

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

**SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S NOVELS  
"THIS TIME OF MORNING" (1965) AND "THE DAY IN SHADOW" (1971)**

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Article Received: 19/07/2021

Article Accepted: 27/08/2021

Published online:06/09/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.3.168](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.3.168)

**Abstract**

Women's subjugation in patriarchal society is one of the biggest issues not only in India but in the entire world. From the ancient times a women have experienced low status, oppression, loss of self –determination, exploitation and many other types of physical and emotional tortures by men in the male dominated society. Man is stronger to woman and it is natural that stronger controls and weaker is controlled. Man is master and woman is vulnerable. In such a society men holds power and a women are deprived of any kind of facility and opportunity. Another noticeable thing is patriarchal mentality of people in which more importance and value is given to son than a daughter. The birth of a girl was taken as insecurity and liability to family. It has attracted the attention of almost all female writers and they felt it a need of the hour to raise voice against subjugation of women in Indian patriarchal society. Nayantara Sahgal is one among those female writers who always wrote against subjugation and suppression of women in Indian society. The present paper is an attempt to study Sahgal's two novels in which she strongly raises the voice of Indian women who have been victims of male's oppression in our male-dominated society. Her range is not wide and she is the championship of high class elite women and in her writing her main focus is on their pains and predicament, their exploitation, subjugation and place in family and society.

Keywords: India, Women, subjugation, patriarchy.

**Introduction**

The past of Indian women except Vedic has not been so good and glorious. In Indian patriarchal society women were not treated as inferior to men and male dominated society different types of devices for subjugation of women. Since man is stronger hence he is master and protector of his family. A woman is inferior, vulnerable and victim of man's dominance. Man holds all powers and controls woman in his family. He treats his wife as

inferior and her only job is to prepare meal, produce children and to care for them. Indian patriarchal society expects:

1. Every girl before marriage should be obedient and under the control of her father and elder brother.
2. As a wife she should be meek, submissive, loving, caring and devoted to her husband.
3. In old age she should be a good grandmother.

The above lines clearly indicate that a woman is never independent and free in her entire life in Indian male-dominated society. Although some change has come from past and present but the condition of women is not equal to men. Nayantara Sahgal is a strong critical of this patriarchal view and she has raised her strong voice against the subjugation of women by men in patriarchal set up.

Nayantara Sahgal (b. 1927) is one the most influential Indian feminists with a broad outlook and thinking. She comes from the biggest political Nehru-Gandhi family. She got her primary education from the most advance English medium and higher education from America. She was highly influenced by Western culture in which the condition of women is different from the condition of Indian women. She thinks in our 21<sup>th</sup> century modern, advance and civilized society women are not free and they are oppressed by patriarchy. Their choice, their likeness and dislikeness are ignored and their voice is not heard by parents. Before marriage a girl is controlled by her parents, in youth as a wife she is under her husband and in old age she in on the mercy of her children.

Sahgal's novel *This Time of Morning* is a good example of female subjugation. The writer has expressed this idea through the Dr. Narang family and daughter Nita. The novel was published in 1965 and deals with the theme of dissatisfaction of a daughter whose voice is ignored and she is completely controlled by her father and after by her husband. Nita is a more than twenty year young girl, educated and open minded and likes freedom and want to live her own free and a life in which she has her individual identity and recognition but her freedom is curtailed by her parents. Her independent choice does not matter. She feels suffocated in her own house. She has to do as per the choice of her parents. She is not allowed to go out and take her own decision. Talking to Rakesh, Mrs. Narang says:

Her Nita's father hardly ever allows her to go out to these club dances. He is ever so strict but since it is you..... <sup>(1)</sup> (*This Time of Morning*) (P. 38)

The above lines show that Narang family has complete control on her daughter. Dr. Narang visits clubs but he never allows his daughter to go out in club party. On hearing the words of Mrs. Narang Rakesh, an ICS officer, is surprised and in his question he asks in your own party Nita is not allowed to go. Mrs. Narang replies:

We don't allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not bear it. <sup>(2)</sup> (p. 38).

It shows the double standard of society in which man can go anywhere freely without a permission of parents while a girl is not allowed to go without the consent of her parents. It also indicates that a woman is not treated a person but as a property.

Nita as a young girl is filled with modern outlook and thinking. She is career conscious and wants to get education to make progress in life but the Parents are worried for her marriage. They just want the girl to settle down in marriage. To produce children and care for family as a dutiful wife and a good and caring mother for children. They don't give importance to the choice of her daughter rather they just want to wash their hand from burden by marriage of Nita with a boy of their own choice in their caste and religion and at last she compelled Nita to marry a boy whom she had never seen or met her.

Dr. Narang has fixed Nita's marriage without telling her anything. When she comes to know about her marriage she is shocked but she can't go against the decision of her father. Nita's all hopes and dreams are spoiled by her parents when they make a decision of her marriage with a boy Vijay. Nita has is not told about the decision of her marriage and when she comes to know and asks her parents but they are not ready to listen what her daughter had to say. When Nita says that she is not willing for marriage then her Dr. father and even her mother say that the decision of girl is taken by parents and children don't interfere in such matters. In this way Nita's voice is ignored, suppressed and unheard. In this way, a career conscious girl surrenders and is married against her choice. She is filled with unhappiness and in her talk with Rakesh, an ICS officer, Nita tells:

....my parents have in their mind for her either so unlawful or midgets or men who never allowed her to open her mouth. ( p. 42)

After marriage Nita as a wife is completely subjugated by her husband Vijay. He does not respect Nita, her feeling and sentiments and her condition in her husband's house is like a caged bird. She finds that her husband Vijay is different from her. There is no much in understanding and their ways are different. Nita's arranged marriage proves to be a loveless marriage because Vijay does not give Nita respect and insults her at every step and exploits her sentiments.

Moreover Nita is a devoted wife but her husband loves Nita's body and nothing more. For Vijay Nita's choice, her career, her likeness and dislikeness don't matter and he wants complete surrender of his wife. In this way Nita's all hopes for freedom, individual identity, self respect and all what a woman wants from her husband comes to an end. Her condition as a wife is without any choice and no place to take shelter. A woman of self respect Nita does not want to go at her parents' house because she does not like to be burden on her parents after marriage. Narang parents here represent all Indian parents and Nita is representative of all young girls belonging to high class Indian society.

In the novel Uma Misra is another woman who is subjugated by her husband and old social system which affects the freedom of a woman. Uma is wife of Arjun Mitra who is much older to Uma. There is much difference between the thinking and understanding of husband and wife. Uma is not happy with this marriage and she feels bored but suffers silently without making a complaint to her husband. She wants love and company but her husband likes isolation. Arjun's behavior makes Uma frustrate sexually and emotionally.

Sahgal in her autobiographical, novel *The Day in Shadow* (1971), focuses the subjugation of a wife by her husband. The novelist has expressed this very concept through the relationship of Som and his wife Simrit. Simrit gets an arranged marriage with Som per choice of her parents. She gives birth to a son Brij but she never gets respect and love from her

husband. For Som business is all and he calls his son Brij, Som icks up and tosses high into the air, starts singing and says:

.....my son you are going to be a very very ..... when he was put down he rushed out shouting his sisters. (*The Day in Shadow*). <sup>(4)</sup> (p. 23)

So the novelist through the above lines tries to show that even in high class and so called civilized, advance and 21<sup>th</sup> century modern society more importance is given to boy than girl.

For Som Simrit's love and dedication has no value and importance. He wants complete surrender of his wife and his ego must be served first while Simrit wants equality. They are different in every way, therefore, their loveless and unhappy marriage does not last long and they decide to separate from each other. So the marriage ends with divorce.

Through the story of Som and Simrti, Sahgal has expressed her own life, her mental agony and how she was oppressed by her husband Gautam Sahgal who gave no respect, love and importance to his young, educated, modern and beautiful wife. The novelist in a talk with Vishnu Dutt and Barinder Baweja in May 1986, expresses her personal agonies and mental pain as she tells:

I should not really have married when I did. I don't think it was cut out to marry young. One should take time to decide. I should and would have left marriage for much later. But society in India pressure girls to marry young. (p. 17)

Actually this novel is an emotional autobiography. In this novel Sahgal has purposefully chose an intelligent, hypersensitive and aware woman who is a writer and free launce journalist who is trapped in a brutal divorce settlement just as the writer herself was in her real life. Sahgal, in *Femina* on 7 May, 1976, writes:

In this book I tried to figure out that has happened to me the shattering experience of divorce.

It is to be noted that it is very difficult to live a life without husband in male –dominated society.

After separation from her husband Gautam, Nayantara felt need of a partner and came in contact with an ICS officer Mangat Rai and began to live with him in relationship because he respects her as a person. Both lived in relationship many years without marriage and there was a good understanding between both but in 1979 Sahgal remarries Mangat Rai. Talking about her second marriage the writer says:

Neither of us at all interested in getting married but in 1979, the Janata government appointed me an ambassador to Italy and that forced me to marry....fundamentally there is no much difference between living together and being married. If you loyal to each other, it does not matter. If there is loyalty and trust, one does not need marriage. (Dutt and Baweja , p, 17)

Thus the novel shows that what a woman wants from marriage is freedom, equality and self respect. Indian society has been patriarchal which gives more power, importance and all rights to men and women are more vulnerable to social disapproval. Jasbir Jain remarks:

While for women it is their relationship with men which becomes the governing factor of their lives, for men it is not so. They can side step this issue and identify themselves with larger ideas ones. Men and women differ from each other not in the intensity of their involvement but also in their sensibilities and views.

Sahgal, in her novel *The Day in Shadow* describes the subjugation of wife by her husband. The novel is a story of Simrit and her husband Som who is a typical male character and believes in keeping her woman under lock and key. Simrit is a woman oppressed by her husband. She has been denied all her rights in her home except the right to decide only the color of curtains. She lives in an ignorant bliss that all will well one day. She does not feel the need to revolt. Like a foolish and innocent little girl she believes with the passage of time everything can be set right. She is not only insulted by her husband Som but also by the friends of her husband. She continuously faces humiliation and cannot raise her voice. Sahgal, in an

article in leading English newspaper The Hindustan Times on 18 December, 1971, writes:

The worst part of it is that Simrit, like most women, can be casually exploited because she is eminently exploitable. She is a passive creature to whom things happen. She is not part of the creating, acting world. Even when the enormity of the settlement is explained to her then she cannot bring herself to believe it, much less to fight it.

### Conclusion

So Nayantara Sahgal has attacked the Patriarchy that thinks man is for honor and woman for virtue. She has described subjugation of Indian high society women who are victim of traditional social system but they challenge the codes of traditional society. In the novels both Nita and Simrit are modern and educated who want freedom and struggle to get rid of tradition and orthodox rituals. The modern Indian woman does not bear subjugation of patriarchy and for her freedom she does not hesitate in separation. A modern woman wants freedom, equality, respect and recognition like a man. She wants freedom in taking decision of marriage and career and we can see this change in Sahgal's women characters in our society in present times.

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