Chapter III

Female Quest for Identity

Women are born as free as men, but they are not permitted to feel free for long time. Some feminists assert that although women are the product of society their virtues and morals are negated in the support of patriarchal system.

One is not born but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and Eunuch, which is described as feminine (The Second Sex 445).

In fact this is one of the maladies of patriarchal society. Though she has feminine virtues and graces, she has no independent identity as a person. The patriarchal system forces her to be a nonentity, a nonexistent thing. She is confined in the house but she has to be an ‘angel in the house’ as said by Virginia Woolf.

An observation about the position of women in our patriarchal society shows the pathetic condition of their lives. Though woman has been compared to the Creator, her own identity as a woman has sadly been denied by the male dominated society. Although she is the mother, wife and daughter she has failed to assert her own identity.
Man has misused her, exploited her for his success in life but at the end of it he has thrown her away shamelessly. She bears everything and acts a silent sufferer because she loves him and she is emotionally attached to him. Women not only in India but in European countries also are subjected to sufferings and humiliations. All the scriptures of the world including *The Bible*, *The Quran*, and *Manu Smiriti* have explicitly stated the role of women to be in the submissive position.

This chapter seeks to analyze how Nayantara Sahgal, a remarkable Indian English woman novelist undertakes the quest for identity of woman through the portrayal of her different female characters. Sahgal is not only a woman novelist, writing in India; she has herself been subjected to these problems in her own life.

The fictional corpus of Sahgal describes the identity of woman and the lack of understanding between husband and wife which results in marital disharmony and emotional estrangement. She also portrays the modern Indian woman’s search for individual identity and self-realization.

Sahgal is for new humanism and new morality. According to her, woman is not to be taken as “a sex object and glamour girl, fed on fake dreams perpetual, youth lulled into passive role that requires
no Individuality” (*Women: persons of possessions* The Hindustan Times 4) but as man’s equal and respected partner.

Sahgal is not only a writer but a humanist also. Though they have been crushed by patriarchal society for woman, the value of the freedom is not given to them. They have also struggled for freedom but sometimes they accepted their roles as mothers, wives, daughter and subordinates of men. But the aspiration to find their identity has not died down.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels portray her deeper concern for the emancipation of women and she wants them to become aware of their existence as individuals. Most of her women characters are portrayed as wives mothers and daughters, her views in connection with feminism find examples through these domesticated characters. As a professional feminist Nayantara Sahgal’s journey as a woman writer starts from the search for self hood and reaches its climax in the attainment of it. She dislikes suffering and inequality. And she is sensitive to the suffering of Indian women.

Though she is a feminist in her approach she does not follow militant feminism. Sahgal’s women refuse to become perfect ladies.
Instead of opposing social order her women accept their roles as respectable and equal place within the social order.

She is the product of a world where husbands have respected their wives. She does not rebel against husbands or men for that matter; it is the system which is to blame. In her novels she analyses the social forces working on the psychology of the Indian woman.

Sahgal remembers how she was aware of herself as a person from her childhood. In her period, women had to keep themselves, hidden behind curtain and purdah. She did not know about patriarchal practice rather she was aware of the joy of being herself.

There was an attempt to damage her hard-earned freedom that she realized the spirit of freedom after many years. It is a man’s world where self-identity is a luxury as far as women are concerned. And she got concerned with the issue of self-identity for women. Her women struggle for freedom and social justice against social taboos.

The women characters in her novels portray women’s struggle against male domination and continue their journey towards self-identity. The search for identity begins with her very first novel, *A Time to be Happy* which was published in 1958. This novel presents many facets of women. And there is the narrator’s mother who is the
symbol of atypical woman. She portrays the picture of the traditional Indian women, and their Sacrificing her dreams and desires, adjusting to the point of compromise and still living happily. Her happiness does not come from her satisfactory circumstances of life but from her acceptance of it.

She is satisfied and happy because she has chosen to be happy and not because her life is full of bliss. Though she is refused by her husband, she does not oppose him.

My mother, though inwardly shocked by his refusal, had staunchly supported him against criticism, as she supported him against criticism, as she supported all his views and enterprises against the displeasure, I am sure, of gods. It was for her husband, she felt to right his actions in the eyes of God. Like any good Hindu wife she believed that his concern was with god and hers with God in him (A Time to be Happy 7).

This novel is significantly concerned with freedom of women. It follows a number of ideas about the novelist’s advocacy of woman’s individual freedom, which becomes central theme in her later novels. Maya is Sahgal’s first woman character who struggles to get freedom from marital bondage and she is the first of Sahgal’s trapped woman seeking escape for the emotional fulfillment.
In spite of his western education, Sanad, the narrator of the novel, has great respect for tradition and he is not a western culture follower. He is aware of the political and social forces but he is drifted into the spate of nationalism, learns Hindi and spinning and contemplates to switch to dhoti-kurta style of dress. His employer, Mr. Trent observes all these activities and warns Sanad, but he boldly tells him that nothing is wrong with his activities and the steps which he has been taking are only to familiarize himself with his own country. He feels unhappy and confused of having been alienated by his upbringing. He tells McIvor:

It is a strange feeling to be midway between two worlds, not completely belonging to either. I don’t belong entirely to India. I can’t. My education, my upbringing and my sense of values have all combined to make me an Indian what do I have in common with most of my countrymen? And of course there can be no question of my belonging to any other country (A Time to be Happy 151).

After his marriage with Kusum, Sanad comes from nationalist movement, his inner conflict about his rootlessness and unreal existences surfaces more often which drives him to be more of an Indian and less of an English man. After independence, he wants to resign from the English factory, where he has been working. The
central theme of the novel is the awareness of Sanad to the social, cultural and political realities of independent India.

The question of self-identity for such a woman seems outrageous as she is too identified with her husband to hold a separate identity. There is no match between the views of Govind Narayan’s mother and her husband. She refuses to accept the sudden desires of her husband. Though she belongs to the tradition bound Hindu society she seems to be Sahgal’s preparation of new woman. Though she belongs to the older generation, she is a strong woman with an individual identity. The narrator observes:

She had in her youth, been a woman of character at a time when character was not admired in women of breeding and later this had given way to a sharp criticism of all that she disappears of in her husband and his house (A Time to be Happy 28).

Maya Shivpal is another character who becomes the protagonist of the journey towards self-realization. She becomes important in this novel as she is in contrast to the traditional Indian woman. She feels her marriage is doomed. She is not opponent to the social taboos, but she is detached from her surroundings. When all members of the family are planning to go to a hill-station, she openly
says, “I shall stay here ….I don’t mind the heat, I will get used to it” (A Time to be Happy 33).

The reason for this refusal for accompaniment with Harish is her dislikes on her husband. Her husband’s world is a strange world for her and she does not find herself capable to deal the problems. She wants to live in village to reach self-determination and self-realization. And another women character Lakshmi does not remain the position of narrator’s mother. She has her own ambitions and aspirations. This natural ability draws her towards social work and it also draws Rashmi to Neil and then Rakesh, Saroj to Vishal and Simrit to Raj and herself to the narrator of the novel. This is the instinct of survival not to service only but to live as an individual. She asks the narrator “What is the most important in life” (68) and she tells him:

A response … not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even whether we live or die is not important unless it is important to someone (68).

All the women in the novel are portrayed as the followers of tradition. Some women are educated and modern like Devaki and Kusum, but none of them, seems to have ever experienced
dissatisfaction. There is Rohan Masi, who does not accept the spirit of individual freedom. “But she had always had a lively disregard for the individual, treating all young people as if they had been born to be mated by sensible elders such as herself” (197).

Kusum’s mother also sacrifices for her family and hides her dreams for her family. Laksmi is another woman who acts as a wife and mother, She does not, feel the need of satisfaction as an individual in her life. When Harilal mathur marries a second time and making his wife. Prabha Mathur a victim of bigamy, she does not revolt against her husband. She continues her role of submissive woman hood. She has been trained in slavery. She does not ever become conscious of her individual identity. We find this submissive traditional woman not only taking alcohol at her husband’s insistence. Men marry a second time that is their usual behavior. But women like Maya; they drown themselves in other things instead of seeking their emotional fulfillment. Maya shows her as unmarried woman by removing all the signs of a married status. It is her unique way to prove her individuality. Though she cannot reach her desired goal at least, she gives awareness to Indian women about individual identity.

The growth and development of a woman is not possible without freedom. In this respect the word freedom does not mean
mental freedom but freedom of the whole personality. In *Storm in Chandigarh* there is a need to redefine virtue and morals. The protagonist proves that women have an individual right to live as they wish. Saroj is suffered by her husband, Inder, for her pre-marital relationship. As she is brought up in an atmosphere of freedom, she expects equality and faith. She tells him about her past events. Being very loyal to her husband she starts her journey to find her identity within marriage. But her efforts to find identity are nullified by her husband’s cruel attitudes. Inder is a typical male chauvinist who believes women should not have dream on her freedom and individuality.

Inder believes that marriage is a support of tradition and it does not involve any sentiment. He is the master and his wife is expected to follow him and submit her to him. As far as Saroj is concerned her past is dead but Inder keeps the remembrance of the past. In fact, Inder’s problem is that he fails to see Saroj as a person. Traditions and Ethos taught him to expect a wife to be loyal and submission to him. Inder’s world is a different world from that of Saroj. In his world there is no question for self-identity of women. And the fact remains that what Saroj hides is troubling and what she does not hide causes misunderstanding. Though he gets himself involved with Mara, he is
the cause of her suffering her. And he has strong concepts about the man-woman relationship.

Saroj tries to find self-identity within the sphere of marriage. Her involvement with her marriage is remarkable. Her thirst for self-identity is similar to that of Rashmi. Inder could not give her, the freedom as he is involved with Mara. Saroj needs true love to find out her identity. This satisfaction she does not get from Inder and she turns her attention, to her children. And she gets satisfaction in bearing a child. Involvement gives a value and meaning to most ordinary moments of life. It produces a sense of security which makes saroj strong when she is humiliated by Inder. When Inder locks her out of their bedroom, she does not feel panic, instead of that she attends to her children.

This strength she gets out of the realization of identity. When the identity crisis is over life becomes happy and worth living. This involvement gives meaning to her life and she tells Vishal.

You can have babies like a dog or a cat does, just produce without being involved. That’s humiliating … or you can understand every step of the process you’re in charge and it’s your experience. It’s probably the only time of stark no pretence in one’s life, when there’s nothing one can be but oneself (Storm in Chandigarh 187).
She makes herself weak because of her desire and she has this dream of getting identity but her dream is not realized with Inder. She has to live with him not to offend Inder. Saroj has to pretend with Inder. It is her desire to be herself that brings her to Vishal. Inder makes her to believe that she is dirty as she has pre-marital relationship. But Vishal tells her, he accepts her as an individual. He feels very much for the lowly treatment of women:

Women were not subject for discussion. They belonged to their men by contract or by blood. The one thing you could not crave, the thing that was crime, was that they should inhabit the world as your equals with the splendor and variety of human choice before the they themselves were afraid to for they had nor preparation for it. They did not believe in themselves (191).

Through the relationship with Vishal she learns to respect herself. Inder makes her feel guilty. But Vishal consoles her with telling about her purity. She finds the change in her personality when Inder opposes her virtue. Nayanara Sahgal opines that the importance of virtue follows many a sacrifice and self-effacement of women.
She writes:

Down the ages the halo of virtue has extracted an awesome range of self-denial in return, from the sacrifice of life as in Sati to the personality, expression and ambition depending on the times, and more crucially, the culture of the home” (Relationship 7).

Vishal’s words in this novel seem to be the words of Nayantara Sahgal, he says, “It was life’s precious obligation to rebel and humanity’s right to be free, to choose from the best light it could see” (Storm in Chandigarh 193).

Saroj finally succeeds in breaking the barriers arranged by men in the marriage because that bondage was disturbing her in her life. She throws away the burdens which accompany the marriage and feels free. She has always had this respect for her freedom. But there is no one who will have this activity. Vishal often consoles her that she is an individual and she has a separate identity which she should not ignore. Her departure from Inder’s home portrays her breaking off from the cruel suffering.

Though Mara is born in India, she has been brought up abroad and she is more foreigner than Indian. She fails to enjoy the loving
freedom given by her husband and she has illicit relationship with Inder. She can hold Inder for a while not because she is his ideal of womanhood, but because she is bold and passionate. Here Saroj does not have the personality like Mara. But the relationship between Mara and Inder does not obtain permanence. This affair with Inder upsets Mara, but it ends well for her and her husband in that he takes this opportunity to reach out to her. So there is a new understanding in personal relationship opened by this couple but the life for future for Inder and Saroj is not permanent. Saroj finds it difficult to keep on living with her husband without proper understanding. She leaves Inder to begin a new life with his friend Vishal.

If Saroj’s search for identity takes her away from Inder’s home Mara’s attitude is entirely changed and it turns towards herself realization and self-determination. Inder has failed as a husband and he goes to satisfy Mara for a little while. Though she is an independent lady, Mara gives company to Inder’s feudalistic remarks. Jet’s very decent approach makes her silent when Inder’s cruel approach tortures her in life. When Jit comes in Saroj’s life and expresses his eagerness to make amends, she comes back to him truly and finally she decides Jit is a perfect partner in her journey to discover her identity.
While searching identity, Nayantara Sahgal is aware that it cannot be ignored or suppressed and is a part of man-woman relationship but she relates to the feeling behind the act, the involvement or independence. Her attitude having feminist approach to sex is towards establishing its morality or immorality.

Outside sex, marriage is not an unrelated or self-contained act. It is to be viewed with reference to a situation and an attitude and no single rule can help to judge it (The Aesthetic of Morality: Sexual Relations in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal 47).

Saroj is not guilty because she leaves Inder to start a new life. According to Shyam M. Asnani,

Saroj’s pre-marital act of sex has nothing to do with the pollution of flesh, promiscuity or immortality. The humanist in Nayantara’s champions for the new human values to blast its ways through the jungle of superstition, pretence and seeming façade of politeness (New Dimensions of Indian English Novel 60).

Saroj’s departure from her husband is a move towards personal freedom and the rejection of the role of housewife thrust upon her. She learns that courage is not a virtue as good cannot oppose the evil. She has to reach out to create the new relationship with Vishal. She has realized that
Mere living together under the same roof only the accumulation of a life time’s living habits, without any real bond of intimacies, in spite of sex and children, the human substance between them dwindling, is nothing but the mockery of marriage. True living lies in understanding each other, in mutual respect and thrust, honesty and freedom, without a thought of dominance” (The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal 57).

In The Day in Shadow, Simrit is the protagonist who struggles to find out her own identity and this woman character portrays Sahgal’s search for self-assertion. When the story begins in the novel, Simrit has left her husband and she lives alone in another house with her children. She feels there is something wrong in the world of Som. Som’s world is the world of men where Simrit cannot find out her identity. To him Simrit is merely a lovely puppet. He sees her as a member of weaker sex.

She is with Som in all matters but she does not say anything over the matter. Som belongs to the world where ‘woman for use’ which is called by the patriarchal society. Simrit was like a necessary thing for him. “Her usefulness to him had never extended to areas of the mind” (The Day in Shadow 5).

He wants to change her to his sudden desires and expectations. Though this is the bitter experience, she keeps obeying for many
years and she does not become aware of her need for the self-expression. Som’s cruel male chauvinism is seen everywhere in the novel, not only in his introduction with his wife but also with his children. He concentrates with pride only on his son.

Simrit feels alienated even in the physical act of love. Her problem is searching an identity for herself. She does not want anything in her life but she simply wants to exist with her children. “Not that she has wanted to lead, only to be, thought that would have meant a battle” (7). Simrit’s efforts for freedom make disturbed in her life. Her interest for freedom is according to Jasbir Jain, the process towards self-identity. Freedom is impossible within marriage for women, and Simrit is not permitted to get her the space to breathe. Finally divorce is the only way to go out and get freedom. After divorce settlement, she discovers her suffering that a clean break is not possible even after this. She finds that marriage is a mistake which she had to give all her life. Sahgal’s letter to E.N.mangat Rai supports the belief of Simrit.

A long relationship like marriage has for years sent out too many shoots and tentacles…. The pattern of marriage is ineradicable, if one has ever put anything of oneself into it (Relationship 197).
Marital disharmony will destroy everything in life. Simrit searches her identity within marriage, but it is a critical task. Luckily Raj breathes life into her again and she rises from her ashes like the phoenix. “Before she has met Raj she had been part of a frieze; Raj had uncared her” (11). In Raj’s world she is not a spectator. She is not a silent woman, the shadowy apparition which she was with Som. She knows well she was forgiven for she was not weak, with Raj she is loved for she is strong.

Pixie is another woman character in search of her own identity. She is a widow with a child. In her longing for self-realization her attention turns towards Sumer Singh. Sumer serves as a foil to Som. As Som gives financial security to Simrit, Sumer Singh also gives emotional security to Pixie. These men impose their wills on the women. There is a difference in the stories of Simrit and Pixie. It is part accidental and part character related. The basic similarity of Sumer and Som is the essential oneness of archetypal men.

Woman is not necessarily opponent to man in her struggle against suppressive forces. There are men like Raj who not only support but also act as a guide for woman like Simrit. He correctly gives guidance that the first step towards self-hood is to face the situation and to be enthusiastic. She is like a flower which cannot
bloom earlier out of fear of getting plucked but now it has opened its petals without fear because the breeze of faith, confidence and friendship is for it to enjoy.

Sri Rashmi Talwar observes:

In presenting the evolution of Simrit, Sahgal has captured, as if, the whole gamut of experiences of Hindu womanhood from the earlier days of oppression to the recent times of freedom, legal and personal (99).

Simrit’s divorce does not mean that marriage has failed as a social institution. It only means that there is the need for a matured with love and care. In Sagal’s approach the act of living is no way, it is the kind of living without pleasure or luxuries. Her women characters occupy a world full of desires and emotions, but they do not accept the conventions of the society. When most of the woman novelists treat sex within or without marriage in many sexual relationships, Nayantara Sahgal proceeds to do something different. According to her sex is either good or bad in itself. Raj and Simrit are in love about to be married with the success of life and the fight against them. The world which Nayantara creates is the only sensitive and alternative to the world of power.

the personal world of raj and Simrit, grounded in sympathy and understanding, human communication and
empathy, rather than bestial sensuality and cruel insensitivity (Critical Response to Indian English fiction 30).

Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* has her first woman who is a foreigner and her second and last career woman Sonali. The imposition of Emergency in 1975 has been used by the nationalist as the backdrop. Emergency itself spells the adjournment of all freedom and consequently stimulates the appetite for the same. The story is presented through the conscience of two women, Sonali and Rose. These two women are Sahgal’s new women but different from each other.

Sonali is a fine Indian new woman she grows up with a dream to fulfill “a new tradition to create our independent worth to prove” (*Rich Like Us* 28). She has grown up in a world which is encouraged by idealism. Her job requires her to compromise on many problems but she is not flexible with that situations. She had friendship with the ideals since childhood and she dares to believe that what she taught was true during her training living in a fool’s paradise; sonali realizes the false reality only when she is suffered by the cruel hands of a new power.
It is clearly portrayed that she is molded in fine tradition but she does not follow it. She was supposed to follow sycophants and pretend sadly. Sonali knows that there is an attempt to crush her. From her childhood she had been a champion of emancipation. She had worked hard and scarified the simple pleasure to achieve the higher pleasure that emancipation brings.

She has been an independent woman since her college days. At Oxford University she felt a new found freedom. Along with her childhood friend Ravikachru she follows Maxism, where she sees a new world. Sonali is not only mentally and economically free but she is also emotionally strong. When she leaves Ravi, she rejects the borrowed order and security of home. She is rather more secure in her freedom. She dislikes this kind of order and looks down upon it as an instrument to enslave women. When suppressed and humiliated she loses her hope and feels wronged the story of her great grandmother serves as an inspiration.

Through her father’s family history, she discovers that she is not the only victim of the patriarchal system. She learns that there are many women who have undergone the horrible sufferings. She also knows that she is not only who has courage in the male dominated society, “She realizes that no one is passive before cruelly and
depravity” (152) and “at all times there have been men and women who were enlightened” (121).

In some personal qualities, Sonali is like Devi. Both are single and independent and they are stronger than Sahgal’s early women characters. Yet Sonali is not as free as Devi for she has no political powers. She is tortured by the senior officers and ministers and in order to maintain her dignity she has to resign. Though Devi has political powers, she does not have to bow down to outward forces. Sonali courageously rebels against the accepted norms of society. She defies all conventions. She is all for freedom and analyses Ravi’s passive attitude in this way: “He had never fought a battle for freedom …. Her had no idea what the simplest subjugations were all about” (112).

Sonali is a woman, has lived with women, and has felt and experienced with women who have lived a life of subjugation at every level, hence she knows the pain in search for freedom. She would never compromise; she could never afford her weak moment to the oppressors. Her survival instinct is strong and indomitable. She begins a process of self-questioning instead of struggling against oppressive forces.
Sonali’s struggle for self-determination is different from that of other women. In the sense; she is facing destructive forces outside of her home. Rose, a close friend of Sonali, is facing this problem at home front. Rose, the foreigner is as much a picture of victimization, as is Sonali the Indian. The burden of society and its custom crushes the personality of all women Indian or western. Rose, is quite emancipated woman but she is not really free. This becomes clear in her interaction with Ram, as well as with Dev, her stepson. Rose leaves her people, her country and even her self-respect at times for Ram, she is far away from the experience of contentment. It was for love that she refused to obey her family, her parents, and her religion and came to India as Ram’s wife. To her Ram is the very suitable for her existence and without him she is an unimportant person. Rose was an educated, financially independent girl who had certainly better future, but when she falls in love she forgets all other considerations. Forgetting herself she comes with Ram in order to search for her new existence. Though as a wife she is quite submissive, basically she was not a submissive girl. She has been quite courageous girl in the matter of choosing her life partner, Ram, who was already married and has a son of alien culture. It is her bold decision and her submissive attitude as a wife and not makes her to marry Ram. She is humiliated at times, deceived at other times and left in the sudden unsteady movement at
some other times yet it was out of her own will that she had become Ram’s wife and all her life she remains so.

Neena Arora, in her analysis of her character, put her on one platform with other submissive wives in Sahgal’s fiction. Rose is like Mona, who thinks with her Indian mentality that Ram is her God and She is like Gauri, who is perfectly happy with her like of luxury and has no emotional needs to satisfy. In fact Rose is unique among Sahgal’s women. Her submission is a result of her strength and her pride. It is her pride that does not makes her accept defeat.

Mona and Rose, the two wronged wives of Ram are portrayed as the concept of sisterhood. All feminists agree that an important step towards freedom of women is sisterhood the strong bond of love and friendship among women themselves. The pain of Rose is made to certain extent when she becomes a friend of Mona. These two women present the great example of love and sacrifice. They feel that they are sailing in the same boat, hence if there has to be any relation between them, it must be based on mutual sympathy, trust and understanding. The dumb devoted wife Mona places much faith in Rose that on her death bed, unmindful of Ram’s assurances, she looks beggingly towards Rose. When Rose promises to look after Dev and his new bride, Mona dies in peace. In the sharing and understanding
of Nishi, the wife of Dev, Rose and Mona Sahgal explores the possibility of co-operation among which may lead to freedom.

Nayantara Sahgal’s next novel, *Mistaken Identity* is also written with the theme of search for identity. Though the protagonist is a male, the feminist consciousness of the novelist has not dies down. The conscience of Bhusan Singh is dominated by two important women in his life Razia and the Ranee of Vijaygarh who is his mother. Though these women belong to different generations, they are same in the like of establishment and orthodoxy. Mother is generally considered as the member of older generation but she is quite unlike the woman of her age. (Lakshmi and Kusum in *A Time to be Happy* and Ranee in *Mistaken Identity*). Ranee refuses to follow the traditional ways. She has her own way and she could not suppress her indomitable spirit. Her violent revolt seems to be her second nature and essential part her personality. Here is a woman who is looking for horizons beyond her reach. Bhushan singh’s opinion of his mother is,

> Anything that defies explanation makes perfect sense to mother. The traditional five senses have never been enough for her” (*Mistaken Identity* 33).

Ranee does not fit in her traditional role of mother and finds it difficult to accept her husband’s polygamous ways. Somehow she has
come to terms with the fact that her husband brought home a second wife but she does not forgive the marriage of the Raja.

She is a different character and religiously dedicated woman. Here is a soul longing for a face of her individual identity. Here is a woman who would offer her whole energy in temple for a child like a traditional woman and at the same time she would not hesitate in breaking all relations with her husband if her ego is hurted. When, for the second time, a wall is erected in the house to show the arrival of another rival of hers, she builds a permanent mental wall between herself and her husband. Refusing conventions, she absorbs her attention in her son, forgetting the very existence of her husband.

When looking back on a past event the narrator analyses this multifaceted personality in its wholeness. If she prostrates before the deity to take blessings for a child, it is not her submission activity to the tradition where a woman is not considered complete unless she is a mother. Like Rose, even her humble respect and obedience shows her will power. She begs for a child because remaining childless would be equivalent to degrading her importance, and accepting defeat. She has to prove that she is not lacking in any way. Bhushan Singh’s analysis holds true, “She was more like a warrior queen falling on her sword in defiance of defeat and disgrace” (34).
Her longing for a child is then, symbolic of her search for identity. It’s not only as a woman, but also as a person, that she would not be satisfied before she has delivered a child. A child for her is by no means a requirement essential for hierarchy but an expression of herself.

At the age of thirteen she is brought to the palace. It’s here only that she reveals attains maturity and like all women behind a purdha, loses her face. Ironically, it is here again that she becomes aware of the need—a deadening, excruciation need to search for her selfhood. It’s not as a wife or as a mother that she is satisfied, she has to survive as a person.

Unlike the legendary Ranee she does not accept the straying away of her husband with a spirit of indifference and resignation. Birran’s efforts to appease her by the much repeated and stale adage, ‘a man goes from flower to flower’ infuriates her no end. For her the marriage bond is to be acknowledged by both the parties, because marriage is a bilateral affair. When her husband fails to respect this bond, she tears it into pieces, because then it becomes obsolete, one she has no use of.
Her fascination with superhuman powers sadhus and occults is an expression of her preoccupation with emancipation. Though superstition is a kind of bondage in such weird powers mirrors her own yearning for freedom. Power in all forms is welcome because power rules the roost. She is full of energy herself but it welcome because power rules the roost. She is full of energy herself but it assumes the dimension of power only near the end of the novel. Her respect for the tsarina is her tribute to an equally strong soul. Her defiance is seen in all her actions. When she finally realizes that there is no returning of her husband, she is filled with intense hearted for him. Unlike ordinary women she does not take to brooding. Instead she vows to finish all reminders of his authority in the house. When in a fit of fury, Bhushan breaks all the valuable things in the room where he had been locked, instead of getting angry she becomes ecstatic. Her jubilance is due to the fact that those valuable belonged to her husband. It’s as if her revenge has begun which reaches it’s culmination in her leaving the house and getting married to Yusuf.

As Asha Choubey said:

Aeons of humiliation and mortification lie locked in the bosom of mother. Whenever it finds an impetus, the valcona erupts surging away all that comes its way. Establishment, institutions, all bows low before her
tremendous fervor. When she gets in the mood she can perform better miracles than the clairvoyant tailor the yogi who could become giant. The wonders that they perform are mere show of power not the need of the moment (The Fictional Milieu of Nayantara Sahgal: A Feminist Perspective 45).

Mother performs such wonders which have the power to change the course of life. Her walking out with Yusuf is one such wonder. She is not satisfied with her limited horizons, she must hold the sky. Bhushan Singh rightly feels, “the only person I had ever seen raving for more life to live was mother” (152).

Mother’s desire to see snowfall is again symbolic of her longing to break free of all norms. For her snowfall is the fulfillment of all her dreams. It’s as if in the scene of snow falling abundantly her dreams have got completed. When, finally she does realize her dream of perfect friendship in marriage, she plans to go to Leningrad to see the falling snow. Falling snow is the wall of her abstract dream.

Like the mother there is another woman character Sylla. A Parsee girl, she is comparatively free and uninhibited. She is a girl who does not have to struggle for freedom, for she belongs to a community and a family where she does not have to live according to norms set down by others. Her will is only guiding force for her. This
woman is refreshingly aware of herself as a person. She has male friends, she writes and directs plays and she is free to pursue her hobby of reading good books. She is not only physically involved with the narrator but also has a very good influence on him. This woman is never faced with the need to discover herself for the lonely reason that she is the only woman in Sahgal’s fiction who is wholly emancipated and free.

Another woman in search of identity is Bhushan Singh’s school teacher whose complete change of her nature is incredible. From being a school teacher, she has become the head and the guardian of the fallen sisters. She is in-charge of are not petty flesh –sellers only. They take active part in the national movement too. Their involvement with nations cause is their effort to establish their individuality vicariously. These faceless creatures are in search for an identity and national movement seems to provide them with the opportunity to discover one.

Sahgal’s women are not opposed to men, but they would certainly not settle for a subordinate position. They are not ready to compromise though they do not hesitate to adjust. Sahgal tries to make a plainly clear that no relation is good or bad in itself; it has to be free from all labels. Even extra-marital and pre-marital relations
are not entirely immortal, if they tend to fulfill the person as individual, that which loses individuals of their individuality is immortal and that which cures them of all frustrations is wholesome and ethical.