



## The Burden of Unfulfilled Love: Female Characters in Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* and *Storm in Chandigarh*

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### Abstract

It is education, and its further reach amongst the population, which has helped women excel in all fields in today's India. Now, they are viewed as empowered, with an identity of their own, making choices on their own, enjoying greater freedom, and yet remaining attached to their household responsibilities. The various experiences of women, especially in regard to their relationships with men, have been sensitively brought out by men and women writers in India. The concept of relationships has prevailed in literature because of the absence of communication, love, or affection. Nayantara Sahgal takes up in her works the interior dilemma of women in marriages, portraying their sense of dissatisfaction and isolation from society.

### Introduction:

Women writers have succeeded in earning recognition and respectability in India and are considered to be successful in the realm of letters. The novelists among them, more so who write in English, have successfully catered to their struggles and challenges through women protagonists. Their work has added new dimensions to the ways of looking at women within the family and society, striving hard to break out from the traditional shackles of male domination. Nayantara Sahgal is a loud voice for feminist literature. She explores deep into her female characters to draw out their pain, insecurity, and turmoil that often lie camouflaged in modern day

life. Women, though liberated, educated, self-assured, still cling to that entity called 'marriage' in the novels of Sahgal. The other chief concerns that manifest themselves through the work of Sahgal are the libertine condition and the self-realization of women, coupled with sexual freedom. Much of her works mirror the contemporary political scenario, tinted with western liberalism.

### **Marriage to Liberation:**

Nayantara Sahgal portrays women who suffer in their marriages and finally decide to break the shackles that bind them together and end the marriage by opting for divorce. Many of her female characters finally decide that it is better to dissolve the marriage than to spend their life in a world full of injustice and unhappiness. They either leave their husbands or break free from marriages that trample upon their independence and do not let them live life on their own terms. They want to free themselves from the agony of an unhappy or unjust relationship by divorcing, yet this act does not free them from their misery. Women are burdened with triple fronts economic, emotional, and psychological.

The frustrated women, be it due to marital conflict or loneliness, turn to social or religious activities as an antidote. For example, Maya in Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* tries to drown her unhappiness and dissatisfaction by engaging in social work and religious practices. Sahgal is particularly concerned with the breakup of marriages and the loneliness that is likely to be its concomitant factor, very often compelling her women characters into remarriage. Although many of her couples are outwardly happy, they often suffer from loneliness and a failure of communication in marriage. Maya appears to be emotionally aloof, but this is because the lack of meaningful communication has led to emotional isolation in her own marriage. She longs for some kind of acknowledgement, recognition of one's existence.

Not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even when we live or die is not important unless it is important to someone. (*A Time to be Happy*,35)

Ineffectiveness of Maya's marriage and her resultant childlessness add to her unhappiness. For Maya is shown as taking in silence all that comes her way as the result of a loveless marriage. But Maya does not become a meek housewife; she asserts her independence. Maya suffers, due to her refusal to lose her identity. While Ammaji belongs to the older generation, Maya bridges the gap between eras. Sahgal has tried to emphasize how women had been made dependent on society and how marriage was a means through which

freedom eluded them. *A Time to Be Happy* is an account of women's search for their identity within the framework of marriage, as equals, and outside marriage, as independent entities.

Lakshmi is the typical Hindu wife of Govind Narayan. She runs her household in such a disciplined way that one rarely ever hears either the servant or a baby crying. She has become so dependent upon her husband that she never makes any decision all by herself. Similarly, Savitri, Kusum's mother, is portrayed as a religious Hindu woman who fasts and gets up at five every morning to pray for the well-being of her family. Traditional women, while focused on by Sahgal, are very integral parts of Indian society; their contribution is deep rooted and was not easily challenged. In contrast, Maya felt the urge to free herself from such a society and the limits that set, and made a step to be emulated by others. Maya is not the type of woman who stays in the ashes of the relationship where there's nothing left to give and receive.

Sahgal has taken three young couples Vishal-Leela, Inder-Saroj, and Jit-Mara to focus on their struggle for an unhappy married life and the loneliness that goes hand in hand. In *Storm in Chandigarh*, published in 1969, the characters pass through two worlds: one where they go on with the superficial promises made by marriage and another where they seek deeper personal satisfaction and freedom, like some birds who search for their ideal place full of worldly pleasure.

The novel both brings out the similarities and differences of these characters and shows how they find themselves sandwiched between the obligations of marriage and new love interests. Indeed, the subject of the novel is violence not necessarily physical but a more subtle, inner form. Saroj's pre-marital relationship becomes a major issue in her married life. Brought up in an enlightened environment of freedom, equality is on expectation list for Saroj in her marriage. A violent outburst of her college love story by husband Inder. She can't tolerate the past and remains self-centred with revalidation of Inder on her past.

Inder misuses the soft feelings of Saroj throughout her marriage. Innately a lady needs authentic companionship, warmth, and sincerity from the better-half. She ultimately will not be put up with the conventional and oppressive marriage with her children to go to live alone when her husband's jealousy and incomprehension waylay her. Ironically, Inder himself has an affair with Mara. Saroj falls prey to the male chauvinism and seeks satisfying communication and comprehension in the form of Vishal, who came with the solace and sensitivity she wanted.

Inder, conditioned by traditional beliefs, refuses to accept the qualities of Saroj's personality and resorts to violence. He continually judges, abuses, and tortures Saroj because of her pre-marital sexual relationship. Although Saroj yearns to be loved and understood, she has felt herself begging for it, which has led her to retreat into silence. In college, Saroj acted out her curiosity about life by entering into a sexual relationship with one of her male friends. However, when Inder comes to know about this, he brutally judges her, treating her as if she has committed a sin. He regularly punishes her and is prone to physically and emotionally abusing her.

Ironically, Inder harshly punishes Saroj for one pre-marital relationship while he himself indulges in an extramarital relationship with another man's wife and goes scot-free. Customary to Indian society, a woman having sexual relations outside of marriage is viewed as a serious offense, while a man's sexual contacts with other people, either before marriage or after, do not raise any hue and cry. This disparity shows the double standards that prevail, wherein men and women are evaluated based on different yardsticks.

Inder shows a great deal of apathy towards Saroj and disinterest in emotional involvement. There is no meaningful communication between the two. Even Inder's affair with Mara breaks off as he feels repelled by Mara's strong determination and independence. Even while Saroj does play the role of wife and dedicated mother, she feels that there is now nothing much she can talk to Inder about even at the simplest of levels. The walks with Vishal are a refreshing getaway for her from the confines of her home. So, when Inder forbids her from meeting Vishal, she refuses to do so. It is from here that she starts acting in revolt and realizes that her marriage has been a failure. Saroj's decision to leave is a quest for her personal freedom, freedom from the bondage that Inder had put her into.

## **Conclusion**

The works of Nayantara Sahgal represent a unique picturization of Indian women, reflecting their individualism and their social roles. Her works explore the tangles of unstable marriage where characters seek love, loveable companionship, and personal satisfaction. The female protagonists in Sahgal's novels are well educated and confident but cannot find their role within the four walls of their homes, which usually results in legal separation and turning towards religious or social activities either as an escape from drudgery or as a means for self-expression.

While Sahgal takes social demands and individual expectations apart, her women characters are seen to tread between tradition and modernity. It was often found that their roles in marriage and the doses of societal norms were an obstacle to the creation of a moving portrayal of discontent, isolation, disharmony, and disintegration. With this increased attention toward such struggles lies a greater social problem and reflects a critical attitude toward the issues thrown by contemporary Indian society at women.

In the personal journey of her characters and their quest for independence, Sahgal brings out larger issues pertaining to individual struggles within the framework of societal expectations. In many ways, she represents not only the emotional and psychic conflicts of women but also interacts with the social and cultural dynamics that shape their lives.

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