Chapter IV

Women's Search for Self Respect and Dignity

The Indian English women novelists reveal the feelings and emotions of Indian women in their novels. They show the miseries and misfortunes and sorrows and sufferings of these women and their search for identity, self-respect and dignity, and, if need be, to revolt in order to achieve these. They also raise their voice against the illiteracy, the orthodox and conservative customs that overburden their lives with child marriages, bearing and rearing of children without any proper planning. These novelists discussed the awareness of identity or individuality in the tradition bound society, resistance against male domination, code of conduct and mode of morality and double dealing of standards, by raising their voice. Women's individual struggles are the main theme of these women writers.

Nayantara Sahgal, in order to maintain women's dignity and retain their self respect, revolts and resists against women sufferings caused to women in their mismatched married lives which only bring domestic disturbance and family discord. Her protagonists are pained to break away from taboos and traditions because more escape from these does not necessarily bring safety and security. There is immense struggle for liberty and dignity whether it be personal or political. Nayantara Sahgal's marriage was unconventional like her mother's aunt and cousin Indira's. The very title of the autobiographical piece, From Fear Set Free, suggests a sort of rebellion at a time when she was trying to make adjustments in her married life. The entire pattern of her life style changed with her marriage. Her husband was not from a political background like her own family. Therefore, she felt a sort of vacuum in her life, the main reason being that she could not put her cherished views into practice. She found Gautam's life quite different from her own. Young and full of her own ideas, she found it very difficult to come to terms with the established code. Incidents in her married life made her feel alienated and in search of dignity and honour, as she could
not face Gautam's indifference to the issues which involved her emotionally. This was bound to lead to divorce. The realization came gradually when she was older, wiser, more weary and a little more confused with the superficial exuberance around her. In 1976, she finally realized that marriage had unsettled her disastrously.

Injustice and imbalance in Indian society disturbs Nayantara Sahgal as she says: "For the first time I came across the shocking assumption of inequality. A man's ego and ambition, I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict, the man's will and desires must prevail .... I was uneasy and restless adjusting to the demands of a personality and an environment whose goals and textures were different from anything I had known or had been comfortable with."\(^1\) She is deeply concerned with the freedom of woman. She presents her women characters as simple women who are conscious of their identity and wish to be regarded as equals to their husbands. In *A Time to be Happy*, Ammaji does not find any solution to the difference of her opinion with her husband who had never made any effort to understand her. She had refused to "submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her."\(^2\)

Nayantara Sahgal places her women characters in rebellion against the patriarchal society and depicts their struggle vividly. It is felt that the patriarchal practices reduce women to inferior social beings or B class citizens who have been made so since the time unknown or from the time immemorial. Man looks down upon woman as the weaker sex and treats her as an object of pleasure and service. The male-dominated Indian society assigned a subordinate and secondary position and place to women. Nayantara Sahgal follows Manu's belief that "Where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased; but where they are dishonoured, there all religious acts become fruitless."\(^3\)

Rashmi's separation is the result of growing indifferences of contemporary society. The novelist expresses her disgust in "women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstances, to

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\(^1\) Sahgal, Nayantara. *“This Time of Fulfilment”. Femina*. 7-20 May, 1976. P. 15.


brutal insensitive husband, to lunatics and lepers." Rashmi's attitude changes with the change in social conditions and she does not allow her awareness to be stifled. Here is a release from old bonds and suppression. Her behaviour brings realization to her mother of the changes in the contemporary society, which she had never seen in her youth.

Jit's gentleness leaves Mara dissatisfied; Mara turns away from him as Saroj does from Inder. Saroj's separation from Inder is to find a sense of freedom and self regard. Storm in Chandigarh is successful from the point of view of making the reader able to understand his humiliation. Saroj belongs to the sphere of an intense and sharpened sensibility. Inder, however, is a typical self-centered Indian male, as Vishal Dubey observes, "That can only happen in a country like this which produces people of such vastly different traditions. And a thin "Cancer of westernization succeeds in furling people that come from the same sort of past. Get two people so unlike is marriage and every effort at growth on the part of one can like an act of betrayal to the other."

Inder does not believe to give freedom and respect to woman because of the cult of male-dominance where there is no freedom for women. Therefore, Saroj becomes a victim of Inder's frequent assaults on revealing innocently her indulgence in pre-marital relations to the reader that the moral lapse on the part of Saroj is a part of her growing up. The novelist is for women. Therefore, Saroj becomes a victim of Inder's frequent assaults on revealing innocently her indulgence in pre-marital relations to the reader that the moral lapse on the part of Saroj is a part of her growing up. The novelist's disgust is evident in her reference to Inder's constant obsession with her moral lapse which demoralizes Saroj.

The life of Saroj in that house is entirely on her husband's terms. Like Som, Inder too regards his wife as a social possession. Saroj too, like other socially disrespected and distressed women, lacks recognition of identity. We can very well guess the novelist's disgust in "you can have babies like a dog or a cat does; just produce them without being involved .... That's humiliating, like being at the mercy of

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a tyrant, and it's the way so many women have their babies."\(^6\) Nayantara Sahgal perceives further agony in Inder's opinion of women as "one half of an enterprise."\(^7\)

Saroj wonders why she is denied dignity and is being ill-treated for something which happened in the past and which she confided to her husband. If she had wished, she could very well have kept it a secret, why she wonders, should she beg forgiveness and think of herself as unchaste and impure? She does not feel ashamed of her moral lapse which is being equated to crime: Saroj yearns to penetrate Inder's inflexibility with "I am clean and whole and yours."\(^8\)

Saroj's association with Vishal Dubey opens new avenues for her. Vishal is outraged with woman's unconditional acceptance of traditional system. He reflects the novelist: disgust that, "Women were not a subject for discussion. They were wives, daughters and mothers. They belonged to their men by contract or by blood. Their sphere was sexual and their job procreation. They were dependents not individuals .... The one thing you could not crave, the thing that was a crime, was that they should inhabit the world as your equals with the splendour and variety of human choice before ..... In the fires and desolations of living she ranked as not quite human."\(^9\)

In Saroj, we notice the emergence of a new type of woman. She is one who does not believe in hiding her pre-marital relations – only she is not convinced of the purity of her being. She wishes to be virtuous and Dubey's revolt against the established code comes up when he conveys to her that the essence of companions is to accept the individual's post. "Life could remould or break the system that lacked righteousness and reason. It was life's precious obligation to rebel and resist, and humanity's right to be free to choose from the best light could see, not necessarily the long accepted light."\(^10\)

Dubey's advice compels Saroj to rebel for her respect and dignity and establish her existence and honour. Her revolt peeps through "I've always loved myself. One

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\(^6\) Ibid. P. 191  
\(^7\) Ibid.P.51.  
\(^8\) Ibid.P.101.  
\(^9\) Ibid. P. 195-196.  
\(^10\) Ibid.P.54.
should be able to." He helps her to give importance to her dignity and identity. "We have the unholy trappings of tradition going on and on while the reality of it isn't there at all." He shows his dislike for cultural hypocrisy and pretence and to confront it meant a tremendous courage on the part of the individual, "... there is yearning for freedom in everything that lives. The way plants grow towards the sun .... And in people, since the time began, sooner or later, one way or another, 'the yearning bursts out and spills over .... We are still bound "by meaningless doctrines and we show no mercy to those who don't conform.""

Saroj realizes that her individuality is deep within, stored in her being. Dubey, gently and gradually makes her aware of this. Finally, Saroj realizes that her life with Inder is a failure. This is an appalling discovery. She leaves him and realizes personal freedom – freedom to seek her self respect and establish her own identity. She finally gives up her futile relationship with Inder, though not without pain. Inder is not ashamed of his relationship with another woman, but Saroj's relationship, prior to their marriage, long before they even know each other, made him react improperly.

Nayantara Sahgal's profound and powerful perception of enlightenment of the self-leading to true freedom is the basis of her novels. Saroj is the much desired, reckless new woman who finally, after much distress, proves herself by rebelling and fighting against the orthodox society. The novelist is rebellious in that she shows that enlightenment is possible for both the sexes. She likes to keep a balance by accommodating modernity in tradition.

Divorces in Nayantara Sahgal's novels also pay a way for seeking a woman's self respect and free will. But divorces do not mean that the institution of marriage is a failure; but it certainly requires reciprocal relationships – relationships that need to be liberated from taboos and conventionalism. In almost all in her novels, the novelist has a woman as a central character who gradually becomes aware of her being which also reflects the novelist's own life.

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11 Ibid. P.198.
12 Ibid.P.18.
13 Ibid.P.231.
Her novel, *The Day in Shadow* also deals with the theme of separation and divorce, and its impact on a traditionally raised woman. The protagonist, Simrit, had to leave her old ways of life and create a new life full of freedom and self-respect for herself. Som disappointed her and she was forced to abandon the marriage itself. Som is rather materialistic who cheats his closest friend Lalli for money. Like other man of Nayantara Sahgal’s other novels, Som also treats his wife first like a commodity. He is concerned only for his son who he feels will be the inheritor. Simrit longed for a fuller and finer relationship but her struggle for self-expression is almost a failure. Som's materialistic attitude and his love for wealth stifle her. She longs for appreciation, respect and understanding which she is unable to find in Som's ambitious and materialistic world.

The novel reflects the inner crisis of a woman and her desire for dignity and individualism. The story reveals personal concerns wherein a divorce faces the onslaught of male-oriented society. Simrit hates her position. "She had dismissed her cook twice for drunkenness and bad behaviour and Som had kept him on." Som, on the other hand, treats her only as a possession. Simrit revolts against Som because of his obsession with power and pelf. She finds it impossible to continue living with him because for him even his friends are mere pawns. His partnership with Vetter to make armaments appalls her. For him, this deal means more money and more comforts and conveniences. He feels that there is no other solution but divorce which will help her defy Som's world. It is only with divorce that she will be able to retain her dignity and maintain her prestige. She finally reaches her decision, "When she was impelled by an absolute conviction greater than right or wrong, and then one burned at the stake if need be."  

Som agrees to the divorce, but as a punishment leaves six lakhs to be inherited by her son at the age of twenty five, for which Simrit has to pay crippling taxes. Nayantara Sahgal reveals her rebellious feelings about women who can be criminally assaulted in every sphere of life, in a country like ours. She reveals that the divorced 'Simrit is socially scrutinized where women do not accept her views that she needed to

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17 Ibid. P. 52.
be understood as an individual with an independent identity and not just as a wife. The novelist's feelings are reflected in, "wasn't it odd when you were standing by yourself, fully a person not be asked what you did .... Simrit herself had never accepted a world where men did things and women waited for them."\textsuperscript{16} She wanted an equal place and "right of a woman in Hindu society."\textsuperscript{17} Simrit's revolt in the form of divorce does not give her the socio-cultural freedom by society. Her daily existence is also threatened. Her predicament depicts a shattering experience of divorce. Her son leaves her when his father offers to send him abroad, thus enlightening and enlarging further the degradation of woman in society. "The indignation of the author at Simrit's hopelessness and appalling situation is clear when she says that 'divorce for women-nature is like a six, and in expiation of her share of guilt she stays mute and acquiescent over the settlement willing to accept it as a part of her Karma."\textsuperscript{18}

Search for respect and revolting spirit can also be marked in the form of Raj's suggestions to Simrit to fight back. He helps her to re-evaluate her capabilities and convinces her that passive acceptance of the atrocity too is a coward's way of life. Simrit has to protect herself in the changing world and must not feel smothered. "First it had been her husband. Next it could be her children. Women for use had been the rule far too long."\textsuperscript{19} Simrit felt that her rebellion must help her define herself meaningfully. In her association with Raj, she finds true self-expression, as he wanted her to "forsake her shadows and begin to live."\textsuperscript{20} So she starts leading a life negating all social norms, ".... and whatever she did from now or would be her own special achievement – or failure."\textsuperscript{21} despite the fact that she has to face a lot of opposition from the narrow-minded and orthodox society, Simrit realizes that in this male dominated society a woman has no respect, place and position but she decides to face all eventualities. Her bold self-reliant attitude separates her from other tradition-bound women who believed in only following their husbands.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., P. 6.
\textsuperscript{17} Harrex, S.C. \textit{The Fire and the Offering}. Calcutta : Writers' Workshop.1977. P. 43.
\textsuperscript{19} Sahgal,Nayantara. \textit{The Day in Shadow}. op.cit., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. P. 167.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. P. 181.
Nayantara Sahgal reflects the predicament of a woman after a brutal divorce settlement. "Mrs. Sahgal's fictional probe into cancerous proliferation of social hypocrisy and political practice in modern India is incisive like that of a surgeon's knife but is tempered with compassion and love. Its analysis and interpretation of the human predicament is informed of newer and truer insights into the human psyche." Through the divorce of Simrit, the novelist appeals to the society for revitalization. Maxily French is of the opinion that after divorce men becomes singles and women become single mothers. Yet Simrit tries to overcome her problems with her characteristic boldness and integrity. Nayantara Sahgal is pained with Simrit's torment and tension under emotional stress. Though she is upset by the suffering caused by the oppression by men, yet she is not against them. She envisions a world based on equality and harmony between the two sexes where each one's opinion and values are respected, where man-woman relationship is liberated from conventional codes and social situations. She looks for communication, not perfection in her quest for self respect and identity.

Nayantara Sahgal's another novel, A Situation in New Delhi portrays Priya Jaspal called Skinny, who again, like Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit is the new woman. She is full of enthusiasm about everything in life including her self-respect and dignity. She believes in change. Devi too moves towards a state of internal awareness and awakening. She denies herself the privilege of relationship with Michael for the sake of her brother, but regrets her decision. Years later she emerges from the situation and defies her brother. The theme of New Woman is not a detailed evidence in this novel because Nayantara Sahgal becomes more politically involved.

In the novel, Rich Like Us, Nayantara Sahgal deals with bigamy which is a cause of losing self respect and dignity and suffering for both the wives, Mona and Rose, who are both wronged by a man, who has no care for age. Besides these two women, he is infatuated with Marcella, a beautiful English lady. He seeks separation from Rose for Mona is already dead. But finally, it is Rose who looks after him in his paralyzed condition. Bigamy brings insecurity and agony to both the wives and the novelist's rebellious feelings are evident in the portrayal of the circumstances, wherein
she presents man trying to get comforts at every level but for a woman marriage means dedication and servility.

Now let us throw some light on the ethical, moral and religious aspects in which a woman tries to secure her social standing and gain her dignity but when she fails in doing so, she naturally raises her finger and revolts against theme. Religion has been depicted by several Indian English novelists in various ways. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya have used religion to relate it to the average Indian, who gives more importance to the mysterious as well as to the unseen 'Karma'. R.K. Narayan does not depict direct revolt against religion as Mulk Raj Anand does, but has given casual reference to superstitions and has written against the exploitation by priests and pujaris.

In Nayantara Sahgal's novels, religion affects her characters in diverse ways though such incidents have not been given a dominant place. The novelist relates how Hinduism and hypocrisy become allies of all kinds of exploitation checking the freedom of a woman and suffocating her dignity and honor. She advocates positive and healthy interpretation of it with reason and responsibility. Hindus, especially Hindu women are deeply affected by religious sentiments. "Hinduism was neither a creed nor religion but a way of life sprung from the soil."23 That is why it probably lacks clear instructions. Everything is left to individuals. Therefore priests take advantage of the situation. The novelist feels that religious leaders are responsible for creating confusion among the masses to suit their own purposes. They equate caste with karma. In the novel, Rich Like Us, it is suggested how priests rule the religious world and they create an aura around them related to their mystic power which dopes and dupes women. They spread superstition to make their own standing firm. Ram Kishan in A Day in Shadow is also a believer in fate and accepts everything passively. Trivedi in Storm in Chandigarh questions the importance of a Brahmin. Vishal explains the novelist's view that Hinduism is "a way of life, wrongly called religion" (p. 92) that people, follow blindly. Nayantara Sahgal feels that "Any naked,

23 Sahgal, Nayantara. This Time of Morning, op. cit., P. 78.
Be draggled haired fraud of a sadhu, covered with ashes could attract a formidable following and hypnotize it into obedience.\textsuperscript{24}

The religious and spiritual aspects confirm the traditionally 'multicultural' make up of the Indian society. Everything begins and ends with religious rituals. It is an endeavour of Nayantara Sahgal to awaken the women consciousness to maintain social standing and self-respect in society and awaken the slumbering suffering female masses and make them revolt against exploitation and resist hard to retain their honour and prestige.

The Indian English novel, by and large, especially of the sixties and seventies, present a feminine world of despair and disillusionment, her efforts to safeguard her identity and save her honour and social prestige when she protects against the social and economic injustice perpetrated upon her, she is labelled a rebel and an outcast, a social misfit. The norms of ethical and moral values underwent a rapid change. Unscrupulous methods, undisturbing, disorder, disharmony and confusion in all works of life made the position of women worse. People, especially woman, were doped and duped by male dominance. They believed that they were being saved by so-called saviours and supporters. In the words of Nayantara Sahgal, "The most unusual aspect of our leadership after independence has been its commitment to safeguard the liberties of a people who were not yet experienced enough to protect these for themselves."\textsuperscript{25} Power-hungry politicians polluted the social environment.

The dependent, tolerant India woman psyche is the main reason that makes her fail to defend her honour and prestige. She bears everything in the name of destiny and Nemesis. Nayantara Sahgal is of the opinion that as religion professes obedience as a mark of paramount duty, it does not encourage woman to make choice and value her image of honour. No wonder then women found to their dismay that they should not bother about their identity and honour because the fixed stars of their beliefs and dogmas fell from the skies, rain. No doubt, women today, whether living in urban or rural areas, feel awakened and emancipated but in reality they are not completely, in a position to retain their prestige. In this context, Simone do Beauvoir rightly remarks:

\textsuperscript{26} Sahgal, Nayantara. \textit{A Time to be Happy}. op. cit. P. 13.
"The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity; they are beginning the affirm their independence in concrete ways, but they do not succeed in living completely the life of a human being."

Now the questions crop up whether Mrs Sahgal's novels present the picture of emancipated women who maintain their self-respect; whether the women try to fight for their identity as a human being; whether the resistance they show is basically Indian in nature or they are blindly following the Western women.

Really speaking, feminine resistance is the result of women's awakening consciousness toward their dignity. They boldly show their resistance, conflicts, confrontations and protests against all that which hampers them from marking their dignity and self respect. This awakened woman earnestly derives to assert her individuality as a human being. "She awakens with a new sensibility and sensitivity which is essentially her own-Indian. In spite of being shackled by traditions, outdated dogmas and crumbling family and marriage laws of divorce, adoption, dowry, rape, inheritance and sexual exploitation, she is intensely eager to assert a 'new morality' and show her identity in society.

This seems to be a happy and phenomenon to watch this weaker sex with tears in her eyes and bearing the burden of child rearing, courageously facing and resisting the male dominated society and aspiring for "full membership in the human race."

In the same gesture, Shanta Krishna Swamy says:

The woman in the Indian novel now reflects the shift in the sensibility of the writer as well as the reader. She is no longer the paragon of virtue and chastity to be extolled by poets and philosophers. She is the symbol of imagination, of sensibility itself, of nature arraigned versus the forces abroad actively denaturing humanity .... The woman has now become the perfect

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image of the artist's insecurity. His isolation, fear, bewilderment, vulnerability and sense of acute violation; potential and actual; are all mirrored through her consciousness.  

The truth is that woman today is fully aware of hand and harsh realities of life that life is not a bed of roses but a bed of thorns. In real life a Cinderella does not get her prince. She now likes to see the new dawn through her own eyes and find out her own ways and means in this male dominating world.

Now it will in the fitness of things to illustrate these points from the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Mrs. Sahgal is a spokesperson of 'new womanhood', 'new humanism' and 'new morality' because of which now a woman is not to be regarded as "a sex object and a glamour girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth, lulled into passive role that requires no individual identity." But now woman walks shoulder to shoulder with man. She is a co-partner and an honoured companion of man.

The humanist in the novelist is powerful and she advocates for a need of full freedom to woman because "human personality is a precious, hard-won achievement, worthy of nurture, irrespective of sex."  

Nayantara Sahgal's women characters are mostly in favour of freedom and self respect. They have a deep concern with the need for freedom to become aware and conscious as individuals. Kusum, in the novel, A Time to be Happy, begins this process of awareness unconsciously, which is carefully and consciously realized by Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh and by Simrit in The Day in Shadow.

In the novel, A Time to be Happy, the main concern of Kusum is to find self-expression with marriage, but in the novel, This Time of Morning, the area of concern is rather extended and expanded to a kind of full freedom the young women crave outside marriage. The protagonists, Rashmi and Nita belong to these changed social

31 Ibid. Sunday Magazine.
conditions. Neither are they passive nor docile, but they claim freedom to lead their own lives of self-respect and dignity.

It is observed that sometimes Mrs. Nayantara Sahgal's woman characters cross the limits of values to achieve their dignity. They break the social customs and barriers that prevent them from getting freedom and enjoying self respect. With the result, they show more resistance and revolt which are already present in their lifestyles. They have commonsense enough to think soon that there are no immediate solutions to their problems, but they still do not lose their heart and set example of resistance against socio-cultural maladies such as exploitation.

Like all her novels, the novel, *This Time of Morning* (1965) presents the upper class aristocratic life of elites, politicians, scientists, ambitions bureaucrats, social highbrows and their wives. Woman protagonists like Rashmi, Nita and Uma show their resistance against the denial of freedom, and self respect. There is the emergence of a new type of honoured women who advocates a new type of companionship between man and woman, husband and wife, based on free and frank communion not only on physical and mental level but also an emotional and intellectual union.

With regard to the self respect and dignity of woman, they in Nayantara's novels demand definite answers to such questions as to why women cannot be given equal respect and honour and social status with men so that for them marriage may become a more meaningful and valuable give-and-take partnership. Why doesn't the government provide them increased scope for independence and job-reservation in all walks of life? These questions make society silent and country as the guilty before the ignored, neglected, exploited and subordinated feminine sex.

In her novels, two types of women are portrayed - one who are docile, humble and an image of piety and chastity and those who are forward and progressive. In her novel, *This Time of Morning*, Rashmi is the daughter of Kailash and Mira. She is an antithesis to her mother whereas the mother, Mira, is a traditional woman. She is a steadfast devoted and dedicated wife, standing as a symbol of Sita, Sati and Savitri. Rashmi is married to an IFS officer. She believes, like a modern woman, in the breaking of a relation that does not work properly. She goes back to her parents'
home, absolutely alienated, utterly disturbed and fully frustrated so much so that she is serious thinking of divorce.

With a view to keeping up one's self-respect, Rashmi advocates for the need of mutual love and understanding in marital life and relations. If there is any misunderstanding or lack of mutual communication between the husband and the wife, it is always better to part with. Rashmi is somewhat uninhibited that she finds nothing wrong in seeking sexual satisfaction in extra-marital relations. No matter she is separated from her husband, she eagerly and actively participates in social gatherings, drink parties and equally shares "interludes of closeness", including sex, with Neil, in order to assert her individual growth and freedom to be herself."32 She does not find complete confidence and comfort in her husband, Rakesh, but all these are very well there in Neil Bernson. Communication with Neil is easy and joy giving to Rashmi and act of sex with him seems to be a natural act with him. She wants to understand Neil and to be loved and liked and understood every inch. Yet, look at the paradox nevertheless true when she does not get what she wants even from a person like Neil, she does not blame him, as "it was an age of impermanence, of brief meetings and partings".33 Rashmi feels frustrated. She is not happy, perhaps, because of the increasing in differences, and callous attitude of the contemporary society towards humanistic basic values of life. The truth is that she desires a union that is not based on domination or self-effacement but on love, affection, sympathy, equality and mutual understanding. Her decision to take divorce naturally gives a shock to her mother who is orthodox and traditional and far whom "Women stayed married, had since (from) time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstances, to insensitive brutal husband and lunatics and lepers."34

Here Rashmi's drastic decision of divorce shows her bold step and her growth and yearning for self-respect. She is now a liberated self who does not want to be choked off any more. As regards the case of Kailash, this decision of Rashmi, in spite of a lot of a headache, a heartache and a suffering is "a torrential release from ancient

34 Ibid., P. 146
groves and bonds, ancient pain and suppression”35. becomes her motivating source and liberating force.

We can see, like Rashmi, another female character, Uma who falls a victim of disharmonious relationship in married life. She is the wife of Arjun Mitra, an officer. Neil paints her as a woman with "one eye and three breasts." Uma is a candid woman who is proud of her sensuality. She always tries her best to attain satisfaction and fulfilment of herself. Arjuna Mitra does not take any interest in her. His indifferent attitude to her has forced Uma to be addicted to drinking and she becomes an adventurist. Addicted more and more to drinking, she badly blames the double-standards of the society which is mostly made dominated. She openly tells Neil:

It always amazes me, that what is taken for granted in a man is horrifying to a woman. Even in this day and age.
Imagine, It's a man's privilege to get drunk ...... and no one thinks him any the worse for it, or to be a libertine ..... it never matters.36

There is another female character, who is all for her liberty and social standing. She is Nita Narang. Though she is a mature and grown up girl of twenty three, yet she is not prepared for tying herself down in the bond of marriage, lest she should lose her liberty and identity. The need for maintaining her individual freedom continues to be the motivating force in her life, and the society must abide by it. It is true that nobody can continue to take silently the kind of parental barbarism, such as the Narangs are guilty of in deciding to marry off Nita to a person she does not want and does not love at all.

Nita wants a job of her own and live an independent life. She resents and resists the idea of getting an arranged marriage as she thinks that the emotional content of marriage with some "putty-faced man" will be overshadowed by the "Stocks and shares", "money and clothes". She observes, "What about her body and its desires .... the body that pulsed for something with an urgency she had never known."37 Later when she is engaged to Vijay who views her nothing but an item or

35 Ibid., P. 214
36 Sahgal, Nayantara. This Time of the Morning. op. cit. P. 162-63.
37 -------------. This Time of the Morning. op. cit. P. 35.
"possession", she feels frustrated and unhappy because such a kind of matrimonial tie does not give any hope of fulfillments.

Nita's relationship with Kalyan, a Minister without portfolio, is nothing but a sort of an extended urge for this fulfillment to know herself, and practically experience her sense of freedom. She is adventurous and not scared of having scandals. There are no moral stings piercing her heart, so long as her own mode of morality and code of conduct permits her the sanctions to do what she does and what she wants. When Kalyan, for fear of any scandals, asks her why she came to meet him in day time, her pert reply is, "I have thought about that so often. Every time I come I wondered why ..... I didn't know why I came. I only know I would die if I didn't". She admits freely and frankly that he has given her "the freedom to be myself. I'd never know it but for you."\(^{38}\)

It is observed that the intense passion of all these women characters is an urge to merge in freedom and feel the true sense of full freedom, free both in word and deed. These women who are the victims of the "fractured families" and who feel "a state of emptiness almost of fear"\(^{39}\) want to be fully alive and live an independent dignified life, though this 'new morality' may down and degrade them before the male eyes. Like Kalyan, they believe that "What a woman does with her body (and mind) need concern her alone."

Though Nayantara Sahgal's another novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* is a political novel one full of them of violence and bloodshed in Punjab and Haryana, yet there is three couples with a different theme. They are Inder-Saroj, Jita-Mara, and Vishal-Leela. The novelist presents the hidden and subtle violence of infliction of one person's will thrust upon another person. It is the male's inherent desire to have a complete control not only on the female body but also her mind. The desperate struggle of the female to escape, to be free and liberated from this barbaric 'man the supremo' mentality, which takes her as a bonded labour and treats her like a slave. These women are in search of a society where fair dealing, honest companionship gives the same respectful relationship as the light gives to the shade and shape of a painting, where in the

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\(^{38}\) Ibid. P. 102.  
\(^{39}\) Ibid. P 140
presence of the stark no-pretence togetherness, "there could be only one feeling, acceptance". 40

In the novel, Saroj is one of the intensely perceptive and sensible women. She is an innocent being brought up in a free atmosphere yet tied and tethered to Inder who is a selfish, self-centred and insensitive man full of dual personality. As a matter of fact, he belongs to the 'He-man Cult'. Both of them, as husband wife, are from different socio-cultural climate. Inder is rough and rude in his attitude. For him to love and possess a wife is like loving a slave and possessing a new pair of shoes. He says to Mara:

“She (Saroj) belongs to me. Belongs to you! So do your shoes. Even my shoes are special to me became they are mine”. 41

He is a man of external gloss and glamour but he has internal gloom. He is a man of the Duke of Ferrera mentality who internally tortures and torments his wife for the 'past crime' which she had none.

Inder has a dual personality which is very deceptive. He is like a black cobra hidden under the green grass of goodness and gentility. He has extra-marital relations with Mara, the wife of Jit, and at the same time he badly and brutally beats Saroj for her pre-marital relationship. This exposes his double standard of life -- one standard for man and another for woman. In this context, the critic, M.L. Malhotra asks, "Is fidelity to be a one sided concept even in this time and age?" 42

Saroj's dream of marital life is a balanced one. She strongly believes that in a marriage that would:

take not only the best one had to give but the trivial
and absurd as well. Even the dirt. It would recognize that
somewhere within the desirable woman .... there was struggling,
imperfect human being to be valued for her own sake.
A marriage like that would be uncommonly strong and

41 Ibid. P 140.
uncommonly pure.\textsuperscript{43}

But look at the paradox that in place of this pure partnership, her cup of life is empty of joy; it is filled with loneliness. Her heart-breaking remark that "I'm alone even when Inder is here", tells us about her deep sorrow and strong desire for friendly communication. No doubt, both of them have been living together under the same roof, but the 'human substance' between them was fading fast and the sweet milk of marital rapture was drying up. They were just like two neighbours "who happened to live under the same roof" (with) no real bond between them, money the lifetime's habits. The enormous waste of it appalled her.\textsuperscript{44}

Even Vishal, an officer, marks a big gap in their marriage and relationship. He says to Gauri, "They are two different cultures - that can only happen in a country like this which produces people of such vastly different traditions .... Get two people so unlike together and every effort at growth on the part of one looks like an act of betrayal to the other."\textsuperscript{45}

Though they live in a wasteland full of sorrows, sufferings and suspicion, yet a female character, Saroj, tries to bring in a rain of hope and happiness by doing her best to hold happily on her family and children:

"Not by throwing things away but by holding on. Grasping, the next moment and the next. It's like chugging to a precipice, to all the dangerous places, by every hand and foothold, and never giving up".\textsuperscript{46}

We can simply say that this shows her courage. The only weakness she had was that she could not pose or pretend; she could not hide the fact of her past from Inder, for which she had to suffer as she says to Vishal:

"Half the time one is afraid you know - of saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood -- just of being oneself and being punished for it. So one spends such a lot of time acting, or at least hiding, and that is very tiring."\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Sahgal, Nayantara. Storm in Chandigarh, op.cit. P 194.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{--\textemdash}.Storm in Chandigarh, op.cit. P. 224
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. P 162.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. P. 88.
As regards the case of Vishal, it is "Life's precious obligation to rebel, and humanity's right to be free, to choose from the best light it could see, not necessarily the long accepted light." He further exhorts Saroj and says:

It has taken a million years of evolution for a person and his cherished individuality to matter and no terror must be allowed to destroy that.48

It is Vishal who at last makes her realize that whatever might have happened in the past, the past is past, because she still is an "honourable virtuous woman". Now it is for husband Inder to stop playing the game of suspicion and brutal torture. She says to Inder, "I can't do anything about it (the past events) now. It all happened so long ago. I don't even remember .... So you see, you will have to stop punishing me." 49

When Inder objected to Saroj's meeting, talking and walking with Vishal, she knew it very well that this time, she was fully prepared to resist, confront and protest, as no longer was she in a mood to live a life of disrespect and humiliation with Inder. She pleased powerfully with him to understand and realize her need for "someone to talk to"50 about oneself and to get out of the labyrinth of superstitions and suspicions to go for a walk "in sight of the fields and hills and the sky. Right out in the open"51, and feel fully free and highly honoured.

In this way, Saroj, a new awakened type of woman, "without realizing it she had renounced the bagging bowl and with it her capacity to be broken."52 Finally, Saroj, like Mulk Raj Anand's Gauri or Ibsen's Nora leaves the house to go with Vishal:

She knew as she left the house with him (Vishal) that there was very little to see. People like her did not have their homes. It dawned on her with a slab of pain that she could leave now because this was not

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48 Ibid P 227.
49 Ibid. P 197.
50 Ibid. P 203.
51 Ibid. P 204.
52 Ibid. P 205.
home ... (but) there were heart breaking gaps through which she could come in and the emptiness yawned. Vishal had been right. Human relationships could not be left to chance.\textsuperscript{53}

Thus, it can be said that Saroj at last found her life partner, with whom she could share the great glory of communication, joy as well as sorrow and her self respect which is generally only possible when people wholeheartedly and cordially accept each other in truth. Their concept of traditional morality is free from constraints of conventionality.

Tamara (Mara) another female character in the novel, is unusual, unconventional. She is a woman "who has a mind of her own."\textsuperscript{54} She is all for freedom and all for the best and highest in life. She craved for "all the worlds she could lay hands on and the best of each the softness of Jit and hardness of Inder."\textsuperscript{55} Her strong desire for having ‘only the best of everything, and nothing spurious or unclean.’ It is no crime for which she should feel guilty or ashamed. She is eager to 'fulfil and integrate herself' through fragmentary joy of other relationships. It is this urge of her to 'integrate herself'\textsuperscript{56} and the passion of growth, fulfillment and expansion of herself that takes her to Inder. She is very critical of her country and its customs and conventions where women are treated like a playing item or a living commodity of men as she says.

That’s what I hate.... old, useless impossible ideas going on and on. We carry them around like deadwood on our back .... we’ll die if we go on like this. Sometimes I think we are already dead.\textsuperscript{57}

But she is not scared of all this. She is a dauntless character. She frankly says, "I’ll never be satisfied till I get the hang of it (India) and somehow make it mine."\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. P 239.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid P 156.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. P 57.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. P 57.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. P 140.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. P 141.
She does not believe in male domination and the possession cult of man. She wants to make Inder realize that though Saroj is his wife and has given birth to his offspring yet "she is not (his woman) and he (India) is not her man. She flies from you apparently in search of comfort you cannot give her, and you are drawn here to me .... for some reason you don't even understand."59

Mara and Jit are rational characters. They are ready to accept and compromise about any doubts, misgivings or even silence between them. Vishal's plea for 'frank and free talk' with 'relentless honesty' inspires Jit to break the barriers of silence between Mara and himself on several such matters. He starts a free and frank dialogue which is more intimate than just the intimacies of bed. Jit made Mara realize that could never be happy in the emotional word, "Where you don't know from day to day what's going to happen and why?"60 Mara does not Storm in Chandigarh want to remain in doldrums any more. So she accepts Jit and his love in totality, as it is the only truth which makes her achieve her desired wholesome best.

Nayantara Sahgal's another novel, The Day in Shadow (1971) may be called a sequel to. The women protagonists, Saroj of Storm in Chandigarh, Rashmi of This Time of Morning and Simrit of The Day in Shadow, are the characters who represent the moral vision of the novelist.

These women protagonists, like other women characters of Nayantara Sahgal, are modern liberated women, belonging to the high class society and living a life of honour and self respect. They are hypersensitive, in constant quest of identity and individual freedom, dis-appointed, dejected and dissatisfied in their marital life.

In The Day in Shadow, Simrit is never allowed the freedom of expression or the choice to be herself. She is not liked talking openly about things that mattered much to her.

Paradoxically, Simrit was penalised not for any vices or faults for her part but for the basic values which were so dear to her. Why did the possession of values liking respecting one's self, maintaining one's honour and not bowing down to anything unjust or wrong? Why did it always result in carrying one's own cross, or

59 Ibid. P 105.
60 Ibid. P 234.
drinking the cup of poison oneself? Simrit is one who detests this kind of hypocrisy, the poses and pretensions of society and says:

“I hate this century - except for the freedom it's brought for people, especially for women. But it is barbaric otherwise, full of rotten elastic standards and the worship of money. I hate the whole mess of human affairs.”

Like Vishal, Raj desperately tries jolt Simrit out of her darkness and dizziness of loneliness. He warns her that if she did not wake up to realize the fact that "she did not need a man for her identity and status; that she was wholesome and her own master, then some other brutal minded shylock would take the benefit of her exploitable vulnerability”.

It is overserved that sometimes Simrit is seen feeling guilty of leaving Som, and not adhering to and abiding by some social traditions, though .... he insisted on it. But I (Simrat) left him in spirit before. I feel I've offended against something - old and - or dained.” Her guild is common like that of other common women who consider in India divorce a sin and a social or moral stigma on themselves, though in any why they may not be responsible for it.

The struggle that Simrit fights and the resistance that she shows is not the struggle and resistance of one woman but it is of the entire women folk who try to free themselves from the moral, social and economic pressure and pushes to curb their identity and make them a dependent cripple.

There are faithful friends like Ramakrishan and Raj who help her come out of the mire of her innocent guilt and remind her the value of "the refusal to bend the knee and bow the head", and preserve her image of self respect.

Finally, Simrit and Raj agree to get married. This is a choice of an independent, self-respectful mature sharp-minded woman who knew her position and place and her way to take a proper decision in proper time.
From this high spot in immense valley of choices spread out before her gaze and she felt free at last to choose what her life would be. She was filled with the sheer rightness of being alive and healthy at this particular time. .... The rest was balanced in a deeper, calmer rejoicing.\textsuperscript{64}

Thus, all the women characters, Saroj, Simrit and Rashmi, rose out the ashes of their past and are transformed into a new 'being' of self-consciousness.

All women characters of Nayantara Sahgal are generally emancipated, urban intelligent women. Their main motive in the quest for identity, self-honour and freedom with a strong urge for enduring companionship and wholehearted co-operation.

The novels of Nayantara Sahgal tell us that is marked a change in the status of women in the Indian social ethos. Their constant quest for freedom, honour, self respect and plea for granting them just a human status is not a cry in wilderness or futile effort. It has the fervour and force, the will to search and find something far more fruitful than the pleasure or the security of marriage. These women characters are not virtuous bowing head women in the conventional concept but in reality, they have dispelled the spell of hypocrisy and double dealing with their own selves. Saroj, Simrit and Rashmi are unable to become sexually involved in meaningless and jejune relationships and their emotional turning away affects a distancing which helps them retain their self-respect and maintain their mark of honour. In this way, it can be said that chastity for these women characters is not a concept of flash or body, but it is one of the spirit or soul.

The roots of these woman characters are in the Indian culture. They respect their individual identity. They struggle hard to save these values. Their ways and means of resistance and their frankness of so-called liberty are "not the permissiveness of the neurotic exposure of nudity paraded in the guise of new morality in several best sellers of the west."\textsuperscript{65} They have an urge to do away with

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid. P 236.
unhealthy institutions and curbing and crippling traditions. Their fight is not a blind fight just fighting aimlessly in the dark, but it is a well-thought of action taking them towards their goal of winning self-respect and honour and a quest for the liberated self.

They know it very well that there may not be proper solutions to their problems, but, being true rebels in their own way, they set good examples of resistance against sexual or any other kind of injustice to or exploitation of them. They first find out the main cause of the social or individual malady, then they try to find a remedy to it. If that remedy does not work properly, they no hesitatingly come forward to cut off that ailing part of their existence. They have to make a choice between allowing the decayed part to remain with them or cut it off entirely. It is only the surgical operation, not the medical moralising, that saves and sustains the rest of the body from decay, downfall and death.

These women characters in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal have nourished and nursed the stamina within themselves to resist against all that which is detrimental to their respectful existence. For this, they need no support or help any more from any one. They can dependently accomplish their 'status and identity', no do they need to be safeguarded; as a thinker has said : ".... a woman must have money and a room of her own." Thus, it can be safely and surely said that women today are marching and moving ahead and exploring new vistas and visions to safeguard their honour and self-respect and shape and sharpen their identity and live as honourable human beings in society.

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