Chapter I

Introduction

For many years women have been prevented from having justice from social, economic, political and constitutional spheres and largely ignored as the ‘Weaker Sex’. The twentieth century has seen the new awareness about the women’s marginalized status resulting in the birth of women’s Liberation Movement. Literature, being the mirror of society does not reflect the pathetic condition of women but explores the woman’s questions, extensively and vociferously.

Some feminists assert the importance of women to become aware of themselves as individuals, and shaping their destinies by assertiveness and self-confidence and they use the term ‘Feminist Consciousness’ in this context. Juliet Mitchell in her book, Psycho Analysis and Feminism, defines the term Feminist Consciousness as “the process of transforming the hidden individual fears of women into shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems, the release of anger, anxiety, the struggle of proclaiming the painful and transforming it into the political” (61).
When the traditional bound women accept their false conditioning into subordination and dependence without objections, the sensitive and aware women realize their need of freedom and struggle against the norms suffering women. Nayantara Sahgal in her article, *The Virtuous Woman*, refuses the opposing the institution of marriage: “Leaving a marriage that had become an emotional wasteland” (1).

Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, argues:

She is called the sex, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being, for him she is sex, absolute sex, no less….she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other (16).

She asserts that the relationship between man and woman should be based on common love and consent. Another important feminist Betty Friedan says in *The Feminine Mystique* that the main problem for women is not sex but identity which has always been prevented to them. She finally declares “for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment autonomy self-realization, individuality, self-actualization is an important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted” (282).
These feminists want a humanist and self identity for women. They aim at bringing a new world for women and see more meaningful relationship based on true love and understanding rather than on power politics where one sex suffered by the other.

From the above quotations, we can understand that, the woman of today no longer wants to be a Cinderella, she needs a change for her survival; she has to release herself from all kinds of exclusion. Today, the suppressed female voice is articulated to a certain extent and the dignity of women is affirmed. She has a greater share of social responsibility and a greater readiness to author her own authority.

Feminism under many names wishes to prevent discrimination of the grounds of gender and is generally a movement for social change. Yet its origin and past have always been neglected in the history of literature of all the languages.

The movement of feminism was in its full swing in the 1960’s. The chief aim of this movement was to secure equal rights and opportunities for women in the male-dominated society. This required awakening and struggle on the part of woman.
The term ‘feminism’ originated from the French word ‘feminisme’ coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier and this term was first used in English in the 1890s in association with the movement for equal political and legal rights for women. The women’s Liberation Movement is one of the results of this feminist movement.

Feminism is a rapidly developing critical ideology of great promise. It has evolved into a philosophy encompassing diverse fields of human activity in society. The feminist theory, its varied articulations and its complex results in a literary context constitute a significant segment for critical endeavour.

Feminism is becoming a more and more accepted part of ordinary social political discussion, even if it is not seen in the same view by everyone. However, feminism now, as in the past of this diversity, is often symbolized in everyday conversations, as well as in lecture rooms, as a single entity and mostly concerned with equality. This limited portrayal is rarely challenged. Many forms of existing feminist analysis require substantial previous knowledge and are difficult that they make Einstein’s theory of relativity appear similar to a piece of cake. Present day feminist thought has sometimes, in this context, been accused of retreating from badly comprehensible
language into an incomprehensible jargon typically associated with ‘ivory tower’ academics.

Whether this accusation is fair or not, the problem remains that despite a growing awareness and potential audience for feminist ideas, as Christ Beasley rightly said, “feminist thought is little understood even among academics” (*Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women’s Writing* 42). If this is the world scenario on feminism, it is a phenomenon of great deal in Indian scenario. Historical circumstances and values in India make women’s issues different from the western feminist rhetoric.

*The Bible* says: “Then the lord God made the man fall into deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out of the man’s ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him” (5).

This ‘Great Event’ in *The Bible* describes disparity between man and women. Man boasts and flaunts, domineers and dominates over women only because woman has come out from man, she is being one of the ribs of man. In Hindu religion, the social status of woman is not certain, sometimes upgraded and sometimes degraded. Manu, the Hindu law-giver, in one of his laws observes: “To be
mothers, women were created and to be fathers, men. The teacher is ten time more venerable than sub-teacher, the father a hundred times more than the teacher but a mother a thousand times more than a father” (Manu Smiriti 24).

Here Manu highlights the status of woman. But in the same book he says that she is a true wife who has born a son. In Vedas too, most of the hymns are related to sons; never daughters. In The Quoran, a woman is described as a fit one who tempts man and brings trouble.

For centuries women in India and all over the world have remained under male subjugation. All the scriptures of the world including The Bible, The Quoran and Manu Smiriti have defined the role of women putting them in the confines of the household. But the spread of education and the influence of a few institutions and organizations have played a vital role in the emancipation of women from age-old shackles of social and domestic traumas and some signs of awakening among women have become visible.

Feminism, as a new way of life, as a new perspective, came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s to strike at the roots, to belong and assert her identity in a
traditional society. Like man, woman is born free but she is in chains, not always and everywhere. All women do not conform, they rebel, they reconcile, and they are both Kali and Durga symbols of destruction as well as creation during the Vedic period. Even, Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala and Droupathi who make their appearance at later period in history and they were not said to be passive, submissive, docile and servile. Sita in ‘Ramayana’ has resisted the demoniac aggressiveness of Ravana. Shakuntala in ‘Mahabharatha’ proved the strength of her nerves by meeting the challenge of Dushyanta. Draupathi displayed the female violence by washing her hair in the blood of Dhushadana who has attempted to disrobe her in the court of Kauravas.

The feminism in India has been controversial. Some traditionalists argue that it alienates women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities; they view it as a diversion from the more important class struggle - the struggle against western cultural and economic imperialism. Chandra Mohanthy (1988) supported the assumption that feminism as a western ideology and supported only the third world women, and it is only the third wave feminism.
Many feminists in India were influenced by the western third wave feminism and the new idea third world women. Loomba in the book, *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women’s Writing*, observes:

It is easy to imagine why entrenched patriarchal traditions would seek to marginalize women’s movements by calling them un-Indian. In fact such rhetoric seeks to disguise the Indigenous roots of women’s thinking or organization has not influenced Indian feminists. Cross fertilizations have been crucial to feminist struggle everywhere. But given the history of colonial rule, the burden of authenticity has been especially heavy for women activists in India (271).

Nayantara Sahgal an Indian feminist was influenced by the western Third Wave Feminism and the term ‘Third World Women’. Most of the literary works of Nayantara Sahgal seek answer to the problems of woman in the male dominated world of today. Sahgal has been in this regard immensely influenced by her mother.

The historical reasons for this resistance to feminism in India extend back into the nineteenth century when the woman question was a central issue in argument over reform in India. Some British writers like James Mill condemned Indian religions, culture and society for their rules and customs regarding women. And a
significant tool used by colonial ideology to prove the inferiority of the subject was the question of the status of women as reputed by Christian missionaries who argued that the moral inferiority of Indians was demonstrated by their barbaric treatment on women. Thus, the argument is revealed that Indian women needed the protection and intervention of the colonial state is only to justify the British rule.

A discussion on feminist perspective will surely help us. Feminist Perspective is defined as pattern of thought, emotion, perception, expectation, and motivations. In other words, it tells us to think, feel, perceive expect and act. Feminist perspective is a women-centered theory. The major concern of feminist perspective is to understand woman’s oppressions in terms of race, gender, class and sexual preference.

There was no unity among the feminist movements in India. But different schools of feminists on specific issues were taken up at different times in different parts of India. The main issues included Sati (Window burning), Female infanticide, Child marriage, Purdah (female seclusion) and restrictions on female education. Though sati was practiced by the people in 1829, It has never been eradicated as suggested in Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich Like Us (1985). Nayantara
Sahgal also pictured fictional narratives of female infanticide, child marriage and purdah in *Mistaken Identity* (1988). There had been some reform groups in all parts of India from the eighteenth century onwards, including the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the National conference, all of which aimed to modernize Indian society in gender relations.

The Nationalists were divided into two groups those who wished to reform gender ideology in India along western line and those who sought to receive a traditional culture, seeing women as emblem of indigenous religion and family traditions. Hence the dominant nationalists developed and popularized an ideology where by women responsible for protecting and preserving the Inner core of the national culture, when man had learn the superior techniques for organizing material life in the world in order to overcome imperial domination. So, according to this ideology, the new women must learn literature, numeracy, and housekeeping but she must be responsible for observing religious rituals, maintaining cultural tradition and ensuring the cohesiveness of family life.

Indian feminist scholars and activists have to struggle to carve a separate identity for feminism in India. They define feminism in time and space in order to avoid them in critically following Western
ideas. Indian women negative survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures: age, ordinal status, and relationship to men through family of origin, marriage and procreation as well as patriarchal attributes – dowry, siring sons in kinship, caste, community, village, market and the state. It should however be noted that several communities in India, such as the Nairs of Kerala, certain Maratha clans, and Bengali families exhibit matriarchal tendencies, with the head of the family being the oldest woman rather than the oldest man. Sikh culture is also regarded as relatively gender-neutral.

The heterogeneity of Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies and therefore multiple feminisms. Hence feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women and women as a group. There is a poor representation of women in the Indian workforce. The dropout rate of girl children from middle and primary schools, as well as lower levels of literacy is around ten present when compared with boys. Since unemployment is also high in India, it is easy for employers to manipulate the law, especially when it comes to women. Because it is part of Indian culture for women not to argue, with men, additionally, labour unions do not
adequately focus on women’s needs. Women also have to settle for jobs that comply with their obligations as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

This research seeks to evaluate and examine how Nayantara Sahgal, a prominent Indian English woman novelist, through the portrayal of variegated female characters and dramatization of ‘real-like’ situations undertakes the quest for female freedom in five of her novels- *Time to be Happy, Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, Rich like Us* and *Mistaken Identity*.

From the time immemorial, Indian women the symbol and embodiment of love and affection, hope and patience, have been showing their worth in each and every discipline of knowledge. Gargi and Anushia in scriptures, Sita and Rani Durgavathi, Rajia begum and Noorjahan in history and Ruth Parawer Jhabwala and Arundhathi Roy, and Nayantata Sahgal and many more have left their indelible imprint on the pages of history- an imprint which cannot be erased and darkened by time.

Indian women novelists in English and in other vernaculars try their best to deal with women who suffer from birth to death. Now the question is: why is it that women novelists portray mostly the
miserable life of an average Indian woman? Why is it that a woman has to suffer insult and abuse, tyranny and injustice without any reason in this male-dominated societal framework? The answer can be sought very clearly in religious scriptures.

Indian English novel was male dominated for some time. Some major Indian English novelists, namely Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, came from the male gender of the society in the pre-Independence period. Though their novels arrived at post-Independence period, some of the women Novelists have given their significant contribution in the field and have definitely enriched their thoughts in feminist writings. They are Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukerji, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Despande, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Gita Mehta, Kusum Ansal and Arunthadhi Roy. They have the problem of adjustment in their families with husband and the problem was widely described in the novels written by Indian women novelists, and this problem was carried out in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a container of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writer’s eyes we can see a different world, with their
assistance. Indian English literature and appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. This claim should be accepted as perfectly justified at last in respect of a few writers like Toru Dutt, Krupabai Sathanathan, shevanthi Bai, Nikambe, Cornelia Sorabji, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, Kamala Markendeya, Kamala Das, Antia Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy.

These women writers focus on women’s problems; they have a woman’s perspective on the world. The educated women prefer to enjoy a greater individually, recognition and responsibility than their uneducated people. Enlightened families encourage their daughters at home and at school and even send them to universities and jobs. The lot of average Indian women still remains much the same for custom as superstition die-hard and it is indeed very difficult to break the old barriers and destroy the shackles of tradition.

Though Indians have a different experience of feminism, the quest for identity as a woman and as a human being is basic to the human world. With the decline of grandeur dignity of human life, in the post-world war era, the crisis has intensified. The quest is to attain a personal view of life and world, which makes the life meaningful, and a sense of belonging to him. Literature comprises this process-the crisis of self, the quest and the succeeding discoveries. In the case of
Indian women it is a double quest-the quest of the Indian women poets in English began with Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, and their poetry is an assertion of national identity. There is a strong change in life concerns in the post-Independence period so life has become more complicated.

The modern Indian women poets writing in English also expressed the identify crisis in their writings. They have evolved their full identity as modern women in the post-independence period. They encounter a variety of tensions in this age, which stimulates their psyches’ progress from tradition to modernity. It is the case with Monika Varma, Kamala Das, Amritha Pritham, Kamala Markendeya Shashi Deshpande, Mamta Kalia and others. They often deviate from the traditional pattern of Indian womanhood and revolt against the conventional role of a woman in the society. Their struggle for new identity and their conscious participation in life around has given a new turn to their writing. Thus they mark the evolution of the Indian feminine psyche from tradition to modernity. Social discrimination, male oppression, self-realization and consequent evolution of feminine consciousness are the recurring themes in their writings. Their concerns are not only feminine but also human.
The battle of emancipation is not over and this battle has been taken over by a few educated women themselves, who, in their effort to communicate to the world, their perceptions have acted as catalysts in the transformation of our society.

A bird’s eye view of the contributions of a few eminent authors is appropriate here. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was certainly the foremost as a writer in English and as an artist, for she was a born poet and highly gifted writer both in English and French. Her works are *Le journal de Mademoiselle d’ Arners* in French and *Bianca* or *The young Spanish Maiden* in English.

Krupabai Sathianthan (1862-1894) was the youngest daughter of the Rev. Hari Pantkhisty, an American Missionary at Ahmedabad. She wrote in succession, two stories with an autobiographical touch, *Kamala*, a story of Hindu life and *Saguna*, a story of native Christian Life.

Shevanthi Bai Nikambe is again another writer whose place among the early women writers may be considered to be as important as that of Toru Dutt and Kirupabai. She was a social worker dedicated to the cause of young married girls and widows whom the orthodox bigotry of the times had forced to remain in the dark world of
ignoredance and servitude. To strengthen her own cause and build up strong popular opinion in favour of women’s education, she published her novel Ratnabai.

Conelia Sorabji is again another gifted writer who deserves a place in the present study though she has written only short stories and not novels. She wrote three volumes of short stories, *Love and Life Behind the Purdha*, *Sun Babies* and *Between the Twilights* in addition to which she published two other books, *India calling* and *India Recalled* both of which are intensely autobiographical. Swarna Kumari Ghosal (1855-1932) was the sister of Rabindranath Tagore. She wrote two novels, *The Fatal Garden* and *An Unfinished Song*.

Kamala Markendeya (b.1924) is one of the most successful novelists writing in English today. Her novels often exploit the Indian locale as well as Indian Social milieu. Besides *A Handful of Rice*, her novels include *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession*, *The Coffer Dams*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Virgins* and *Pleasure City*. She received the National Association of Independent schools Award (USA) in 1967.

Kamala Das is one of the greatest literary figures in English and Malayalam. She was born in the year 1934 in Punnayur kulum, in
south Malabar, Kerala. Educated mainly at home, she has been writing verses and prose since early youth that has given her a permanent place in modern Malayalam literature. Kamala Das has been the recipient of such famous awards as the Poetry Award for the Asian PEN Anthology sponsored by the Philippines centre, PEN Manila, 1964, the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for the best collection of short stories in Malayalam and the Chaman Lai Award for Journalism. Her famous volumes of Verses are *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendents*, *The Old Play House* and Other Poems. Recently she has embraced Islam and rechristened herself as Suraya.

Anita Desai (1937) who made her mark as a sensitive and powerful novelist with very first work, *Cry, the Peacock*, is today among the best Indian novelist writing in English. She is also a distinguished short-story writer. Her novels include *Voices in the City*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *The Fire on the Mountain*.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. She was born in Dharwad, in Karnataka in 1938. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada writer and Sanskrit Scholar, Shriranga. The Legacy is a collection of her short stories. Her other works are That Long Silence,
which received the Sahitya Academy Award, *The Dark Hold No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows*.

Arundhati Roy is the first Indian to win the Prestigious Booker Prize (1997). She has brought recognition to, and opened up a global market for Indian writing in English through her book *God of Small Things*.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most popular Indian novelists of our time. She was born in 1948 and was educated in Delhi and abroad. The Popularity of Nayantara Sahgal is her mastery over the art of storytelling, and her use of the language. In fact, her novels seem to the modern version of picaresque novels of the eighteenth century, the picador in this case is a woman, but she, is very interested of experiences in search of which she goes from place to place.

She is a very gifted writer. She has an extraordinary ability to deal with very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationship in general and men- women relationship in particular is really excellent. The orthodox people in India criticize her for her open discussion on the concept of marriage. But her fiction has got tremendous response not
only from several European countries but also all over the world. All classes of people read and enjoy her fiction. As a writer she differs considerably from other Indian women novelists writing in English. A very frank narration of incidents and absolute open heartedness are her strong points. She is the last person to care for what orthodox readers say about the subject matter of her fiction. As a creative writer, she is becoming immensely popular day by day. Most of the readers enjoy her extraordinary narrative technique as well as her subject matter.

As a writer her intimate understanding of the psyche of women and her problems are the major reasons of her popularity. She is famous for her treatment of the contemporary urban women’s position and the challenges. Sahgal’s novels are mostly based on empathy towards women.

Generally speaking, Indian fiction depicts three kinds of women: First, the poor women, belonging mostly to the rural class, the educated and employed depicted by writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Shasi Deshpande; and thirdly, the neo-rich aristocrat women depicted by writers like Namita Gokhale and Shobha De.
Nayantara Sahgal has been many things to many people, super model, celebrity journalist and best-selling author, her enigmatic personality has held her admirers under some kind of a spell. The present study attempts to make an inquiry into the nature and context of her fictional writings.

During her period of life time, since she started writing fiction, she has received a mixed response from the readers she always protests the male dominated society for the individual freedom for women.

Thematically, Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are highly complex. They offer sufficient stuff to the critics to interpret them in varied ways. She gives vivid picture of the society and culture of the high society of contemporary India. Sahgal is essentially a feminist writer even though she does not announce publicly herself as one. Like Shobha De and Shashi Deshpande, she concentrates on women’s problems and gives a new approach to them. She recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside through her writings. She constantly tries to destroy patriarchal structures and raises a voice of protest against male dominance, the two aspects of feminism which are expressive and
explosive in Shobha De. The man-woman’s complementary image has been completely shattered in her novels.

Some of the woman novelists suggest that equal rights must be given in the Indian families and they must not be treated as inferior to their husbands. Nayantara Sahgal seems as a champion in this cause according equality to women. The morality was applied to both men and women in her novels. In her novels like *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Mistaken Identity* Nayantara Sahgal opposes the oppressive practice in marriage and the social discrimination through point of view how marriages break over the issues of pre-marital and extra-marital sex relations.

Sahgal raises a voice of protest against the practice of having morality for men and another morality for women. In the novel *Storm in Chandigarh*, she portrays Inder who believes in two kinds of morality one for himself, and another for his wife though he is not faithful to himself and his wife Saroj.

Though Nayantara Sahgal has taken the problem of wife’s adjustment in her husband’s home, her approach is different from that of Anita Desai. Anita Desai taken the problems causing enrage ment in families, and describes. Therefore, the lack of freedom Sahgal
herself observes in her autobiographical work, *From Fear Set Free* is Sahgal’s Sequel to the first part of her life story *Prison and Chocolate Cake* published in 1952. It is published exactly after ten years in 1962. It begins from where *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1952-53) had ended. The previous one concluded with the passing away of Mahatma and his dream India. This sequel begins with Mahatma Gandhi’s faith in universal brotherhood, love, Satyagraha and Non-violence. The book, *From Fear Set Free* is dedicated to her husband referred to as “G.S.” It has a preface quoting Gandhiji: “The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment” (*From Fear Set Free* 6).

The preface of the book is a key-note to the whole book. It describes depicts the true definition of freedom. One’s head can be held high only when one feels the true spirit of outward as well as inward freedom. Furthermore, outward freedom can be attained only through inward freedom. In order to attain inward freedom one must be fearless. Sahgal has entitled the book, *From Fear Set Free*. In the very first chapter Sahgal has given a formula to set one’s fear free. She says that ‘Love’ is the ultimate remedy for all the problems of the world. If your heart has wide store of love; Fear will remain far away
from you. Non-violence, Satyagraha and Freedom-struggle are all synonyms of love. She observes:

Love had pervaded my childhood and charity, its counterpart, the political climate of my country even its most turbulent, when the people who had followed Gandhi towards the goal of freedom had cheerfully gone to prison without rancor against the government that imprisoned them. Love, the guiding principle of all good men, had been Gandhi’s lodestar too....He believed that the individual could bring about a change in the heart of his opponent through love and non violence... (7).

Nayantara Sahgal is the pioneer to represent explicitly the feminism in her works. She has the ability to delve deep into her consciousness and to create female images which are at once her and the other woman. She does not project a single personal experience in her writing that is also not a collective experience. As she uses her personal voice to speak on behalf of others, it results in the identification of her person with the persona in her writing. This is the cause for a lot of misunderstanding, and has even brought a fair measure of notoriety besides earning her the title of being India’s most controversial woman writer.

Sahgal, niece of Pt.Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, is a novelist of politics and feminism. She is
also known as a successful political columnist for different newspapers. Her writing is generally characterized by simplicity and boldness. Her writing is also famous for keeping in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tinge of Western liberalism. Her novels truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political theme. She herself declared that all her novels more or less reflect the political era we are passing through. Her attitudes in the novels are tantamount to that of Nehru that is, co-mingled with the western outlook. Unlike the other political writers, she never professes any specific political ideology or favoring any political creed or political movement. Her novels only portray the contemporary incidents and political realities with artistic colour and objectivity. All her major characters of the novels are drawn towards the vortex of polities. But besides politics, her fiction also focuses attention on the Indian woman’s search for individual freedom and relaxation.

The problem is significant in that she has also been subjected to these problems in her own life, lending the quest theme a peculiar note of authenticity, subjectivity and immediacy.

Sahgal’s entire fictional corpus revolves round the twin themes; first –the political one, that India is passing through a transitional period. So the Indian must adjust to the changing times, second-the
lack of communication between people, especially between husband and wife, which results in unhappiness and prevents human fulfillment. She delineates both the motifs in a very subtle and intricate manner.

In *Outlook*, Sahgal believes in ‘new humanism’ and ‘new morality’, according to which “woman is not to be taken as a sex object and glamour girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth lulled into passive role and that requires no individuality”(15).

There is a happy blend of two sensibilities in her work—the sensibility of the artist and the sensibility of a humanist. As humanist she is for unfretted freedom and “pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, and absence of pretence, selfishness and self centeredness” (*From Fear Set Free* 15).

The description of the twin themes, political turmoil outside and the private torment of broken marriages within one’s own self, doesn’t adversely affect her artistic integrity.

Sahgal is a notable writer who added a new dimension to women writers in English with her feminine sensibility which attempts to open up women’s issues with the right sociological perspectives. In her novels the inner sensibilities of women are more
compelling than the outer world of action. She is preoccupied with the presentation of feelings, emotions and the sensibilities of women folk who face opposition from the domineering men folk. Though regarded a writer of political novels, Nayantara has also written novel whose main pre-occupation is the search for women’s freedom.

Sahgal unravels the maxim of freedom in the context of feminism of Indian sensibility. She has disturbing questions to deal with-like the agony and pain of women in her novels. She is deeply concerned with the need for freedom of women to become aware of themselves as individuals, which the society has normally denied them.

Jasbir Jain says in the *The Emergence of New Women*, “Self – awareness is a two-way process requiring not only the social circumstances conductive to it but also the sensibility and fineness of individual sensibility” (18).

Nayantara Sahgal’s progress as a novelist bears testimony to the fact that she has been moving towards a definite feminist position. According to Sahgal, “Freedom is not a gift, it is an achievement and every generation has to do well in order to continue and preserve the tradition of freedom” (*From Fear Set Free* 7).
Feminism is an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to women. Feminism voices the new woman’s objection to be treated as doormats for the convenience of men. It is a struggle against neglect and the dual moral standards to which women are subjected. Feminism as an extension of existentialism gets echoed in world literature. Indian English is no exception to this, what was once almost a whisper has now become gradual increase of its sound that echoes the thoughts and emotions of Indian women. There is a whole generation of women writers who have been the beneficiaries of social reform, education and modernization, giving them means and opportunities to express themselves. Her novels bring out Nayantara Sahgal as a writer with feminist concerns seeking independent existence of women. She sees women as victims of tradition bound Indian society engaged in their quest for identity.

Sahgal’s world consists of two types of women characters. The first group consists of women who are happy in the boundaries of Hindu society, and the other of those with a strong sense of individual freedom and an analytical mind but shuttling between traditional and modern values. Sahgal’s women belong to a class where women are still relatively free, and once they decide to break the marriage they
do not experience any pressure from their parents to say married properly.

In her first novel *A Time to Be Happy* (1957) Nayantara Sahgal refers to the inflexible social codes forced on woman and bigamy. Jasbir Jain observes that in the novel Sahgal’s prime concern is with self-expression within marriage. Kusum is the central female character. Her marriage to Sanad is halfway between the two worlds of orthodoxy and freedom. The early months of their marriage are unhappy. They are able to overcome some of these difficulties because they both are genuinely interested in overcoming them. Except for Kusum’s marriage to Sanad, all the other marriages are arranged one, but they are not necessarily happy. The narrator’s mother had found “happiness within the confines of Hindu orthodoxy” (*Nayantara Sahgal* 46). Ammaji, who belongs to the same generation is unable to find any meeting point between her husband’s opinion and her own. While Lakshmi and her daughter-in-law Devika adjust easily to the circumstances is a symbol, not a cause, of her unhappiness. Ironically Harilal Mathur in the same novel marries for the second time in his desire to have a male heir and both society and his first wife Prabha accept it. On the other hand it is Maya who is confined by her marriage. The central point of Mrs.
Sahgal’s view is concerned more for women and their struggle to attain recognition as individuals.

In *This Time of Morning* (1965) through the character of Nita, Sahgal explores the place of women in Indian society before marriage and the young women’s desire outside marriage. Sahgal refers to the rigid codes in a traditional society when a young girl reaches puberty; her movements are restricted, whereas marriage seems to be a license to things hitherto prohibited. Nita resents the idea of an arranged marriage. To her this kind of a marriage does not offer any prospect of fulfillment. Vijay sees her not as an individual with independent ideas and views but as a possession. The desire to be her own self leads her to commit a ‘faux pas’. Jasbir Jain opines about Nita’s sexual involvement with Kalyan, the other man,

> With Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally in her because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by convention (*The Aesthetics of Morality; Sexual Relations in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal* 42).

Nayantara Sahgal seems to be exposing conventional narrow-minded Indian society, where life-partners are chosen by the parents.
Sahgal strongly attacks this social convention and means this kind of marriage as just organized rape.

Through the character, Rashmi, Nayantara Sahgal launches her theme of isolation of the individual and the need for human understanding. Rashmi, with an unhappy marriage feels “since marriage can be so unhappy, I suppose it can be happy, too, with the right ingredients” (This Time of Morning 41). And therefore comfort comes to her not from Rakesh but from Neil Bersen, who is a stranger. Sahgal asserts that the right ingredients for a happy marriage are mutuality, communication, honesty and respect for each other.

Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure marital relationship, the loneliness of living and private terrors in her next novel, Storm in Chandigarh (1969). Saroj, like Rashmi, is unhappy and unable to find a reciprocal involvement in her marriage. Her pre-marital relationship becomes the cause of failure of their marriage, which Inder has not forgotten and neither had he let her forget it. Saroj laments: “it’s not being alone I mind – I enjoy that. It’s the loneliness. I’m alone even when Inder is here” (Storm in Chandigarh 223). Inder on his part treats her merely as a wife and not as a person. Saroj’s quest for communication and sharing naturally leads her towards Vishal and she finds more understanding
and considerate. Saroj’s departure is a more towards personal freedom and a rejection of the role Inder had wanted to thrust on her. While there may be no harm in knowing about sex before marriage, to be involved in such an act before marriage for a woman in concerned to be the highest sin in Indian society. Sahgal conveys this through Saroj. Ironically, Inder had no explanation to offer for his own extra-martial relationship with another man’s life. These double standards make one of Sahgal’s characters comment angrily: “It always amazes me what is taken for granted in a man is horrifying in a woman. Even in this day and age. Imagine” (This Time of Morning 162).

Sahgal’s very closely autobiographical novel The Day in Shadow (1971) is basically concerned with the emotional effects of divorce on a woman. It expresses the experience of Simrit who has, like Saroj, after many years of married life decided to put an end to her unhappy marriage. But when she meet the divorce it is not at all easy for Simrit. “It was painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The tissue of marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on” (The Day in Shadow 220). Through Simrit, Sahgal explains various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Simrit soon realized that it is
basically a “husband–centered world” (2) Where a free woman has no place. Out of this struggle to be free is born a new Simrit-a person who makes choices, takes decisions and becomes aware of herself as a person. First the mind, then the body open up to new response and life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj which is an involving and an equaling one.

Sahgal’s divorce in *The Day in Shadow* does not suggest that marriage had failed as a social institution or that it has outlived its utility. On the other hand it clearly demonstrates the need for reciprocal relationships in marriage. Discussing Sahgal’s works, Jasbir Jain observes:

Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even contract-or it is wrong to approach it in that spirit. It is a partnership based on respect and consideration and requiring involvement from both (Nayantara Sahgal 60).

Through Simrit’s divorce, Sahgal thus makes a strong for a change and revitalization of the Indian society.

In *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) Skinny Jaipal is the new woman whose awareness of herself, is not at all self-conscious. She has a passion for the act of living and involves herself fully in
whatever she undertakes. She is confident and superior on the stage and equally natural in her behavior.

Some young women in Sahgal’s fictional world are the helpless sufferers of the tradition bound Indian society. Madhu’s rape and her parent’s attitude leads her to seek refuge in death. Through this incident, Sahgal portrays that a woman in a patriarchal set up has no place to go to once she is stigmatized. “Clearly Sahgal has very strong feeling about the wastage of young lives, especially women’s lives” (Continuity and Development in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal 51).

Devi, another woman character, does not come to life in spite of the writer’s repeated attempts to give her vitality. She has allowed herself to be hedged in by her widowhood. Her sexual relationship with both Usman and Michael are temporary and based on pretension which she does not acknowledge. Sex, for her, is only a release from her emotional tensions and an act of renewal. She uses the men in her life for her personal survival. She does not have the courage to oppose convention or free herself from her past. This is another facet of man- woman relationship where a woman through her dependence is able to exploit the situation.
Rich Like Us (1983) coming after an interval of seven years marks the third and the most mature novel of Sahgal’s literary creations. The women belonging to this phase are strong-willed, emotionally independent women. They refuse to obey before the strange hold of men, right from the beginning. They are mistresses of indomitable spirit. Western educated Sonali Ranade is the central female character, who suffers a lot. She grows up with a dream to fulfil “a new tradition to create, (our) her independent worth to prove” (Rich Like Us 28). An uncompromising administrative officer, she refuses to pretend that “the emperor’s new clothes were beautiful” (28). Her natural ability for survival is strong and instead of giving in, she gives up. Her resignation is not her acceptance of defeat; it is rather her defiance against oppressive forces, her refusal to feel disgust before forces acting her identity. It is her unique manner of asserting her individuality. In this novel, Sahgal presents very unpleasant account of the way widows were forced to perform Sati, “a revolting system of suicide and murder” (134). Sonali, reading her grandfather’s manuscript, finds how after her grandfather’s death, her wife who was a non-believer in Sati was forcibly taken to a pyre next to her husband’s and most cruelly burnt to death by her relatives. Mrs. Sahgal vigorously reacts that what to talk of remarriage a woman had to perform Sati after the death of her husband whereas a man could
abandon his wife and remarry anytime. This is what annoys Sahgal as a novelist that women are not treated as equals and they are discriminated against in every sphere of life.

This thirst for identity is not a problem facing the Indian women only. Anna Hansen of Plans for Departure (1986) is a Danish woman, free from the shackles that women in a parochial society face, yet she comes to India when she wants to break out and be herself. “Her going abroad and working as a governess” (Plans for Departure 59) is not liked by Nicholas. Anna tells him “what else can I work at? Women are not trained for anything except chastity and self–denial” (60). Mrs. Sahgal is here voicing female consciousness against male domination. Reacting sharply to the marriage proposal, Anna tells Nicholas that she is despaired to think of her epitaph as: “Here lies Anna, beloved wife, who died without having made much effort to live, and nobody noticed the difference, since being a beloved wife was supposed to be reward enough”(62).

It seems that not only in the East, in the West too marriage is considered to be final destiny for women. But Anna’s enthusiasm for emancipation forces her to leave the warm embrace not only of home but also of a country. She would rather face hostilities in a foreign land than be a slave in her own surroundings, to her own people. She
is assertive and self-confident. She bursts out “it is not the silly wonders I am after. But what other way can I break out and be me?” (62). Nicholas, then, “in keeping with their new understanding helps Anna with plans for her trip to India” (Plans for Departure 67).

Jasbir Jain aptly observes: “Anna’s travels are part of her quest for freedom and meaning” (Nayantara Sahgal 146). Here is a woman whose visions of self-assertion are not clouded by conventions. She knows not only what she wants but also how to achieve it. In her article, “Woman’s Liberation” The India Way” Sahgal recognizes Women-power but laments that Indian society has still not accepted this notion. Ours is a patriarchal society, where personality is a luxury for women.

Sahgal’s concept of emancipation reaches its climax duly and justly in her novel Mistaken Identity (1989). Here we meet a woman who is out and out a rebel. The Rani in Vijaygarh opposes all moulds and definitions. She is a class apart. She breaks all boundaries and makes her own rules. Sahgal says that she had been through agony and had no life, but her mind was free and she lived life. She belongs to an age when women were expected to stay behind veil.
The woman is herself bound in multiple chains. First, there is the hierarchy, then there is her wifehood to a Raja, and then again there is the veil behind which she is doomed to choke. Those women shine in the sky of Sahgal’s fiction as the pole star, the brightest and the most firm. She is a woman, who is living in 1920-30s, is uneducated, rather illiterate, has an apathetic husband, has nothing to look forward to, and yet she dares to reject her husband from her life, when she discovers the man has no respect for her kind. There are no outside forces which make her aware of this (like Vishal for Saroj), there is no one to support her in crusade against female exploitation (like Raj for Simrit), and yet she dares to challenge the authority of her husband in his own home. Displaying exemplary strength of character the woman behind the veil breaks all bondages with her husband, when he marries for the third time. Though she knows nothing about women’s liberation, she becomes a strong practitioner of the same because whatever measures she takes to insulate her self-respect from oppressive forces; she does so without the support of anyone else. It is her inherent courage, her strength, her own will-power.

This suppressed soul prostrates before the deities to procure a child not because she considers it essential for hierarchy but because
she wants to express herself through it. Her longing for a child is symbolic of her search for identity. It’s not as a wife or as a mother that she is satisfied she has to survive as human being. When in the end she breaks free from all inhibitions and marries comrade she breaks free from all inhibitions and marries comrade Yusuf, it is without any infesting sense of guilt that she does so. Her marriage to comrade Yusuf, then, is not an effort to seek refuge from the evils that the Raja has subjected her to. Such refuge, she does not ask for. This woman does not need support even from her son Bhushan. What Bhushan observes here is worth quoting:

Besides, I’d known this woman since she was twenty-two, and sentenced to that greenish light of unfulfilled desire. I couldn’t have guessed she’d escape it, but before long I was sure no sun would have the nerve to melt her if she did (Mistaken Identity 206).

Sahgal shows a steady evolution in the course of her writing career. Rani of Vijaygarh, though a nameless character, marks the culmination of the onward march of Sahgal’s new woman toward freedom.

As a writer with feminist concerns, Nayantara Sahgal is progeny of the tradition wherein power itself is worshipped as goddess ‘Sakti’ a female symbol. Her novels seek to put forward the
independent existence of women and atrophy all attempts to preclude them from the centre-stage of human existence. In her *Point of View* Sahgal believes:

Through the rewriting women do, new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did and how their lone, remote struggles can help our search for identity and emancipation (33).

The fictional journey of Nayantara Sahgal from *A Time to be Happy* to *Mistaken Identity* shows her deep concern with the uncertain state of women in the patriarchal society. Her women from her prototype Maya to mother figure Ranee, rise against all attempt to avoid women’s pivotal role in the family and society. In a male-dominated society these women hoist the flag of gender-equality and seek emancipation for their race. Sahgal’s women finally emerge as “free-women” looking for a life of self-fulfillment and self-realization. In fact, awareness in a woman that she can live a different but happy and purposeful life is of no avail unless the patriarchal forces in our society support her and do not pressurize her to accept the stereotype as it normally happens.
Nayantara Sahgal believes that freedom should come from within. Self-awareness on the part of woman automatically changes the basis of man-woman relationship making it a more equal one. Marriage has been seen as a traditional basis for man-woman relationship which may or may not provide the conditions necessary for individual growth. Nayantara Sahgal describes marriage as a ‘lifelong damage’, if the other person is not sensitive enough about marriage. The collapse of matrimonial alliance and disharmony and incompatibility in marriage became one of the major themes in her novels.

In Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* and Simrit in *A Day in Shadow* we have more depictions of new women struggling for selfhood to breathe freely in the suffocating envious of loveless, unfulfilling marriages (*Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women’s Writing* 76).

Sahgal’s protagonists are home-loving women who merely request emotionally for respect for their individually and are not to be taken as sex objects and glamour girls sent to a passive role. In *Storm in Chandigarh* the relationship between Saroj and Inder in purely mechanical and superficial. This kind of pretence is not required with Vishal. She finds his company soothing. With Inder truth isn’t
possible, Saroj didn’t feel share her thoughts with him. She feels condemned to isolation, as the intimacy between them doesn’t go beyond the physical stage. Saroj wonders:

Does desire begin and end with this body? For if that is so then this- my hand in his, what I can see, what I can hold- is the solid ground between us. On this I can walk safely and nothing will go wrong. On such ground men and women build shelter and bring children to birth and grow old in the comfort that they will live on in future generations (91).

In *A Time to be Happy*, all the other marriages, except for Kusum’s marriage to Sanad, are not necessarily happy ones. As Jasbir Jain says, “the only option was between acceptance and unhappiness—there being no third choice” (*A Time to be Happy* 35).

The narrator’s mother had found happiness within the confines of Hindu Orthodoxy primarily because she had accepted it in totality and had not questioned its injustice.

Some men expect women to conform to the standards laid down for them. But on the whole they themselves remain free to obey other rules. Harilal Mathur in the same novels marries for the second time in his desire to have a male heir and both society and his wife Prabha accept it. Whereas, Ammaji, Govind Narayan’s mother who belongs to the same generation is unable to find any meeting point
between her husband’s opinion and her own. And he, an “indolent
pleasure loving man, had made no effort to understand her nun-like
disdain of luxury or her stubborn refusal to submit to the mould in
which he had tried to cast her” *(A Time to be Happy 35).*

Sahgal fulfills a clearly feminist function in her critical
exposure of the hollowness of man-woman relationships based on
socially predetermined patterns of gender inequalities. The new
woman thus implicitly demands a re-alignment of the parameters on
which marriages function. Marriage without emotional involvement,
sex without passion, and love without respect are hateful to her as she
changes her way through changing times.

Susheela P. Rajendra in *Indian Women Novelists Set III says*
Sahgal tried to portray the sensibility of woman, how a woman looks
out at herself and her problems. She feels that woman should try to
understand and realize herself as a human being and not just as an
appendage to some male life (56).

Nayantara Sahgal is quite bold in her feminist approach. She
demolishes the age old Hindu myth that husband should be treated as
God.