



Research Paper

Domestic Violence against Indian Women in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women in patriarchal society is one of the biggest issues not only in India but in the entire world. From the ancient times women have experienced and in present times are also facing physical and emotional violence in the male dominated society. Violence is such a force or activity which a strong person uses against a weak person. Since man is stronger to a woman so he uses his power sometimes physical and another time through abusive and taunting and derogatory words and treats a woman not as person but as property because a woman is more vulnerable. It has attracted the attention of almost all female writers and they felt a need of the hour to raise voice against domestic violence which affects a woman physically as well as emotionally. Nayantara Sahgal is one among those female writers who always focuses on mental violence against of women in Indian society. The present paper is an attempt to study Sahgal's novels in which she strongly raises the voice of Indian women who have been victims of male's oppression in our male-dominated society. Unlike Kamala Markandaya who focuses on physical violence of Indian woman, Nayantara's focus is on psychological or mental violence which is more dangerous and the impact of which lasts long and sometimes stays in mind and heart forever. Sahgal does not write about common woman and her range is not wide. She is regarded as a champion of high class Indian women and in her all writings she mainly focuses on the inner side of a woman, her pains, suffering, mental agony which affects her life badly in family and society.

KEYWORDS: Women, violence, patriarchy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a worldwide problem. It arises because of aggression or anger. Actually violence is an activity or a force used by strong person against a weak person. In mostly cases it has been observed that a man uses his power either against children or his wife.

Types of violence:

- a. **Physical violence**(physical assault, beating, pushing, throwing, kicking, burning etc. The preparator uses this with an intention to cause physical injury.)
- b. **Mental, emotional or psychological violence.** (abusing, taunting, passing derogatory words and actions, making signs symbols and cartoons etc.)

Both the above kinds of violence are used by the preparator to cause mental as well as physical injury to victim. It affects the life of victim and breeds hatred and betrayal against the preparator. Some psychologists claim that emotional violence is many times dangerous to physical violence because the wound of body can be healed in few weeks and months but mental violence remains in the heart and mind of a victim for a long time and sometimes it lasts till death.

Mental violence in Nayantara Sahgal's novels and her other writings

Nayantara Sahgal (b. 1927), comes from a rich and the most influential Nehru –Gandhi political family. She is a different type of writer and she focused on the mental agony of upper class Indian women has described mental violence against these women in almost all her novels from her first novelA Time to Be Happy (1957) to The Lesser Breeds (2003) and many of her other writings. She acts as a psychologist and delves deep

in the heart of her protagonist. It is to be noted that she has expressed the emotional violence of women for them money is not a problem. They are victims of emotional violence and suffer because of divorce, love affair before marriage, extra marital relations after marriage, disloyalty and faithlessness of husband, lack of communication and mutual understanding, quest for freedom, equality and social recognition etc.

In Sahgal's first novel *A Time to Be Happy* (1957), the central woman character Maya is a silent sufferer of emotional violence. She is a loving and dedicated wife but all her dreams and emotions are shattered by lack of communication and cooperation which hurts her emotions. She wants some kind of response from her husband for her existence as she says:

.....not a good one or an approving one necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even when we live or die is not important to someone. (p. 34-35)

Maya is dissatisfied and unhappy in her married life and starts taking in social work and religious functions and activities. She suffers because she refuses to lose her identity.

In Sahgal's second Novel *This Time of Morning* (1965) Nita Narang, daughter of Dr. Narang and after marriage wife of Vijay, becomes victim of emotional violence before marriage at her father's house and after her husband Vijay's house. As a daughter Nita is not independent and her freedom is curtailed by her father as Mrs. Narang says:

.....we don't allow our daughter Nita go out alone. Her father is strict and would not bear and like of it. (30)

In her arranged loveless marriage Nita becomes a victim of emotional violence.

Sahgal's novel *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) deals with the theme of Indian women's emotional violence. In the novel Saroj is the wife of Inder who keeps Saroj victimizing for her pre-marital of her college life. He calls Saroj: 'a sinner'. Inder is a sadist who never forgets his past and he is a man who tortures his wife and makes life a hell. In order to get rid of mental agony she finds some comfort in the company of Vishal and he tells Saroj:

.....if I could convince one person of my acquaintance before I die that the world consists of human beings and not men and women in watertight compartments; I'd count it an achievement. (p. 188)

In this way Vishal is a man who believes in equality between man and woman. In her company Saroj gets much comfort from bored and hellish life at home life.

Sahgal's *The In Shadow* (1971) is an autobiographical novel in which she has expressed the issue of mental violence. The novelist has shown this very theme through the story of Som and Simrit. Som is a businessman while Simrit is an educated and free lance journalist. Both are different in their thinking and in every way. Som always keeps Simrit under his complete control without caring the feelings of his educated wife. Simrit tolerates mental agony for a long time but when she realizes that it is enough and the water has gone over the head, she takes divorce from Som in order to get freedom and to live a life of happiness, freedom and dignity as she states:

....Som would squeeze and stroke her arm, rest his hand warmly, heavily on her thigh, keep her physically in the room mentally out. (p. 127)

Som lives in a world where women do not exist. He uses and exploits women in his own ways. He has not learnt to respect women and her feelings. His heart does not move at the thought of any atrocity on women. He tells Simrit as he says:

His first wife was a good looking but one day he found her in bed with another man. So he shot her then and there. He does not want to happen that again. (p. 127)

So Simrit is an oppressed wife of Som and she faces emotional violence every step in her daily life. Simrit is not a woman but she is representative of all high class Indian women.

A Situation in New Delhi (1977) is another one of the most remarkable novels in which the novelist focuses on the issue of mental violence. It is about different ideologies and revolves around the relationship of Devi and her husband Ishwar. After the death of her husband she sacrifices her life for her brother and does not remarry. Sahgal writes:

.....she and Shivraj would grow older together. They would read books there had been no time for listening for hours to music, make a garden, enjoy Rishad in his manliness, and then Rishad's children. (p. 15-16)

In this way Devi remains without individuality and sensibility till the very end.

Sahgal's novel *Rich Like Us* (1985) is another remarkable one in which she has concentrated on the issue of violence against women and female's agony in patriarchal society. Ram Swarup is a typical male character and product of male dominated society who ill treats all women he has got married. Despite his two marriages he is infatuated with Marcella and tries his all possible efforts to trap her in love. In this novel, Sahgal introduces three female characters Rose, Mona and Sonali who come from different backgrounds. Ram Swarup enjoys fully with Mona who looks after children and house while Rose is an object for satisfaction of sexual desire and company in business. But both women feel insecure and there is a fear in their mind. Here Sahgal strongly criticizes the attitude of a man who takes women to an object of sexual pleasure and not a human being. Neena Arora in her study of Sahgal and Dorris Lessing observes:

While man considers it as normal male behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage ...he turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting her. (p. 61)

Mona is a typical Indian woman. She is like a river, a loser and victim and is never treated equal as human being by her husband Ram. Rose is from an ordinary English family. She is trapped by Ram and she has learnt to live in humiliation. She feels jealous and anguish when she sees Dev playing and growing and she also wants a child as he feels:

.....without a child she would never be mistress of the house. (p. 70)

In this way Ram brings suffering and mental agony for women, Mona and Rose.

Sahgal another novel *Plans for Departure* (1986) also deals with the issue of emotional violence. In the novel Marlow, an American preacher, Croft, comes in Lulu's life in a dramatic way. Lulu starts loving him. Lulu marries Croft but after sometimes she realizes that she has made a mistake. Both are different in every respect and she is disillusioned with Marlow and her marriage. There is no mutual understanding and love. Lulu's mental agony reaches its height when Marlow adopts a sweeper's child. This adaptation spoils all hopes and desires of Lulu and in her mental agony she thinks:

.....her good wifeliness gone and her loyalty to his loyalties at breaking point. The life she had made with him was over. (p. 147)

In this Lulu experiences a serious mental pain and makes a plan to leave Himapur but before she could leave she has to leave the world and she is killed in an accident.

Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* (1988) also deals with the issue of violence against women in Indian society. In this novel the protagonist is Rane of Vijaygarh. She is a rebel of society who breaks all boundaries and makes rule of her own. She was married when she just five years old and at the age of 13 she was blessed with a son, Bhusan but her husband does not care for the emotions of his wife. She faces inhuman form of mental violence and exploitation. In her mental agony she becomes a rebel against her husband and social rules. Jasbir Jain in his *The New Indian Novels in English: A Study of the Novels of 1980s* remarks:

...she refuses to accept his of pursuit of pleasure and new Ranees and says good bye to realism and this is the ending of mistaken identity. (p. 262)

Lesser Breeds (2003) is hitherto last novel of Nayantara Sahgal in which she focuses on the mental violence which women have to face in Indian society in which man is superior and woman is inferior or lesser breeds and more vulnerable in comparison to man.

II. CONCLUSION

Nayantara Sahgal is a writer with a difference. She like a psychologist enters in the heart and mind of her character to find out her mental agony and she has expressed violence against elite class Indian women in a very realistic way. She has much experience of high class Indian women, their pain, suffering and mental condition and she has expressed their mental agony and the violence which they face in their day-to-day life. She has very skillfully and brilliantly described her own experience of life and her through various female characters.

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