ABSTRACT

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the best Indian writers in English. She was one of the first Indian writers to receive wide recognition. Indian women novelists have made a substantial contribution in the growth and enrichment of Indian novels in English. Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are more concerned about the sexual differences, gender relations and status of women’s in the Indian society. Her concern is based more on humanism rather than that of feminism. Her feminism does not go beyond treating women as an individual. While analyzing the character and the inner mind of the Indian women from view point of feminine sensibility and insight, Nayantara Sahgal depict how women struggle not only against aggressive male domination but also against social, cultural, and religious oppression prevalent in contemporary society. Woman across the globe has been relegated to a marginal position and subsequently discriminated in all aspects of life. The fictions of Nayantara Sahgal are essentially concerned with the various problems related to women who are exposed to both physical and psychological abuse and also ill-treated in the male dominated Indian society. That is why Nayantara Sahgal’s heroines who are so deeply rooted in Indian culture are portrayed as struggling for freedom and trying to assert their individuality in their own right.

Keywords: Nayantara Sahgal, Fiction

PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN IN RELATIONSHIP WITH MAN

In fact, historically woman across the globe has been relegated to a marginal position and subsequently discriminated in all aspects of life. She is considered the insignificant other, the ‘sex’ and inferior to male, having no individuality of her own. She has been socially and culturally programmed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family and has been made to believe that the real virtues of an ideal woman are self-effacement, submissiveness, self-sacrifice and unusual exemplary tolerance and patience. This subtle inculcation has made her to internalize the idea of subjugation and accept the roles assigned to her by patriarchy. Indian women are no exception to this historical reality but their problems in the contemporary times are multiplied by a conflict between their adherence to patriarchal culture and their revolt against it induced by ideas of autonomy and liberty imbibed from modern Western enlightenment project.

The positive change in the status of women of India in society, however, started from mid-nineteenth century onwards when the Western liberal ideas of enlightenment brought about a new awakening in the Indian intelligentsia. The progressive Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandita Rama Bai, Madam Cama, Rama Bai Ranade, Toru Dutt and Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi rose against the structural social evils like ‘Sati’, suppression of widows, denial of the right to education of women and child marriage that were constructed to exploit women. After the independence, special legislation was formulated to bring about significant changes in the structure of society. Besides, many Indian
intellectuals by examining the Western liberal, rational and scientific world view realized that much of their rigid and ossified traditions must go. Thus they reinterpreted their cultural traditions to lend credence to women’s assertion of identity.

Since women had started to question the bondage and oppression implicit in traditional religious institutions and social practices, they tried to recast their identities, create new roles for themselves in accord with the assertion of their identities that often differed from patriarchal cultural constructions of female roles like — man to rule and woman to obey; man, the master, and woman, the slave; man, the god, and woman, the devotee; man for the field and woman for the hearth and so on. They contested the patriarchal discourses on womanhood characterized by virtues like chastity, purity, ability to bear pain and suffering. However, the paradoxical reality is that they cannot completely free themselves from the chains of traditional value system. Caught in-between the pulls and pushes of the two opposing poles, i.e., submission to the already established norms and a rebellion against such norms, inevitably leads to the conflict and this conflict of the modern Indian woman is reflected in the works of female writers of the current times.

Insistence on or deviation and disturbance into sex is a sign of man’s imbalance mental state and the crisis of decaying values; and since the relationship between man and woman is known as a unit of individual and social life, the novelists all over the world has adopted this relationship as one of the central themes of their novels. In their novels, they have been making attempts to explore the part sex which has always been playing in man’s life. Among Indian novelists, the characters of Nayantara Sahgal, like those of Anita Desai, Nargis Dalal and Kamala Das, Asthi Brata, reflect the changing facets of man-woman relationship in India. The women characters of Mrs. Sahgal are no longer the subdued sex “a figure of humility, neck bent and eyes downcast.” The leading female characters in the novels of Mrs. Sahgal are solitary individuals striving for self-assertion in their conjugal relationship and their relationship outside marriage. The portrayal of such struggle aims at analyzing Sahgal’s point of view about the complex man-woman relationship in the context of social milieu in her novels.

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