention of looking forward to a clean break from the past. But this confession actually dooms their marriage. Inder keeps on torturing her mentally and physically ever since her confession. Inder represents the traditional patriarchal attitude of society toward woman which puts high premium on female chastity and virginity before marriage. The double standards of patriarchal morality are visible from the fact that Inder who wants to make Saroj feel 'ashamed' of her pre-marital affair, himself has many sexual experiences before marriage. But women have no right to question male promiscuity or indulge in practices which are considered to be male prerogatives.

Saroj, symbolizes modern women, who wants to establish a new order with changed standards, where they can be their true selves and. where character is judged by the purity of heart and not chastity of body. According to Sahgal, Saroj's premarital act of sex has nothing to do with the pollution of flesh, promiscuity or immorality. In spite of all this torture and tormentation, Saroj has never let her inner strength and her self esteem get completely obliterated. Even in extremity, she had never said, 'Forgive me'. For each time she had lived through a night's torment, she could wake to the sunlight and find herself unsullied in it. Saroj's yearning for acceptance, communication, honesty, liberty and lack of pretence in a relationship draws her near Vishal Dubey who completely shares her emotional cravings. Jit and Mira is another couple in the novel, who also suffer from a similar dilemma. They are a childless couple who suffer from emotional void in their life. Mira's marriage with sweet tempered and considerate Jit, has its share of estrangements and misgivings, but Mira's problem is not physical but psychological. The search for communication makes Mira come towards Inder. In her relationship with Inder, Mira stimulates his mind and involves him in ways no woman ever has. Their relationship comes to an end when the understanding dawns on Mira that there is some part of Inder which she could never completely aware of it, in spite of her best efforts.

Inder is left alone in the end, as Saroj decides to go to Delhi for her confinement and with the view of spending rest of her life with Vishal. She makes every effort on her part to make her marriage with Inder successful. But all her efforts to go near him remain as useless as of a

bird beating against the window pane to go inside. She longs for 'oxygen of understanding' with Inder which she actually finds in her friendship with Vishal. Finally she becomes symbolic of modern woman who not only aspires for freedom, dignity and equality in a relationship but who actually has the courage to leave the rotting relationship in favour of one which is full of possibilities without caring about patriarchal society. Saroj revolts against the established norms by leaving a marriage that had become an emotional wasteland for her. Thus Saroj's departure from her home is an initiation towards personal freedom of the new woman. Her courage is her virtue and she asserts her individuality. Saroj, no doubt, is the embodiment of Nayantara's own vision of virtuous woman.

As a woman novelist, Sahgal recognizes that her primary obligation is that of advocating the emancipation of women. She vividly describes how woman is exploited even during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. She is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships, the loneliness of living and private terrors. Her women characters suffer because they refuse to submerge their individuality and cling to their personal identity at all costs. Sahgal shows women suffering in marriage life and the deciding to come out of the suffocating bondage by preferring for divorce. Her women like Saroj, Simrit, Rashmi and Anna all leave their husbands or break the marriage which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. Having personally experienced the trauma of a failed marriage, Sahgal exhibits of the dilemma women trapped between traditional assumptions regarding womanhood and the stirrings of individuality very sharply and skillfully. Sahgal highlights a clearly feminist function in her scathing exposure of the hollowness of man-woman relationships based on socially predetermined patterns of gender inequality. Sahgal delineates marriage without emotional involvement, love without respect and sex without passion as the causes for unfulfilling marriage in her novels. Sahgal's women characters undoubtedly reveal her feminist ideology.

Women are also individuals and marriage is a partnership, not an institution. But the whole social set-up is geared towards the domination of men over women- in marriage, in sexual relationships, in child birth and even in adultery; it is the woman who is victimized. This is fully illustrated in Sahgal's novels. The day women are accepted as equal partners, a new age would begin. Their emancipation bases itself on the ordinary assumption that a woman's body is after all her own and she has her own thinking on issues related to her. Sahgal represents new morality, according to which woman is not to be taken as a mere toy, an object of lust and momentary pleasure, but man's equal and honored partner.

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