NAYANTARA SAHGAL: HER IMAGE OF MAN AND WOMAN

Nayantara Sahgal has made an appropriate effort to show the diplomacy in personal relationships instead of presenting the average result of political ambitions of non-legislative objects. Her works provide sufficient evidence to prove that she is a champion of women’s freedom. She is aware of traditional attitudes towards women in a patriarchal society, where she is condemned as the traditional weaker sex. The condition of woman in a phallo-centric society reminds us one of George Orwell’s famous statements– “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others” (87). If we construe this famous statement in the parlance of man woman relationship, we find higher standing pedestal for man than for woman.

Sahgal shows that after getting the desired freedom in all spheres, women do not find happiness and freedom which they were likely to visualize. They have to compensate heavily for this newly found release from bondage in some other ways. A society instigated by morbid sexual feelings does not allow a lonely woman to lead a safe and peaceful life, and is ready to subdue, humiliate and erase her individuality whenever and wherever possible. She eventually realizes that divorce can only give her freedom from subjugation by her husband. This release cannot compensate for new kinds of exploitations and maltreatment.

Modern and liberal in outlook, Sahgal believes in ‘new humanism’ and a ‘new morality’ according to which a woman is not to be taken as a sex object and glamour girl fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth and lulled into a passive role that requires no individual identity but as man’s
equal and honored partner. In Sahgal’s works, one can easily discern a happy blend of two sensitivities— the sensitivity of an artist and the sensitivity of a humanist. As a humanist, she is for unfettered freedom and urges us to realize that human personality is a precious and hard-won achievement worthy of being nurtured irrespective of sex. She regrets that in this atomic age the monumental problems still seem largely ignored. She, therefore, pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity, unselfishness and unselfcenteredness. Her artistic vision is intensely moral with profound respect for the affirmative values of life.

Men have always believed in the vive-la-difference attitude, and maintained that they are the nucleus of the universe thus. This attitude of their’s had giving rise to the patriarchal society which views woman as the ‘Other’ and the man as the ‘Self.’ A Feminist K.K. Ruthven comments:

What begins as an existential problem for each of us individually as we try to reconcile the ‘ipseity’ of the Self with the ‘alterity’ of the Other becomes a political problem for us collectively when we have to decide what constitutes society’s Self and Other— if Self is white, then black is the Other; if Self is heterosexual, homosexual is the Other; and so on. Whatever the pair, the Other is made to feel a part from the whole rather than a part of it, and ends up subordinated and oppressed. Beaccvoir starts from the insight that societies are organized on the assumption that man is Self and woman is the Other, and that the consequences are always deleterious to woman. The reason for this is that the Self treats the Other as either a supplement or a threat. (41-42)
Two opposite polarities get created where the Self views the Other as not only its antithesis but as a threat to its very being. Hence there arises the need to repudiate the feminine, or if possible, to erase it completely. Ian MacLean comments:

*If it is true that binary terms tend to be locked together not in horizontal complementarity (equal and opposite) but in vertical hierarchy (superior and inferior), then complementarity is unmasked which conceals the fact that one of such pairs is always favored at the expense of the other. This has serious consequences for the construction of male-female relationship, given the antiquity and ubiquity of binary thought processes. The earliest recorded list of binary opposite is attributed by Aristotle to the Pythagoreans. It sets against female, right against left and good against evil in such a way that the list appears to be tacitly promoting a first term sequence (male/right/good) at the expense of a second term sequence (female/left/evil). (2-3)*

The roots of female exploitation are rooted in the rented religious texts. The scales have always been tipped in favor of a masculine God. Attitudes have not changed since primeval times. Woman Bashing goes right back to the times of the big bang or the creation. The Bible held Eve responsible for Adam’s fall and for the loss of paradise. In the Greek myth it was Pandora who opened the box from which all the world’s evil emerged. Misogynistic opinions can be glimpsed in 17th Century spelling of woman as woe-man created second according to a Hebrew myth which Christians inherited as holy writ in the book of genesis and every woman enters with a piece missing, whether it is a head according to St. Paul or a penis according to Sigmund Freud.
On the contrary, Hinduism is seemingly more tolerant of woman. Hindus are polytheists and almost every male god in Hinduism is accompanied by his female counterpart, who is considered to be his Ardhangini and hence bestowed equal status. It is only when the feminine and masculine elements; the eros and the logos are finally partakers in all the religious activities - pujas, yajnas, tirthas, vratas. But on scratching the surface a bit, one finds the Hindu woman enjoying only freedom. Our respected law-giver Manu states, “Where women verily are honored, there the gods rejoice; where, however, they are not honored, there sacred rites prove fruitless. He states that a woman must be entirely subservient to her husband. The husband is entitled to inflict corporal punishment on his wife and even abandon her to her fate. He also declares that throughout her life, a woman must be protected, first by the father, then the husband, then the son, as she is incapable of leading an independent existence” (Kakar 57). Sudhir Kakar points out that dominant psychosocial reality of a woman’s life can be condensed into three stages. First, she is a daughter of her parents; second she is a wife to her husband and daughter-in-law to his parents; and third, she is a mother to her sons and daughters (59).

Nayantara Sahgal does not idealize a few ego-centric, aggressive or neurotic women characters like Anita Desai, nor does she do idealize the Kanjivaram-decked pativartas that the scene on the soap-operas was dished out by the Indian T.V screens. She approaches, on the whole, the gamut of female characters in all their variety as seen in the post-colonial Indian society. At the same time, her women characters are rooted in Indian myths and represented as archetypes.

A vast number of characters are visible in her debut novel A Time to be Happy. AGandhian bachelor narrates in it the story in first person
professing that he is a disinterested witness but gradually as the novel progresses his involvement in the action can be noticed. The principal character Sanad finds himself a misfit in the opposite cultural milieus of the East and the West. He is trying to remain bound to his identity but he is feeling lost. His family has not allowed the suspense and excitement of political influence. Sanad’s father Govind Narayan is happy with ancient traditions and continues to live by it. His brother Harish and his uncle Kare absorbed the British ideas and values and are satisfied. His young wife Kusum belongs to middle class family with Indian background. A large void could be seen between the elite polished family of Sanad and Kusum’s family of mediocre means at the time of their marriage. Kusum’s father and brother were active members of the freedom movements. However, Kusum adapts herself silently to another world. She does not resist, resent or feel sour about her situation. She settles down submissively in her own inexpensive and serene world and is happy and satisfied in her surroundings which are in marked contrast to the noble splendor of her mother-in-law’s house decorated with expensive art pieces, carpets and expensive furniture. Ultimately, Sanad and Kusum realize their reality and their personal differences are resolved. Similarly, Harish and Maya discover the common platform of their dual existence, their conflict is settled. These relations have attained mutual harmony and signify a broader and larger integration in the political and social history of the nation.

When Raghubir is wounded in the procession organized by the Congress, Sanad has compassion for him for he is emotionally pressed due to his repressed feeling of guilt. At this emotional juncture Sanad meets Kusum Sahai who has a flair for Hindi and is embodied with other
traditional symbols. The Indian element lacking in him is visible in Kusum and he feels her to complement him. They get bonded in a matrimonial alliance in 1947, but Kusum has doubts about her relations with Sanad.

Sahgal in her debut novel has shown a tolerant view of tradition and an optimistic picture of man-woman relationship. Sanad’s final decision to discover and adopt his Indianism is significant as much as it bridges symbolically the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the cultures of the East and the West at the end of the novel. The universe of discourse in which we move while reading this novel indeed signifies, to use Jawaharlal Nehru’s celebrated phrase, India’s tryst with destiny. There is a fictional configuration of a momentous personal decision and a historic movement in our national consciousness that a sensitive reader realizes in the novel.

*This Time of Morning* begins with Rakesh returning to India after having seen abroad in the Foreign Service. Although he is already familiar with the major figures on the political scene here, he feels to be an outsider after six years of absence. We come to understand the complexities of political life as Rakesh himself does. Kalyan, a strong-willed and self-serving member of the U.N. delegation has acquired a position of power. Rashmi has returned to her parents’ home to decide whether to divorce her husband or not. Kalyan’s political career has had a setback due to his overbearing self-confidence and lack of understanding of the democratic nature of government. After a brief affair with a Danish architect, Rashmi announces her intimation to get a divorce and leaves for Lucknow. She indicates to Rakesh that she has already recognized the love growing between them.
In addition to the above-mentioned main characters, there are various others like Nita, the seventeen year old girl. She refuses all offers of marriage and finally becomes engaged to a young man she neither loves nor admires, and then enters into an affair with Kalyan Sinha. Leela, a student in Boston, is influenced by Kalyan’s self-serving philosophy of life. She becomes pregnant and eventually commits suicide. Uma, who is a physically attractive and demanding wife, her illegitimate amorous affairs have cut her off from her husband’s love and compassion. All these episodes are very interesting. Sahgal spends several pages telling the story of Gandhi’s train journey in South Africa. There are also people like Kalyan Sinha who have rejected both the Indian and British worlds, not passively but consciously and critically. There are also those who, like Somnath and Hari Mohan, adhere to the Gandhian values. This process of juxtaposing different kinds of people continues in her later novels where there are many worlds reflecting the confusion and doubt in the middle of the contemporary political situation but the question persistently remains the same whether one should be conformist or not.

Kalyan Sinha does not accept the implied passivity of the Gandhian ideology. He is unable to submit either to it or to British regime. He goes into voluntary exile because of his basic disagreement with the Gandhian policies and even when the country is free, he is critical of the Gandhian stance. He feels it is because of Gandhi that Indians backward are dominated by the past. He feels that Gandhi emasculated the country. He fails to understand that there were other values as important as progress. He is impatient for progress and intolerant of suffering personal freedom and sensitivity which haveno
place in Kalyan’s system of values. There are other characters like him who also question the validity of non-violence as a political method and they reject it as a futile exercise. In the same novel, Kailas Vrind, a staunch Gandhian reconsiders his views on non-violence and feels that though non-violence is a right way of life, but it is not a valid political attitude for a sovereign state.

The novel also raises the problems faced by the nation after Independence. The administrative system still functioned in the colonial framework and India found herself burdened by an alien system of values and education. It was the time of trial and tribulation for Indians. There were many who considered it difficult to work in the system unless the official policies were changed and the non-violence abandoned as a political method. Somnath is of the view that running a government is essentially different from leading a freedom struggle and the Congress must strive to become a political party like any other in order to achieve success. Kailas does not agree with him and he thinks that it is important, more particularly at this stage of the country, not to sacrifice dedication. Then there would be no options left and the decision once taken would set a pattern for the future. Kailas has his firm faith in the quality of the people who are involved in the task of nation building. Social change can be meaningful only when a human being is not bypassed and remains the ultimate concern. For Gandhi and his followers, revolution was neither a war nor a religious crusade. It was not a road for personal ambition either. Kailas echoes his belief when he says that any game was a dirty game when dirty people play it. With more and more unscrupulous people flocking into politics, Kailas is ousted both from U.N. delegation and the U.P ministry. His return to politics is not a reward for his virtue, but the
continuation of the struggle. He is expected to lead another crusade for justice and equality which like all crusades demands dedication and sacrifice. The novel *This Time of Morning* mirrors the political condition of India after independence. It can be called a semi-historical novel. Sahgal herself is a keen observer of the high drama of New Delhi’s beau monde and elite society. She portrays in detail, the persons and events in the morrow of freedom with remarkable authenticity. One can almost identify the characters as the living ones. But the world in which these characters live is incensed with imagination, romance and love and flirting.

Sahgal’s artistic understanding creates a sarcastic delusion in the novel when Kalyan loses his administrative power but wins back personal honor. He tries continuously to escape from his personal non-descript identity, but it turns out to be a real search for self-realization when Nita expresses her generous and liberal love in a simple way of while serving coffee to him.

*This Time of Morning* reiterates Sahgal’s view that tradition has a damaging effect on women in Hindu society. She subscribes to the view that his girls feel alienated in the patriarchal society because they are treated very callously with double standards. They are not given adequate chances to develop their personalities and make a mark in life. After marriage, their freedom is more seriously curtailed. Sahgal explains all these points very clearly through the character of Nita in the novel *This Time of Morning*. She explains in it the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage. Nita is the young and beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang whose personality is a queer blend of eastern and western cultures, western life style being a part of his personal culture. Drinks, dance, and
bridge are his main interests. He behaves like a candid and broad-minded person. But it is merely an outward appearance. In reality, he is a narrow-minded person. When it comes to his daughter, he behaves in the most traditional manner, imposing severe restrictions on the movements of his ambitious child. The Narang family never sent their daughter unescorted to the parties. Mrs. Narang says when Rakesh invites Nita to his party, “but don’t keep Nita out too late. Her father hardly ever allows her to go out to these club dances. He is ever so strict” (Morning 28). The concern of the Narangs for the safety and protection of their daughter exemplifies their conformity to traditional values. In this novel she also refers to the rigid social codes. Nayantara Sahgal does not approve of these double and rigid social codes. In her essay “Woman: Persons or Possessions”, she criticizes such attitude that value women as “property” and discourage individuality in them:

*When I heard someone remark. We never allow our daughter to go out or I can’t do that, my husband would not like it; it sounded a very peculiar, alien jargon. As if I thought women were property not persons.* (68)

For Nita, her parents are very strict. They would not allow their daughter to smoke, to have drinks and attend club dances till she is married. When Rakesh, as an escort, takes her out to a ball one evening, she says on the way something to Rakesh. The novelist has described this meeting very enthusiastically: Nita lurked pleasant and hummed to him. Her perfume engulfed him in the car and he was suddenly aware of the gap between the ages seventeen and twenty-three. He lowered the window glass on his side and concentrated on driving, steering effortlessly along the empty road. He loved the dimly lit, free lined roads of Delhi. They were friendly and suburban, unlike any city roads he
knew. It was wonderful to be back. ‘I really would like cigarettes in my room,’ said Nita. ‘You cannot have one.’ Well, keep cigarettes. Daddy does not know. Is not it silly being allowed to do anything until one is married? Suppose I do not marry till I’m forty five! (Sahgal, Morning 130).

Nita would like to have cigarettes and enjoy herself, but her parents do not allow her to do all these things. They think these habits to be immoral for their daughter. On the other hand, they themselves do all these things. But they want that their daughter should not indulge in these activities. Nita keeps cigarettes in her bedroom and smokes when her father is not at home. She wishes to give a free expression to her ideas, but she has to keep silent because of her being a girl. She is much frustrated when she is not allowed to enjoy her life. She is not given the permission to attend late-night parties. Nita’s mother gives expression through these lines to the traditional attitude of Indian parents towards their daughters: “we don’t allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it” (Ibidem 29).

Marriage is considered to be a license to do all these things prohibited before marriage. Mrs. Narang speaks fluent English. She belongs to the elite society and leads an extravagant life. Her friends would gather around the card table and discuss marriage plans for their daughters. Nita does not like this Victorian culture and craves proper latitude with some breathing space she wants to lead a free life. She wishes to do something and does not want to be bound by nuptial knots as yet. She has a thirst to carve a niche for herself. She requests Rakesh to persuade her parents for marriage as she does not want to get married without their will. She says to Rakesh in this regard, ‘I don’t want to
marry at all just yet. Now you’re back, Rakesh, do persuade Mummy and Daddy, I should have a job, its ghastly doing nothing” (Ibidem 31). Later she is permitted to take up a job, but for a very different reason. Kalyan Sinha, the minister offers her job and her parents do not have guts to refuse a minister’s offer. Nita has something different in her mind. She looks for something more than a mere job. She strives for perfect independence and individual identity. She thinks that a job is never enough to fulfill all the desires and ambitions of life. A job leads to money but freedom demands a flat of one’s own, away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices of men and women who do not permit women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfillment.

In Indian society, the efforts of most of the parents are to find a suitable match for their daughter and get rid of her as soon as possible. They do not give any importance to the wishes of their daughter and force her to marry the man of their choice whom she neither loves nor admires. The parents of Nita also want her to settle down in marriage and wash their hands of her. Nita’s suitor is an eligible bachelor, rich and pleasant mannered and she has nothing against him. She does not want to marry him because she can’t reconcile herself to the fact that Vijay is a stranger with whom she would have to spend her life and whose name and children she would have to bear. However, she fails to assert herself in refusing to marry a man of her parents’ choice. Her mother Mrs. Narang is certainly the kind of a woman who accepts the conventions by which women not only accept stereotyped roles but also pass them to their children. She also proves herself to be an oppressive force when she compels her daughter to marry the man whom she introduces her at parties.
Nita feels extremely unhappy, and a sense of uneasiness overpowers her when she learns about her parents’ decision to marry her off to a total stranger. But the desire to be her own self leads her to commit a faux pas when she gets interested in and involved with the elderly Kalyan Sinha. When she meets him for the first time she stands mesmerized in front of him. She finds a strange comfort in his company and visits him on the pretext of decorating his drawing room. Thus starts her infatuation for Kalyan:

_He sat down on a chair near her. He wondered for the first time what this country might have held for him if he has remained in it- a home perhaps, and a woman to call his own. He brushed the thought aside. This was a child, young enough to be his daughter. She is young, lovely and full of promise, but a child. Yet as the tumult rose in him he knew she was a woman and that she would not eat him get away from the fact._ (Ibidem 138)

‘It is late…’ he said within accustomed gentleness, _I’ll ask the chauffeur to take you home._

No, ‘she spoke with quiet anxiety,’ ‘I don’t want to go home’.

‘What is it my dear’, he tried to calm down his own agitation, _avoiding the strained young face._

‘I don’t know’, _she said almost in a whisper, ‘but don’t make me go’._

_He rose from his chair, ‘Nita’. _

_She got up too and came like a sleep walker in his arms, clinging to him._

‘Don’t make me go, please don’t make me go’.

_He took her by the hand then to his room._ (Ibidem)
Nita happens to have sexual relations with Kalyan Sinha. She feels that her money-minded parents do not care for her bright future. She wishes to become independent in her life. Her parents want to marry without her consent with Vijay and therefore, out of frustration she feels attracted towards Kalyan. Her pre-marital involvement is not the result of the western liberated life style rather it is an endeavor to fulfill her inner desire for love and communication. Jasbir Jain has explained the sexual relationship of Nita and Kalyan in the following words:

*With Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally to her not because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turns to him in her desperation at being hedged in by convention.* (42)

Nita has her relations with Kalyan of her own violation. She comes to him impelled by her own wishes. Though Nita is engaged, emotionally she is still dependent on Kalyan and often goes to meet him to tenderness her tenderness to him. She cannot live without meeting him. The novelist describes her meeting with Kalyan Sinha as:

‘Have I ever asked you to come?’ He demanded. She looked perplexed. ‘No, I come of my own will. I always have’.

‘Then must you look like that, as though I compelled you, even ill-treated you?’

*She came to him quickly, kneeling beside him, her cheek against his knee. He had often noted that though she sat and stood and spoke with a woman’s fluid grace, when she curled up against him like this it was with the spontaneity of a child.*
But he made no move towards her.

‘Why did you come?’ he asked.

He meant that everyone could have seen her arrive, involving her in a scandal and adding to the uproar against him.

‘I’ve thought about that so often’, she said not raising her head, every time I came I wondered why. I used to think about it getting into the taxi, and every minute the taxi took to come here and all the while I was here. I was here. I did not know why I come; I would die if I didn’t.

Only the young could talk so glibly of death, he thought dryly.

‘You don’t know why you come’. He could not keep the caustic tone from his voice ‘was it because you were impelled and could not resist’

She raised her face to his

No because I wanted to and it’s the only thing I’ve ever really wanted to. You gave me the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I’d never have known it but for you. (Sahgal, Morning 230-231)

Nita is engaged to a young man, but Kalyan has become an important part of her life. She relies on him out and out.

Sahgal seems to be exposing conventional narrow-minded Indian society through the character of Nita and her parents. In a conventional Indian society the parents choose life-partners. It is considered to be the bounden duty of parents to arrange for the two young souls to live happily. Sahgal does not like this Indian traditional narrow-mindedness. She is against any kind of undue restriction imposed on girls. She strongly attacks this social convention and names this kind of marriage just an organized rape. She does not reject the institution of marriage and
motherhood but she advocates harmonious relationship and individual liberties in her novels. She criticizes the hypocrisies of the affluent upper-class where in women are encouraged to take drinks or to smoke in the name of freedom and modernity, but they are not allowed to take independent decision in choosing their life-partners. On the other hand, women belonging to middle or lower classes are not even allowed to take drinks or smoke, as it is considered a taboo in Indian society.

Sahgal is concerned with the questions such as how far different racial subconscious creates a fundamental difference in moral outlook; how far an Indian girl could accept western conventions and western tastes without losing her integrity and independence. She seems to state the fact that an Indian girl feels alienated when she imbibes western way of life. An Indian girl is taught that sex before marriage is a grave sin. The archetypal role models of Satva display how pre-marital sexual relationship is a road damnation or hell.

Here the unpardonable crime for an unmarried girl is to have a sexual intercourse with someone before her marriage though, strangely enough, it is considered no crime at all for a man to have sexual intercourse with other girls before or after marriage.

Sahgal’s attitude towards modernity as defined in man-woman relationship in this novel is at best ambivalent. She desires the Indian woman to break out of the Laxshman Rekha of Satva as defined in the Indian tradition.

There must be another way of defining female emancipation without excessive flaunting of sexuality. Sahgal charts this out in her best novel Storm in Chandigarh(1969). The woman at the center of the novel, Saroj is not looking for sexual alliance but for friendship and love. She desires freedom from her oppressive marriage, but she is not sexually
promiscuous. Saroj, thus, emerges as Nayantara’s ideal female protagonist who is modern in her quest for personal freedom, and still dignified in her relation with her lover Vishal Dubey.

*Storm in Chandigarh* is a historical as well as social novel. Sahgal’s concern in it is with an India which is bewildered in its retreat from the Gandhian values. The retreat has penetrated in the world of personal life. While on the one hand, it is a confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal, it is estrangement between Saroj and her husband Inder, on the other hand. A shrewd man Gyan Singh has never wastes time on emotions. He always displays a ruthless attitude while dealing with a situation. On the other hand, Harpal is a kind-hearted person concerned always with human beings and human values. Similarly, there is Inder who does not have patience with emotional by-lanes whereas Vishal believes that decent human relations must be formed. His attitude towards human relations becomes obvious when he says:

*With care, with love, when possible and otherwise with time and interest and always with truth, or as the other person will allow. All of that reduces the heart breaks and a lot of loneliness of living, but is damned hard to do* (Sahgal, Storm 80).

Gyan Singh, the chief minister of Punjab, is like Kalyan Sinha, a man concerned only with results, not with methods. Harpal and Gyan, political colleagues and rivals, and now chief ministers of the neighbouring states of Haryana and Punjab disagree on several fundamentals issues. Harpal is concerned with long-term measures in the task of nation-building whereas Gyan is concerned with power and progress. Gyan who had been in the charge of Harpal’s first election campaign had made it clear to him the inadequacy of soft approach to
politics. He had told him that sincerity was a personal crusade, not a political one. When one of their young workers is abducted by a rival group, Gyan Singh finds out the boy and beats him severely. This incident affects Harpal Singh’s life and it becomes difficult for him to bear this kind of atrocity:

His concern for cause had become well-known. He had been one of those who had agitated for the clearance of the hutment area for housing and employment for displaced persons. He, an unknown on the politics scene had soon come to represent the rival of aspiration among the dispossessed (Ibidem 44).

Harpal Singh is conscious of a withdrawal in his own self. He has a sense of frustration. He is not satisfied on the issue that power instead of conviction becomes the main motivating force for men in politics. One had to be more than a mere politician. It can also be asserted that if Harpal Singh is a crusader, Gyan Singh is manipulator. Harpal is extra-careful in dealing with human beings. Gyan denies making a difference between human and non-human beings. He does not have any awareness about the sense of values. Their first encounter was not during the campaign for elections. They had already had a meeting in the similar circumstances, when Harpal was in need of help and Gyan was ready to help him out. It was the time of partition of the country when Harpal was on a relief mission to his hometown. The bus in which he had traveled to Delhi was driven by Gyan Singh who had fully exploited the helplessness of the people depending on him. Gyan Singh had been bred in turbulence where honor was paramount. He knew that manhood depended on it and Gyan’s insensitivity to feelings and emotions, his violent impatience and
narrow, parochial, communal, and populist policies seem to be the inevitable outcome of such an upbringing.

Gyan Singh does not mind whether he exploits emotions or sentiments in order to achieve them. When he advocates for a Punjabi speaking state, he mixes the issues of religion and language.

Though Strom in Chandigarh is a political novel, but some basic problems of man-woman relationship have also been discussed by Nayantara Sahgal in it. Shyam M. Asnani sums up this novel as follows:

*The novel deals with the corridors of power and of visible and invisible violence. Written with restraint and perception, Strom in Chandigarh depicts men’s desire to gain control over each other’s minds, and analyses the deceptive layers of human behavior. The author is deeply concerned with the failure of marital-relationship, the loneliness of living and private terror. The characters try to reach out to one another, suffer loss of dignity and face rejection or acceptance. The novel’s upper class men and women with their crushing emotional and intellectual problems could be found anywhere in the world expect that personal dilemmas become more complex because these men and women are also intensity conscious of their rich and superb heritage. Mrs. Sahgal handles all the problems that have to be exposed by a Hindu, with grace, delicacy, poise and objectivity. (40)*

*Storm in Chandigarh* is not simply a fable dealing with the crisis in the newly created states of Punjab and Haryana and between their chief ministers. It also deals with the storm in the lives of three young married couples- Vishal Dubey and Leela, Inder and Saroj and Jit and Mara. It
should be noted that the novelist is essentially concerned with the problem of harmony rather than discord in the family life. In this novel discord is implied in the first word of the title ‘Storm’.

Through her own experience, Sahgal clearly projects the difficulties that spring up in an ill-matched or mismatched marriage. It is often no better than a cage for the modern woman with independent ideas and attitudes. Sahgal even questions the very institution of marriage and tries to find out the reasons for unsuccessful marriage in contemporary India. The novelist is against the social and moral norms of the traditional society in which women are treated with neglect and humiliation. The emotional center of Storm in Chandigarh is neither the political turmoil nor the political and office intrigues, but the relationship of three couples and it is through their behavior that the novelist explores the very concept of marriage in Indian society.

In Storm in Chandigarh, Nayantara Sahgal asserts that there are three patterns which throw light on the concept of man-woman relationship and its eventual collapse in estrangement and loneliness. It should be noticed that marriage does not mean just sexual gratification. The novelist has described Vishal Dubey’s painful thoughts about his unsuccessful marriage very graphically. In the opening of the novel, he is a widower. His marriage with Leela was not a successful affair because throughout her life Leela could not share her husband’s innermost thoughts, Vishal remaining alienated and aloof throughout. He never tasted the true joy of marriage. Marriage is supposed to be a union of two hearts. There should be a proper and mutual understanding between a husband and a wife. But Vishal Dubey fails to have such a relationship with his wife. Nayantara Sahgal very realistically describes this alienation when she writes:
He had wanted a woman and won her, and forever afterwards had tried to reach the person in her, the one to talk to when the day’s work was done, the friend with whom one could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself. The whole self was not heroic. Most of it was ordinary. It was soiled in part, maimed in part. It had lived and all the signs and scares of living were upon it. But was all one had to give.

Leela had not been interested. She had selected what she wanted of him, distinguished escort at parties the successful civil servant with a promising future, the husband who could be relied upon to take pains with whatever problems she took to him. And she had ignored the rest. She has given herself selectively too, what she had considered prudent and convenient to give and left him empty of the reality of herself. (Sahgal, Storm 69)

Vishal Dubey feels badly neglected and alienated. In his case the male partner did not create the difficulties and problems but it was his wife who did not understand the necessity of becoming an emotional partner in married life.

In the case of Vishal Dubey, marriage yielded no great secrets but it increased his loneliness and created fissures in his private world. It shows how unsuccessful marriage leads to estrangement and alienation. This is the one exemplary case of marriage in which the woman is responsible for unsuccessful unmarried life.

On being analyzed, Saroj’s marriage with Inder presents another view of marriage. After marriage Inder as a husband fails to appreciate his wife’s emotional needs and demands. Of course, they have lived
together with children for many years, but there is no smooth channel of understanding and communication between them. Inder can only see marriage in terms of business metaphors. And later, to her emotional needs, he considers his wife to be a material possession. The novelist writes in this context:

A wife was one half of an enterprise, the complaint partner who presided over home and children and furthered her husband’s career. Saroj had gifted with any accomplishment that took her time. It was her preoccupation with herself that unnerved him. That and the curious concentration whatever came her way (Sahgal, Storm 45).

Inder treats his wife Saroj very callously. As a result of Inder’s ill-treatment, she feels unhappy and is unable to find reciprocal involvement in her marriage. Inder, her husband, is not only from a different cultural background but also a different kind of person altogether. Saroj who had been brought up in an atmosphere of freedom and trust has grown up to expect equality. She is puzzled by Inder’s violent reaction to a casual sexual relationship she had before marriage. She tells him about it in all her innocence, but this is for him the commencement of a nagging suspicion. He dreams it to be a serious moral lapse on her part, which has broken their whole relationship. He considers Saroj to be a wrong-doer. He leaves her alone emotionally. He feels himself to have been wronged. But in reality, Saroj is not guilty. She is not corrupt or dishonest. For her, that relationship was a part of growing up. When she marries Inder it is already behind her a relationship which has not involved her deeply enough. It is a different thing that the society which lives by a double standard brands her as guilty. She is wholly and warmly involved in
marriage but Inder is obsessed by this one untoward act which he uses to humble her and to destroy her sense of innocence.

While Saroj wishes to penetrate his inflexibilities, Inder persists in raking up the past and withdraws into his own self, leaving her isolated, alienated and unhappy. She feels emotionally deprived and her condition is like that of an imbecile. Her pre-marital lapse is, in fact, only a pretext for the difference in their attitudes. Inder treats her merely as a wife- a possession, not as a person. Sexually she gratifies him easily and satisfactorily but she feels troubled with this kind of forced relationship. She wants to overflow in everyday life. But Inder is not able to fulfill her emotional demands. The novelist’s view in this regard is:

*His lingering attention had demanded that he gave her part of himself for a while for no specific person. That kind of companionship had always been difficult for him, just as to take a walk with her became a meaningless expenditure of time, when a restlessness took hold of him to get back to whatever work he had to do. (Ibidem 53)*

Inder feels alienated from her emotional demands. He cannot understand her needs as a wife and a human being on a par with himself. He cannot make it clear why she cannot have a baby like other women without putting every stage of it in to words. Individuality in a woman disgusts him and he feels that man-woman relationship is based on male-domination. He believes that a thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the master who will own and command her and that is the man she will have to respect.
On the other hand, Saroj is pliable and docile. She tries to please him and save her marriage from going to fiasco. She is willingly ready to accept her role as a wife and does not seek anything demanding outside marriage. But it is because of her past misdeed that she remains neglected inside the bonds of nuptial relations. Sahgal explains their relations thus:

Which, after all these years, were the safe, unguarded topics between them, those without consequence? She searched her mind for a neutral subject or that would keep the ground level between them. (Ibidem 91)

Out of frustration she turns towards Vishal Dubey. She finds his company restful, soothing and comforting. He is a person like herself who believes that the truth between two people reduces the heartbreak and a lot of loneliness in life. Truth does not prevail upon Inder. Saroj feels much disturbed as her husband uses her as a tool to gratify only his sexual lust. In mind and heart, they are poles apart but though living together as husband and wife under one roof.

Saroj is left completely alone and has nobody to provide her mental relief. She devotes herself to his plants and her children until this kind of withdrawal becomes difficult to cope with. Her husband, Inder, not allowing her to meet Vishal, attempts to intern her to solitary confinement. It is at this moment that she rebels, though not defiantly and dramatically but in desperation recognizing the fact that with Inder life would not be worth living.

Inder has not been in a position to forget her pre-marital affair. This fact shows that he is not liberal in his thoughts. His narrow-minded view of marriage keeps on inflicting mental wounds on her private world.
Soraj is afraid of him. She always feels intimidated and remains terrified in his presence. She very candidly tells Vishal Dubey:

_Half the time one is afraid, you know of saying the wrong things or being misunderstood- just of being one self and being punished for it. So one spends such a lot of time acting or at least hiding and that is very tiring._ (Ibidem 95)

Marriage has become an imprisonment and tedious affair for her. It has a crushing effect to her spirit. Marriage does not elevate her true self. Sahgal expresses how marriage plays a devastating role in the life of Saroj and destroys the authentic movement of mutual faith.

Another couple in the novel Jit and Mara are also deprived of the bliss of marriage. No doubt, there is a sharp contrast between Inder and Jit but even the considerate nature of Jit fails to enliven the sable life of Mara. Her diminishing vitality suffers nervous exhaustion when she is in the company of her husband. But she feels revitalized when she comes in contact with Inder and experiences that fragrance of love starts embracing her world. Both of them realize that love does not mean only physical gratification but a glowing intimacy. Inder and Mara feel much relieved and comfortable in the company of each other. In this relationship they realize the real depth of love. Once Inder happens to explain the magic of love in these words:

_Do you know the strangest thing about you, Mara? Talking to you and kissing you are the same. It all blends, I do not know where one leaves off and the other begins._ (Ibidem 179)

Inder wants to keep the softly glowing intimacy between them alive. But unfortunately, this relationship does not last long. Mara
ultimately realizes the true nature of man in him. Consequently, all is over between Mara and Inder. There is no other alternative for Mara and Jit but to follow Vishal Dubey’s advice. Jit tries to sort out problems and difficulties that embitter their mutual relationship. He tells Mara:

_No. there’s been a silence between us on so many matters. Not that we have planned it that way. It has just been taken for granted as the way a couple should behave. No intimacies except in bed. Strange, is not it and yet most people accept marriage is those tried out, one- dimensional terms and accept to live also most like strangers. (Ibidem 238)_

The most important thing to note is that within the bond of marriage Saroj and Mara both feel suffocated whereas but outside the marital bond Saroj is her natural self in the company of Vishal Dubey, and Mara feels happy in the company of Inder. It has been asserted here by Sahgal that her characters feel alienated and estranged within the nuptial bonds. Why do they not relish and feel bliss in their married life, why do they try to find fulfillment outside marriage? They find, perhaps, some solace in this way. In Indian society, these kinds of relations are thought to be immoral as marriage is considered to be a solemn and sacred ritual. Sahgal is keenly aware, however, that there is no moral leadership or authority in contemporary India which would prevent such disruption and disorder. In fact, she is highly critical of those marriages which promote false morality and throttle the individual voice of women.

It is also true that man proposes and God disposes. Marriage is not always a blissful thing. There can be a mauldering in mutual relations of a husband and his wife. Married life becomes a life of slavery when there is no love, emotion, devotion and mutual understanding. _Storm in Chandigarh_
explores the true meaning of marriage and also the causes of loneliness, estrangement and alienation which crops up between neglected husband and wife after marriage. Nayantara Sahgal shows that it is neither sex experience nor something physical which converts a woman’s individuality into a passive docility. It is a sort of faith and devotion, which celebrates the glory of understanding and communication.

*Storm in Chandigarh* primarily explains the complexities of human relations, particularly man-woman relations. Vishal Dubey, Nayanatara’s ideal man, realizes as to why marriages tend to fail quite often, especially in India. Indian marriages are unions of two strangers who are somehow brought together. Saroj and Inder can never make a happy couple because they have different perspectives about marriage. For Inder, Saroj has been sullied because she did not keep her virginity intact. He is obsessed with Saroj’s adolescent affair with a boy. He taunts her day in and day out about her pre-marital sexual relations, torturing himself and hurting his wife for something that happened long ago. He callously asks Saroj:

“You weren’t frightened when you gave yourself to a stranger”.

*His voice, always the first sign of his transformation, chilled her.* After an interminable pause she said, “I have told you all about it. He was a friend, not a stranger.”

“A friend..... to go to bed with. How many times did it happen?”

“I don’t know. I can’t remember” (Ibidem 94).

The irony is that Inder, who cannot forgive his wife for an act committed out of innocence long ago, is himself flirting with Mara, the wife of his friend, Jit. For a male, sexual union with a woman that is adultery is a sport, for the female the same act is supposed to be a sin. Such are the double standards in a patriarchal society.
His own dalliance with woman is no problem but Saroj’s mistake has become a canker that is eating away his vitals.

*There had been no such nightmare to contend with until his marriage. He had been precocious and successful in sex. Robustly collecting experience where he found it. Saroj had plundered that robustness, made a tortured image of the body’s surrender, and nailed him to the inquisitor’s chair (Ibidem 134)*

Saroj feels frustrated and fed up with Inder’s accusation of infidelity. She realizes that a woman can never get her right place in a patriarchal society. Talking to Jit and Mara once, she says that women have always been used as toys from times immemorial, even denied true love and respect.

Marriage with Inder has broken Saroj. The only way of survival for her is her divorce from her husband. Vishal inspires her to escape and be free. He offers her love and support. Finally, she gathers courage enough to leave her house just as Nayantara did and began her life all over again. Like Mangat Rai, Vishal Dubey would be the man to join her in a fruitful relationship. There is a definite indication to this effect in the last sentence of the novel: “It was black and wintry in the yard. He went back to his old office, dialed Gauri’s number, and asked for Saroj” (Ibidem 245).

At the core, *Storm in Chandigarh* is primarily the need for freedom, both at personal and national levels. Saroj symbolizes the newly emerging generation of women in India, confident and brave enough to chart their courage over and beyond the bounds of tradition. Freedom and modernity would be the guiding principles of that new generation.
Sahgal has further explored man-woman relationship in her novel *The Day in Shadow* through the character of Simrit and Som. Simrit is the wife of Som. A sensitive being in her own right she desires for communication and understanding which she is not able to find in Som’s world of ambition and money. He treats her with panoply of subdued womanhood and considers inequality in their relation to be the right order of things. Simrit is not able to put up with this denial of freedom for her and finds it a suffocating experience. Som considers her to be inferior and mentally backward. He does not allow her to participate in making even the ordinary decisions of everyday life.

Som believes in the Machiavellian philosophy of ambition and success. He wants to climb the ladder of progress by hook or by crook. Simrit feels estranged by Som’s groaning obsession with power and money. Som lives in the male-dominated world. He does not look upon women as equal partners, but he rather views them as individual possession.

Simrit’s life with Som has become unlivable. In her life with Som she lacks vivacity and warmth. He thinks sex as an act with a beginning and an end with nothing in-between or even afterwards. Simrit feels so completely alienated from Som that the physical act can no longer provide a feeling of transport to her. Sex is a part of life, not a separate relationship which can be isolated from the rest of life. Sex is a dire physical need, but it has no importance if there is no love and affection between a husband and his wife. It has been described very beautifully in the novel:
And once past its immediacy, sex had its visions too of tenderness, of humour, of more than a physical act. Sex could be an argument or problem shared. The same spring fed all its facts- the day’s work in office, children at home, bed at night. Simrit felt on the verge of fatal realization. She was no longer able to follow the goals Som has set for himself and the inability seemed to be spreading through her veins, affecting the very womb of desires, drying up the very womb of desires drying up the fount within her. (Sahgal, Shadow 90)

Simrit shows her emotional non-involvement in her physical relations with Som. She senses it as an insult to him and therefore he becomes completely callous to her physical needs. He cuts her off as he had already cut off Lalli. Because of the indifferent behavior of Som, Simrit feels completely isolated and estranged. She tries to get rid of Som through divorce but it creates several new problems for her. She finds her life disrupted and in the middle of a peculiar financial mess. The heavy tax payments are lurking to enslave her inevitably. She compares her position to an overloaded donkey whose burden attracts no one’s notice. The divorce settlement is a continuation of their marriage, it pins her down to the role of a victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free from the clutches of Som. 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. She finds some solace when Rai, treats her as an equal being. Simrit’s divorce clearly demonstrates the need for reciprocal relationships in marriage.

Nayantara Sahgal is mainly concerned with the need for a mature approach to married life, the need to nurture it with love, care and candor. She wants communication, not perfection, for men and women who have
their own limitations. She knows it fully well that men can be as unhappy as women when relationship is not satisfactory. She also emphasizes the point that ordinarily it is woman who has to suffer more and be deprived of the right to self-expression.

_The Day in Shadow_ brings a comprehensive picture of the political scenario of the late sixties. In this novel the new breed of politicians is represented by Sumer Singh. He is a man cast in peculiar mould, interested only in his personal success. He does everything just for the benefit of his political career. He does not have even the blunt and frank honesty of Kalyan Sinha and Gyan Singh. He lives life at two levels, one being the level of the public image with the profession of socialism and prohibition, and the other that of his private-self, free of sex and cunning. In contrast to him, he faces hostility at home and monopoly abroad. Sardar Sahib accepts the oil portfolio as a challenge. But unfortunately he is a very hard working person and has worked with a missionary zeal in the contrary’s interest but Sumer Singh is a different person whose concern is only with the cheers from the crowd in large number. He is also careful not to take unpopular steps even if they are in the national interest. Sahib’s generation has goals to meet the challenge of nation’s development whereas the generation of Sumer Singh considers power to be the only goal, policies and programs lying outside it, secondary power portals.

Rai Garg has the opinion that Sumer Singh is dictatorial in his political attitude. For him democratic rights and freedom have no place in his political matrix of thought. Simrit is of the view that there is a great similarity between her husband Som and Sumer Singh. She says:
There is no difference between them. Rai had said that the real dividing line in Indian politics would soon be between the ruthless and the compassionate. All other labels and variation would not count. And now she knew what he meant. (Ibidem 222)

Both Sumer Singh and Som are opportunist and unscrupulous men. They are driven by the same motivating force i.e. their ruthless ambition. The ideology does not matter for them. They apply unfair means, methods and short cuts to get success. Som has no awareness of people’s suffering. Everything to him is guided by material consideration. He is not reluctant in exploiting men to his own advantage. He throws up his job to start a business with Lalli. But he gives up the idea and switches over to a partnership with Rudy. Nothing appears to satisfy his vaulting ambitions. Som caters to every whim of Rudy Vetter in order to get his collaboration. Simrit cannot understand why Som attaches so much importance to his friendship with Rudy Vetter. Once she questions their friendship by asking Som:

You never liked him until- laterly you said you did not trust him. You said he was a go - getter.... You said you would not go near any business deal with him. How could you start working with him if you did not trust him? (Ibidem 78-79).

Som is an unscrupulous person and therefore, he fits in well with Rudy Vetter. He is so much lost in his own success that he does not have time to notice Simrit’s withdrawal from his fluctuating loyalties. While Som and Rudy are busy in finalizing a business deal for the manufacture of armaments, Simrit is unhappy on the wastage and destruction of human life. Bombs would kill human beings but they would bring money. Som is a hard-hearted and hot-headed fellow. He is concerned with
money not with human beings. When he realizes Simrit’s withdrawal from their physical relationship, he divorces her and uses money to convey his displeasure.

*The Day in Shadow* has echoes of strident feminism. Women like Simrit shall not be meek conformist sticking like Sati Savitri to a dying marital relationship. They shall wipe the slate clean, even break the slate if needed, and begin their lives afresh.

*The Day in Shadow* is an ardent outcry for female emancipation in Hindu society in keeping with the changing times. Women will have to fight this battle out with courage and dignity S.K Tikko writes:

> The feminist had to have, like men, iron in the soul. Having understood the message she feels freed at last to undertake the struggle, no matter what amount of suffering it may involve. She is placed at a high spot from where an immense valley of choices spread out before her gaze and she felt free at last to choose what her life would be. Yet in carrying on with her struggle she had gladly retained the link with her children. This link has remained unaffected and undisturbed despite the new horizon, which has now opened out to her. In several ways, Shagal’s *The Day in Shadow* shows interest parallel. Simrit throws away the shackles of slavery to man, her husband. The novel seems to be an interesting and instructive illustration of an experiment in Indo English writer’s feminist fiction (57).

Nayantara Sahgal’s lived experience makes her defy tradition and embrace modernity parallel to the life stories of Saroj and Simrit. The novel is about the condition of women in a patriarchal society and the stigma of divorce that brands a Hindu wife as an infidel.
Works Cited


