

# SELF-IDENTITY CRISIS AND QUEST FOR WOMAN EMANCIPATION IN NAYANTHARA SAGHAL'S: THE DAY IN SHADOW

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## Abstract

This research paper has chosen female protagonist character "Simrit" in the novel "The Day in Shadow" written by Nayantara Sahgal to analyze and explore the crisis for self-identity and quest for women emancipation in male dominated freedom India. This is a post independent novel that revolves about theme of politics, history, patriarchal freedom India, problems faced by divorced women in patriarchal country, domestic violence, self-identity issue, and finally brutal divorce settlement. Since Nayantara Sahgal comes from political background family and being a victim of broken marriage that ended with divorce and brutal marriage settlement, these autobiographical elements of author is very much influenced through character "Simrit" in this novel. Simrit is an educated Indian woman from brahmin family got married to non-brahmin person Som, with whom she feels incompatible in all ways like intellectual, emotional, sexual, culturally and humanly ethical gentleman. Som is self-centered, egoist, money-minded person, with whom our female protagonist Simrit finds completely ignored, not loved and incomplete in life with no identity for herself and her voice in the family. This research paper gives a detailed review on the challenges faced by female character Simrit, how she raised her voice for herself in the male dominated society, and her quest for self-identity in Nayantara Sahgal's novel "The day in shadow".

**Keywords:** identity crisis, woman emancipation, existentialism, divorce, patriarchal society, politics.

## INTRODUCTION

This research paper focuses on Identity crisis of woman and woman emancipation in Nayantara Sahgal novel "The Day in Shadow" from Indian Writing in English. Her writing expresses combination of feminism and politics. This novel focuses on life of divorced woman named Simrit; who struggles a lot to live in a judgmental society of India in the name a culture, tradition and norms that is only applicable for woman to follow in her life as wife. Stereotypical society like India still

subjugates woman in all her ways preaching that woman is always sub-altern to her men. As we see, author expresses her personal bitter experience in marriage through the female protagonist of the novel "Simrit".

The novel revolves around the main character "Simrit" on how she tackles, struggles and self-supported herself in failed marriage, rise again as independent woman choosing divorcee as a tool to free herself from subjugated oppressed life of married woman in male dominated society. The paper attempts to

analyze only the quest for identity and woman emancipation theme in novel "The Day in Shadow".

The paper discusses the issues on divorced women in patriarchal society and the brutal marriage settlement after divorce; supporting the title to find identity crisis throughout the novel through character Simrit. However, this research is much more valid due to its theme which represents the most common issues faced by women in marriage is to find identity for herself to live a content life. Sahgal's novel addresses all issues pertaining to politics, social issues, religion, ethics, culture diversity, feminism with Gandhian ideology through her character and historical events of post-independent and post-modern India.

This research is based on primary and secondary sources to reveal the quest for self-identity and women emancipation through character Simrit and made an attempt to extract the themes in the novel "the day in shadow" by Nayantara Sahgal published in 1972. The research used printed articles, e-sources, magazines, printed books as secondary sources to enrich this research title and its theme. Analysing, narrative, explanatory, comparative methods used to write this research based on post independent and post-modern literature in India.

The major aim and objective of this research is analyzing the identity crisis faced by female protagonist of the novel "the day in shadow" by Nayantara Sahgal. The research paper focuses mainly on character Simrit who struggles to free herself from the failed marriage; being ostracized, victimized and shackled by her past memories of domestic violence; discriminated and suppressed by her self-centered husband Som with whom she is incompatible in marriage; To find a new life she bridges to Raj, a brilliant man trying to rise as a member of parliament; the paper revolves on how the character Simrit find her new life with happiness and self-identity from all struggles as divorcee in Indian society dominated by men both domestically and politically. The paper attempts to compare the political and husband-wife relationship narratives in the novels since

Sahgal novel is a socio-political novelist. An attempt is made to discuss and analyze the authors autobiographical narratives in the work.

Nayantara Sahgal was born on 10th may 1927 in Allahabad to Vijaya Lakshmi pandit and Ranjit Sitaram pandit. She has completed her BA in History from Wellesley college in 1947. She is a member of Nehru and Gandhi family; her uncle is Jawaharlal Nehru and she is cousin to Indira Gandhi. She got married twice with Gautam Sahgal and E.N.Mangat Rai. she has one child named Gita Sahgal. Being born in a rich political background family and brought up as child with freedom and education by her father; she advocated for freedom and civil rights, right from her childhood. Her family background helps her to deeply portray critical and analytical view on politics and feminism. Her personal life after marriage and her broken marriage settlement after divorcee in male dominated judgemental society inspires her to write for woman rights legally and feminism.

Her personal experience of wrong marriage, being trapped in domestic life as wife, mother and caring for home puts her to oppression, depression and subjugation; its reaction made her exhibit feminist themes in all her novels. She is first Indian woman novelist to choose politics as her theme in her novel. In Times Literary Festival Delhi 2017, Sahgal has appreciated for her critical view on India's socio-political culture, the voice of freedom and imposing independent thought to woman both emotionally and psychologically through her characters has created self-awareness and self-supporting attitude in woman among this patriarchal society of India.

### **Identity Crisis and Woman Emancipation:**

This novel portrays the theme of identity crisis and woman struggles to liberate themselves from failed marriage and live an independent life both economically and psychologically. Sahgal used stream of conscious method and technique to portrays female protagonist of the novel Simrit, in allegorical method. Woman's plight in divorce and its brutal settlement are

much focused to explain the character "Simrit" in this novel.

Sahgal novels brings out the reality of contemporary political scenarios, its dark side of corruption, domination and misuse of power against weak public, ministers or parliament members misuse of position, subjugation of woman in patriarchal society that portrays woman as toy, material or property. Her novels give a deep picture of status of woman during post-independent India. She portrays how woman loses her own identity and self-respect, become voiceless and puppets to their man in patriarchal society.

Simrit exhibit the traditional reflection of Indian married woman, confined to the four walls of her home. She belongs to the traditional brahmin family background chose a non-brahmin man as her soulmate, later finds that they are completely opposite in bonding as couple, feels incompatible and upset with her decision of marrying a non-brahmin person. The paper focuses on analysing the post-divorced struggles and issues faced by Simrit in patriarchal society and how she undergoes a transition period to change herself from dependent woman to New Woman who is economically and psychologically independent.

As we analyse and observe most of the woman character in Sahgal's novel are born in rich affluent family, well-educated but still considered that woman is subaltern to man and accept their fate without any hesitation and lives with the wrong marriage bonding. But Some of her female protagonist like Simrit in 'The Day in Shadow' and Rashmi in novel 'This Time in Morning' choose divorce as a way to freedom breaking the stereotypes in Indian marriage.

Sahgal female character contributes a lot for creating New Woman concept in India. Her female character is either single woman, married or divorced woman. They try to refine themselves as individuals with freedom, fighting for their voice and equality among male-dominant society. As we see Sahgal uses Gandhian ideology in Feminism as Sahgal wants woman to lead an independent happy life

psychologically, financially, emotionally and socially with their husband with proper understanding and communication. Sahgal remarks herself,

'I try to create the virtuous woman the modern Site, if you like. My women are strivers and aspirers, toward freedom, toward goodness, toward a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. I think there is this quality in the Indian woman'. (45).

Sahgal's protagonist Simrit reflects Sahgal herself in autobiographical way as we see that her female characters are ready to break the stereotypes of marriage bonding as per Indian culture by choosing divorcee as an option for freedom and happy life. They are even ready to start a new life with another man as they wish. So, it is very much evident that Sahgal mirrors her personal life in marriage, divorce and willingness to love and trust another man again as a start to new life through the character Simrit in this novel "The Day in Shadow".

The novels focus on characters of Simrit and Som who marriage was smooth and comfortable for initially but later on Simrit finds that fell in mismatched marriage bonding as she finds her husband doesn't understand her much, treats her as an object of physical attraction for pleasure rather than treating her as a person with emotion and love. She feels distrust and disappointed with him as he subjugates and oppresses her even to make the decision in household chores and things. Simrit is a kind of woman who desire to have understanding lovable, kind, soft and good bonding relationship that gives her freedom, equality and respect. Whereas Som treats her badly as object for pleasure and lust. He is a kind of ambitious, materialistic person who runs after money and wants Simrit to behave like him for his wanting. It is much evident through lines "Som's world had been commerce, never shared with her at all". (12).

Because of these psychological pressure Simrit feels stressed and ostracised herself from Som. Since she alienates herself from him by not satisfying him sexually, as this created a

situation of separation between them as further lead to divorce. Simrit highly wanted a life with freedom, identity and individuality and good communication between them but Som materialistic attitude created a stage for separation in their lives. When Som oppresses her to even make her own choice in buying chair covers and curtains for house, made her physically and emotionally suppressed, distrust and pressured. She felt like she is losing her own self and identity holding this relationship further more in her life.

When Simrit fires the servant for his drunkenness Som continues to keep him. Her suffocation and insult are expressed: “she hadn’t. Not even about chair covers and curtains. Even there Som had had a veto. Not even about servants. She had dismissed the cook twice for drunkenness and bad behaviour and Som had kept him on. Little things, she had thought at the time, nothing important, nothing to quarrel about, but building up into a frightening situation—herself a cog in a machine—with which it had become impossible to live”. (38).

Simrit is a kind of person who expects everything should be on order with proper planning but Som always makes her voiceless. Her psychological pain of subjugated marriage life is expressed through Sahgal lines—When Raj asked her what is your goal for life after her divorce she said “permanence”. She said this is what she longed for. “I’ve wanted everything to be same forever, furniture never moved from its place, never changing address, children growing older in the same house, a godown where tons of could collect and not be in anybody’s way, and not lose prestige, you know just because they’re a bit battered and old – and where one could find them years later: toys and souvenirs and old report cards and that sort of things. Life should be—continuous”. (37).

Sahgal’s criticise woman’s life with no individuality and identity through character Raj in the novel: “Had she ever been avid, really avid about anything at all? She simply could not go through life like this, letting other people’s ambitions and actions overwhelm her.

First it had been her husband. Next it could be her children. Woman for use had been the rule too long”. (38) . Raj is the only person for Simrit who cares her for her individuality, freedom and educated thought; her writing ambition is also been ignited only by Raj. Sahgal strongly believes in her ideology that it is not wrong to break the stereotype of tradition by loving another person again after divorce, rather than accepting and living a fateful mismatched marriage life. Though Simrit is an educated, permissive, broad minded and feministic kind of person it really took her tough way to choose divorce as a way to freedom first. Later, Raj’s courage and bold words made her to choose divorce, to escape and survive successfully from patriarchal mismatched marriage bonding.

### **Conclusion:**

Sahgal expresses the social sufferings of being a divorcee in this society with no social security economically, brutal marriage settlement that imposes tax on it creates an additional financial crisis to her --is the most psychological pressure she faced at that time of divorce. She addresses those social issues autobiographically through character Simrit. Before divorce Simrit life was rich with elite comfort with her husband. But after divorce Simrit has to meet ends by herself for groceries, bills, children and tax problem because of the brutal marriage settlement. “All the living wealth and has left behind the crockery and furniture and liven and jewels and sliver som got all thing, the cars, the bank accounts” (58). Som expects Simrit to surrender to him: “Som could have forgiven her if she had been a weaker being, unsure, dependent and even deceiving, but beneath her docility she was none of these things unpardonable” (53).

But Simrit struggled and met her ends financially well. Simrit realises that she wants a person who gives her trust, freedom, equality, identity and individuality and fortunately she met Raj who gives her emotional, psychological, trust and healthy bonding. Raj accepts Simrit with all his love, her children

and tax too. He shows love towards her with no expectation and gives her own individuality and identity.

Nayantara Sahgal expects woman and man should lead an equality and good bonding life. The novel "the day in shadow" gives a vivid picture of New Woman through character Simrit – a strong woman to choose divorce than living in male-centred subjugated life. Simrit reflects Sahgal view point in feminism in marriage in an apt way in this fiction. Simrit after her transition period finally emerged as New Woman with independent and feministic thought both economically and psychologically. Simrit self-realisation, identity and courage gives a pathway for woman to give importance to woman-hood in all aspects in order to live a happy and satisfied life.

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