Chapter II

Women and their Mutilated Voice

Sahgal, in her novels, presents the emergence of the new woman who is no longer “a sex object and glamour girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth called into a passive role that requires no individuality” (Sahgal, “Women : Persons or Possessions,” The Hindustan Times, 19 July, 1970), but some one who can claim to be man’s equal partner. Ranjit Singh in “Identity, Quest and Conventions at Cross Roads : A Study of Select Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” says : “Having experienced the agony of marital discord which resulted in a divorce in her life, Nayantara Sahgal gives a vivid and authentic account of an Indian woman’s plight in the modern world and her quest for individual freedom and self-realization” (58-9). Sahgal understands that she belongs to a period of transition. In Free, she observes:

For my elders marriage both by law and tradition had been indissoluble, a chance once made irrevocable. For my grandchildren, who would grow up in a greatly changed India, it would in all probability, be a more flexible and less stable institution, yielding more and more to the pressures of personality and society. For me, it would fall midway between the two, the law eventually facilitating divorce while tradition and sentiment were still ranged against it. It would not be the impregnable institution it had once been where the responsibility for it rested with oneself. One had to be all the more certain. (47-8)
Marriage is a social institution. It plays an important role in shaping the life of a human being. In India, most of the modern societies are patriarchies. Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* observes: “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to woman by society” (445). For the Hindu woman, marriage is a bondage. For centuries marriage was considered to be the destiny for women irrespective of the fact that whether she was happily married or was miserable due to constant oppression and suppression by man in her marriage. However, a possibility of freedom from endless suffering in unhappy marriage appeared with divorce, separation or annulment of marriage under law. Divorce is a process of giving legal recognition to the breaking up of a relationship already shattered by irreconcilable disparity in the character of two individuals or by broken faith or bitter tensions. For ensuring harmony in the marital relations, an acceptance and adjustment of the wishes, attitudes and sentiments of both the partner is necessary. But when the needs, wishes or individuality of one of the person are/is ignored, then this results in discord. Marilyn French in *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* says that divorce “like marriage is morally neutral, it is good; in so far as it ends a long-time ‘intimacy’, it is to be lamented” (504).

Marriage is the deepest as well as the most problematic of all human relations. Sociologists in *Dictionary of Sociology* define it as a “Cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring” (127). Religiously marriage is considered the holy union of two bodies and souls. Hindus consider wife as *Ardhangini* or *Sahadharmini*. Despite
these idealized concept of marriage, woman in reality is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. Marriage often does not mean companionship or equality for her. It becomes a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self-realization. She is subjugated, marginalized, and sidelined. Simone De Beauvoir in The Second Sex says that marriage has been instituted more to legalise reproduction and that “it diminishes man […] but always annihilates woman” (496). Germain Greer in The Female Eunuch suggests that “if independence is a necessary concomitant of freedom, woman must not marry” (320). Betty Friedan in the The Second Stage considers marriage as “basic to life” (136).

In her novels, Sahgal transforms her own experience of the traumatic marriage and the consequent divorce together with what she observed, understood and sympathized in the contemporary world, into fiction. She, as a socio-political novelist portraying the twentieth century Indian milieu, describes the conflict of values among married woman. Different types of married women are presented in her novels. The women portrayed in her earlier novels are very conventional and extremely submissive housekeepers. They are the tradition-bound wives. Some do not think of quitting the family. Some dare to get over their state of dreary suffering in marriage. But there are other women who undergo moments of excruciating mental torture deep within themselves. In her novels, marriage is often presented as an experience of conflict, frustration and a long drawn period of stress and pain. Her women are liberated women rebelling against the inequalities and injustices interwoven in the traditional texture of marital life in India.
Sahgal's first novel, *Happy* has the references to congress activities and the events of 1942. The novel presents India's struggle for independence and the changing socio-political life of the country through the characters of the upper middle class. The novel is located in the time immediately after the freedom of the country. The protagonist of the novel recalls his past life, especially the changes in his thinking and actions brought about by Gandhi's call to the people of India. Apart from this, the protagonist links it with the story of the children of his close friend, concentrating mainly on the youngest son Sanad, who finds himself a total misfit in independent India.

The narrator recreates past events partly from his memory and partly on the basis of details given by Sanad. The problem of Sanad is the search for self-identity and self-discovery. The novel takes off from a crisis in Sanad's life, when he seriously meditates giving up his job with a reputed foreign company. Sanad feels ill at ease in the company of his British officers. The relationship between the narrator and Sanad is deeply personal because Sanad absolutely regards him as an idealist whose integrity is extraordinary. Sanad's dilemma about himself is typical in the cross-currents of the East and the West. He explains his problem by saying:

I've studied English history and literature. I've read the English poets. It's all the more real to me than the life I live every day. Don't you see, it has been burned into us? We're branded with it. My body is in India but my brain doesn't belong here. I might as well be an Englishman except for the color of my skin. (TH 234)
Sanad's marriage to Kusum coincides with India's independence in 1947. Sanad and Kusum come to terms with life. Sanad accepts the new changes in the country with an unusual degree of understanding. Kusum gradually recovers from the traumatic experience of Sahadev's cruel and irrational death and finds the comfort and solace in Sanad.

The novel proposes the point that there is immense difference in the levels of living and thinking of its people and the simultaneous coexistence of several layers of past incidents in the country, which made people respond differently to the British. They either chose to remain unmoved and fixed, like Sanad's father or evolved new ways for combating their influence by invoking a part of their native tradition. Some, like the protagonist, gave up their rich and prosperous life for joining Gandhi's social and political programme. Others, like Sanad, chose to follow the British blindly, because they considered it both enlightening and rewarding, as it provided a civilized mode of living and an effective road to Success. The novel deals with the themes like the East-West encounter, the impact of English or Western education, the desire for identity and marriage. Sahgal tries to depict the nation's consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of an individual. Thus, Sahgal provides a multi-layered social and political history in the novel.

The story is told in the first person narration by a Gandhian bachelor, who assumes the role of a narrator. He claims to be a detached observer, but in the course of the novel he gets involved in its action. Two of Sahgal's favorite themes, identity and man-woman relationships emerge in the novel. He says "I have the feeling of
being lost in crowd," (TH 233) and wishes to go to England to see "what the original
is like." (234)

More awesome is the social and educational reality which has brought change
in the characters’ perspective. Sanad’s own family, however, suffers from none of
these perplexing problems. In their own characteristic way they have remained
unaffected by dramatic changes brought about by politics and history, Govind
Narayan, his father, continues to live in the past, Girish his brother, and Harish, his
uncle, are more than comfortable in the world of the British though now greatly
reduced in impact. His young wife Kusum is very different, coming as she does from
a middle-class Indian background. At marriage, there exists a large abyss between
Sanad's aristocratic family and that of Kusum's. Her professor father and four
brothers were directly involved in the independence movement, but Kusum’s is a
silent transformation from one world to another. There is no conflict, rebellion or
bitterness in her. She is able to establish herself and her house in the way she would
have liked to, and is happy in her own inexpensive and quiet world, quite different
from the aristocratic grandeur of her mother-in-law's house, with its priceless objects
of art, and carpets and palatial buildings. Finally, Sanad and Kusum discover each
other because they have discovered the truth about themselves.

Except for Kusum’s marriage to Sanad, all the other marriages in Happy are
arranged ones but these are not necessary happy. Ammaji, Govind Narayan’s mother,
who belongs to the same generation, is unable to find any meeting – point between
her husband’s opinion and her own. And he, an indolent pleasure-loving man, had
made no effort to understand her nun-like disdain of luxury or her “stubborn refusal to submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her” (35). While Lakshmi and her daughter-in-law, Devika, adjust easily to the circumstances of their lives, happiness eludes Maya, whose childlessness is a symbol, not a cause of her unhappiness. She appears to be like a slab or marble, incapable of emotion. This lack of communication is the result of her emotional isolation in marriage. She does not hanker after or cherish things which women are normally expected to do—silk sarees or parties or expensive jewellery. What she wants is some kind of a response, a recognition of her existence. Sahgal writes: “Not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even whether we live or die is not important unless it is important to some one” (65-66). The narrator and Maya suddenly realize that communication is possible between them. They are in love with them. For them, marriage ties are indissoluble. There is no way out for them. The narrator asks for himself: “What should I have done? Begged her to go away with me? Continued to see her and love her, at no matter what cost? Such solutions are for fairy tales. Reality is framed in another perspective” (67). Sahgal’s later heroines like Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit can consider other possibilities but not Maya. Ironically enough, it is men not women who expect women to conform to the standards laid down for them while they themselves remain free to abide by other rules. Harilal Mathav marries for the second time in his desire to have a male hair and both society and his first wife accept it. On the other hand, it is Maya who is confined by her marriage. At the same time, Kusum’s marriage to Sanad is half-way between the two worlds of orthodoxy
and freedom. They are in love but their responses are timid and turned to normal expectations.

Rashmi of *Morning* has an unhappy marriage behind her. She is slowly groping her way back to feeling. Rakesh finds her unnaturally subdued. He feels that she “looked displaced. It was marriage, then, that had altered her, made her a moth trapped in cement” (TM 35). The aftermath of a broken marriage is a plethora of hurt feelings and a withdrawal from the activity of life. She is unable to talk about it, but the experience leaves her weary and vulnerable. And therefore comfort comes to her not from Rakesh but from Neil Berensen, who is a stranger. She finds it easier to talk to him. As there is communication and awaken of desire, she becomes emotionally involved. Sex with Neil comes to her naturally as a part of involvement. She wants to know all about him, about his divorced wife, about his children and similarly wants to be loved and understood in her totality. She tells Neil: “Me without any part or future just me lying on the grass. That’s not me Neil... We have to invade each other’s privacy a little, forces things a little, or we shall stay just where we are” (156). But what Rashmi want is not reliable with Neil. She feels no comparable insistence in him. People, she feels, demand very little from others and are content to live on the surface, in bits and parts. So it is possible to blame Neil: “It was an age of impermanence, of brief meetings and partings. It was not the setting for completeness of any sort. One’s self was burden enough who would take on another total commitment, another portion of weakness and strength, good and bad, courage and fear?” (157-58). Rashmi’s unhappiness is in part related to the growing indifferences
of contemporary society to humanistic values. Rashmi wants her involvement on the basis of equality, not on domination or safe-effacement. Rashmi’s decision to seek a divorce shocks her mother, who is unable to understand the reason for this kind of an action. “What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstances, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lepers” (146). Mira puts it down to a tasteless parody of transplanted modernity.

Rashmi rejects the social and emotional attitudes of the west which are represented by Neil. Rashmi’s behaviour is the result of a natural process of growth. Kailas sees in this decision of Rashmi’s, besides a lot of heartache and suffering “a torrential release from ancient grooves and bonds, ancient pain and suppression” (214). Mira’s own contentment and happiness in marriage had led to the development of an insular attitude and it is only through Rashmi’s broken marriage that she suddenly realized that “new vistas presented a range of new conflicts and tensions that society had never known in their youth” (161).

While in Happy, Sahgal’s main concern is with self-expression within marriage, in Morning, she widens her area of concern to the kind of freedom young women desire outside marriage. Nita and Rashmi are both different from Maya and Kusum and are the products of changed social conditions. They are not inclined to be passively docile. Instead, they want to live their own lives. Nita wants a job of her own and resents the idea of an arranged marriage. She feels that the emotional contents of such a marriage would be overshadowed by the material concerns, by the
stocks and shares, money and clothes. Later, when she is engaged to Vijay, he views her not as an individual with independent ideas and views but as a possession he is lucky to have acquired. To Nita, this kind of marriage does not offer any prospect or fulfillment. She is withdrawn and unhappy in Vijay’s presence and dreads the time when she would be alone with him. Nita is not quite certain what she wants from life but she does want to find it for herself, not have it thrust upon her.

Marriage has been seen on the traditional basis. It may or may not provide the conditions necessary for individual growth. Arranged marriages ensure a minimum affinity of background but this never provides an assurance of happiness. Gauri in Chandigarh feels secure in the knowledge that an arranged marriage has saved her from emotional upheavals and clashes. According to her “there’s only one safety in India for some time to come, and that is to marry in your own state into a background you thoroughly understand… That kind of a thing endures” (SC 160-61). Gauri’s life is comparatively smooth because her idea of happiness is an extremely limited one. Within the secure precincts of her marriage, she also has the need to be unfaithful to her husband, perhaps not so much in thought and emotion as in the physical act of love. Gauri’s friendship with Dubey is based on sex. She makes no emotional demand on him.

The failures in sexual politics are echoed in personal life also in Chandigarh. The Vishal-Leela relationship fails because they never accept each other in totality. Vishal Dubey, the protagonist of the novel, is an idealistic and upright civil servant. He displays admirable detachment and endurance when Leela, the girl he married,
turns out to be an adulterous. Even though he knows it well that she is disloyal to him, he thinks he himself is doing her wrong by depriving her of her marital rights and affection. Talking about Vishal Dubey and his wife Leela, Sahgal writes:

She had selected what she wanted of him: the 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 had given herself selectively too, what she had considered and it prudent and convenient to give, and left him empty of the reality of herself. Even her vitality had needed an audience. She scintillated in company. Time and again he heard her talk animatedly of what had happened a day or a week earlier, of an article he had read, an idea she had had, at a party. Alone with him she had little to share. Had their failure been their fault, or was there something at the very core of human dreams and longings that was fatal to fulfillment through marriage? (69)

Thus, Vishal's life itself becomes an illustration to the fact that suffering is the mark of such honest people for whom life is a persistent quest for the Higher Morality, which means "a search for value and an attempt to choose the better value, the real value, in any situation, and not just do what's done or what is expected" (86). Vishal's marriage with Leela had turned out to be a vanishing search for communication. They were bound by nuptial knots but failed to maintain the marital rights and obligations in the midst of all odds. The situation is described by Sahgal as,
She was dedicated to the cult of conformity, to observing forms that his most intense pleas had not been able to penetrate. The whole mindless mess going on down the ages with never a shaft of new light on it. Men and women contorted into moulds, battered into sameness, the divine spiritual spark guttered out. Somewhere under the sun there must be another way to live, with relentless honesty, where the only cruelty would be pretence. (214)

Throughout their lives, they remained strangers to each other. He is possessed by a deep sense of guilt for living with her without love. After bearing these tortures of remorseful life, his relationship with Leela abruptly ended due to her death. Vishal’s marriage had been a failure.

The novel is the symbolic representation of stormy activity for social and political background. The political violence between the two newly-formed states is reflected in the personal violence of Inder and Saroj. In Chandigarh, Vishal gets acquainted with two young couples: Inder-Saroj and Jit-Mara, Both Inder and Jit are young industrialists in Chandigarh. Inder looks after Nikhil Ray's nylon plant in Chandigarh and Jit is the whiskey manufacturer. Saroj and Inder present a picture of typical traditional Indian family in which womanhood is captured in the possessive spirit of the husband. Their relationship is purely mechanical and superficial without any feeling of affection and tenderness: "This, the touch without sexual significance, the caress of affection, was different. It cost him an effort to make it" (53). His treatment of his wife and children is extremely immodest. He treats them as if they
were non-living objects. Inder's problem with his wife arises from his view of the destiny of women which has descended down the generations, in which she has to live according to a fixed role, pre-determined for her by the male-dominated society. The temperamental incompatibility caused disharmony in the marriage of various characters of the novel. The novelist's main concern seems to be the depiction of the social life of Indian people of post-independence days. Jit-Mara relationship is another example of the same split. “She wanted all the world she could lay her hands on and the best of each—the softness of Jit and hardness of Inder” (192). Even in Inder-Saroj relationship, when Inder misbehaves with Saroj, she is pained and sobs but at the same time feels that the sobs are not her own. “She was a being of pride and purity with a face uplifted to sters” (97).

Saroj in Chandigarh is, like Rashmi of Morning, unhappy and unable to find a reciprocal involvement in her marriage with her husband, Inder, who is not from a different cultural background but is a different kind of person altogether. Saroj, who has 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 an affair she has had before her marriage. She tells him about it in all her innocence but this is for him the beginning of a nagging suspicion. He considers it to be a serious moral lapse which has sullied their whole relationship. Inder believes himself to have been wronged. Her act, he feels, has no place “in an order that clearly demarcated the role of men and women, unless that venerable order was breached, trampled and mocked. He was maddened by it. When it came over him she sat looking at Saroj with a revulsion that had
ancient, tribal, male roots” (96). Saroj, however, is not really guilty. She is not dishonest. For her, it is a part of growing up. When she marries Inder, it is already behind her. It is different thing that society which lives by a double moral standards brands her as guilty. For herself, she is warmly and wholly involved in her marriage but Inder is obsessed by this one act which he uses to humble her and to destroy her sense of innocence. Inder’s attitude is in keeping with the rest of his character. He has no time for finer things, no emotional involvement or for tenderness. He is ruthless and aggressive. While Saroj longs to penetrate his inflexibility, Inder persists in raking up the past and withdraws into his own self. He leaves her outside, isolated and unhappy. Saroj’s premarital lapse is, in fact, only an outward symbol of the difference in their attitudes. Saroj wants to be recognized as an individual and wants to build up a relationship on that basis whereas Inder treats her as a mere wife—a possession, not a person. Sex with her comes easily and ends happily. “It was an act with a beginning and an end, a need never put into words, neatly enacted and dispersed within darkness. There was no traces of it to account for in the morning” (53). Saroj does not want such a relationship. She wants the emotional life and wants to live in the act of parenthood. Inder is unable to give it as it calls for “his lingering attention and demanded that he gave her part of himself for a while for no specific reason. 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” (53). Inder feels ill at ease with her emotional demands. He cannot understand her. She cannot have a baby like
others. A wife, he feels, means to preside over her husband’s home, and children and further her husband’s career. Inder is unable to view any kind of relationship with Saroj or for that matter even with Mara. Individuality in women disgusts him. He feels that man-woman relationship will always be one of domination: “A thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own and command her – and that’s the man she’ll respect” (102). Saroj, who is by nature pliable and docile, seeks to please him and to save her marriage. She clings to the moments of response and communication. She is only too willing to accept her role as a wife and does not seek anything outside marriage – but within this she wants equality and involvement and continuity. But when she finds that ordinary conversation becomes a difficult one, she wonders: “which, after all these years, were the safe, unguarded topics between them, those without consequences? She searched her mind for a neutral subject that would keep the ground level between them” (91).

Saroj becomes Chandigarh is a victim of marriage. Her marriage collapses because of her honesty and simplicity. She has been brought up in an atmosphere of freedom, love and trust. She is married to Inder who has everything to make life comfortable. He is possessive, jealous and a typical male chauvinist. Saroj values frankness. She tells Inder about her premarital sex with a young man. And as a result, Inder, who has no qualms about having sex with other women either before marriage or after marriage, feels shocked and feels jealous of her. So, when he raised: “you should be ashamed of what you did. Aren’t you?” (97), her answer is “I was fond of him”, “and I was curious, Is that a crime?” (131). She can take it a crime.
when Vishal Dubey relates: “A woman was not entitled to a past, not entitled to human hunger, human passion or error” (192). However, she takes the attitude of Inder towards her premarital sex as a crime. She reflects:

When the mood came upon him he retreated from the knives into a bleak landscape, but barred entry. There she would be, somewhere outside it, striken with panic at his unending silence, and he knew he was where she could not reach him. At times she would beat against his numbness like a bird against a window pane, trapped in a futile frenzy. (99)

On the contrary. Inder feels as if he has been humiliated and cheated. Sahgal relates:

He had been cheated. And it was he, not Saroj, who paid the penalty, who suffered the secret disgrace, sickened into silence and turned to stone. The foundation he had thought rock had turned out to be a straw and beneath it the unknown yawned. (98)

Saroj’s life becomes miserable. She is not able to communicate with Inder. Her life with Inder goes mechanical. Inder always quarrels with her, imagining some strange thing. She begins to hallucinate:

She saw the human substance between them twindling until in old age they would just be two people who had happened to live under the same roof, no real bond between them, only the accumulation of a lifetime’s living habits. The enormous waste of it appalled her. (224)
She finds peace with Vishal, which is not the province with her husband Inder. She finds his company restful. He is her kind of a person. She believes that truth between people reduces “the heartbreak and a lot of loneliness of living” (89). With Inder truth is not possible. She feels condemned to isolation as the intimacy between them does not go beyond the physical. Saroj wonders: “Does desire begin and end with his body? For if that is to then this – my head in his, what I can see, what I can hold – is the solid ground between us. On this I can walk safely and nothing will go wrong. On such ground man and women build shelters and bring children to birth and grow old in the comfort that they will live on in future generations. Perhaps the rest-the most of longing for all that remains unanswered – lies outside this circle” (92).

Overcome by a sense of desolation, she devotes herself to her plants and her children. Inder, by forbidding her to meet Vishal, attempts to sentence her to solitary confinement. It is at this moment she rebels. She rebels not defiantly and deliberately but in desperation recognizing the fact that with Inder there could be no hope of communication. It is Vishal who takes the decision for her. He forces her to face the truth of her condition. Marriage has completely destroyed her spirit. Gauri when she had visited them in Chandigarh had felt it be a natural result of marriage to a man like Inder who belonged to the he-man school and had commented “I suppose someone has to bow before the blast or there’d be an explosion” (160).

In Chandigarh, Vishal Dubey’s marriage is also a vanishing search for communication. While Uma in Morning defies convention boldly and outrageously, Leela returns the outward semblance of conformity. Vishal, who wants to build a
relationship on truth, finds it a frustrating task and wonders whether his “ardour for the truth between them had done her actual harm, made her lose her bearing, so that she was like a lost soul wandering in a land not her own” (215). Vishal’s passivity, like that of Arjun and Jit, is partly responsible for the failure of his marriage. He yields to a sense of bewilderment at her affair with Hari.

In Chandigarh, while Saroj wants to be able to take her innermost thoughts and feelings to her husband’s, Inder, Mara deliberately holds herself aloof from her marriage believing mistakenly that men do not relish the truth. She wants Jit to be more aggressive and be passionately involved. She wants Jit to be angry. Jit happens to be in contrast to her expectations. It is his gentleness which leaves her dissatisfied for it is as superior an attitude as that of Inder with all his obtuseness. Though for different reasons and in different ways than Saroj, Mara also turns away from her husband Jit, perhaps for his apparent ability to cope with everything and still remain untouched. In her relationship with Inder, though she wants his domination, she is not willing to cope with everything and still remain untouched. In her relationship with Inder, though she wants his domination, she is not willing to surrender her individuality. She tells him that women are also human beings in their own rights. Inder’s domination is an active form of dependence. She is attracted to him not because she embodies him ideal of womanhood but because she offers a challenge to his domination. Their relationship is a satisfying one. Inder is an altogether different person in her presence, feeling both a sense of belonging and isolation. He depends on her for “the distance between him and any other person was on infinity he might
never span without help” (61). He is able to experience a relationship which goes beyond the physical and suddenly all differences between loving and not loving had become apparent to him. He is in no hurry to possess her; instead, the act of love so final and complete with other women is a never ending one with Mara. However, it is irony that the very same Mara is incapable of responding to Jit’s much simpler needs, who feels that all his affection and care are wanted on her: “Back to the caves, she had said, and that was what would suit her best. You gave a woman the perfection of which you were capable, the finest flower of your most evolved instincts, and it was a waste. She didn’t want to be cherished and affection made no impression on her” (132-33). They are people who are differently made. While Mara needs to be shaken into yielding, he lacks the behaviour that could have accomplished what Jit has to offer Mara and what Saroj wants from Inder are truth and honesty – not what Mara and Inder have. This kind of relationship these two foster is based on pretence. The moment it is taken for granted, it collapses. Mara is able to return to Jit after her affair with Inder because Jit is willing to resume life from the point where she had left it. But a similar resumption is out of the question for Saroj. Inder would be the last man to take her back. Actually, Saroj leaves him only in the end of the novel whereas Inder had left her each time he had quarreled with her and condemned her each time he went to Mara. She is a passive partner. It is with a sense of dismay, she views their future together: “Of course he would be back, when he chose, and resume life with her without a word about his impetuous departure, and they would go on, their give and take reduced a little each time” (222). Saroj’s departure from her home is
accompanied by a sense of failure. She had tried to build a home but there were “heartbreaking gaps through which the cold came in and the emptiness yawned” (237). Her departure is a move towards personal freedom and a rejection of the role Inder had wanted to thrust on her.

Simrit’s story in Shadow is the continuation of Saroj’s in Chandigarh. It can be called her most personal novel as it has the autobiographical touch in it. Sahgal combines the social and the political issues that pose a threat to a developing country. The novel concerns itself not only with the release and recognition of the individual consciousness but also with its growth and maturation. The novel deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring Indian woman trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she experiences in the hands of cruel and unjust male-dominated society of India. The novel represents a variety of people, the political leaders, business barons, journalists and free thinkers. In it, Sahgal has presented the social life of these people living in India in the early sixties, when India was on her way to progress after independence. The novelist shows that though Indians have got freedom yet it is only on the surface level as in their attitudes to love, morality, marriage, sex, education and religion, they are still the slaves of the West.

In the novel, the major theme is the continued domination and exploitation of the woman by her husband despite the constantly increasing awareness of the need for liberation felt by every educated person. The central pre-occupation of the novel is the suffering caused to woman in the prison-house of loveless marriage and her
sufferings. The continued tendency toward exploitation of the woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system and reconstitute it on her own terms. The chief characters of the novel are - Som, Raj, Simrit, Sumer Singh, Brij and Ram Krishan. People in India think that they can become modern just by initiating the Western life-style. The people in New Delhi love organizing parties, drinking wine and flirting with women other than their wives. They enjoy late night dinners and ballroom dances. Accordingly, Shadow opens with the glow and the glitter of the modern society of the capital city of India. Sahgal describes:

The huge mirrors of the Zodiac Room at the inter-continental, festooned in carved gilt, reflected everyone of consequence in the Ministry of Petroleum, and a lot of other officials besides, their wives and some of their daughters - the supple, flat-stomached young, with their saris tied low showing their navels, their hair swinging long and loose, or piled high in glossy architecture (DS 1).

This shows the superficial modernity of the Indian people who blindly imitate Western style in their fashions and manners which take them away from the traditions and customs of their own country. They try to be modern as much as possible by following modern life-style, as they arrange parties and spend money lavishly. Against the glittering socio-political backdrop in New Delhi, the Indian cultural paradox inherent in its predominantly Hindu character is presented as a crucial aspect of the background.
The novel is basically concerned with the emotional effects of divorce. It centers on the traumatic post-divorce experience of a middle-aged woman, Simrit. Simrit's marriage to Som, an industrialist, turns out to be a disaster. Som and Simrit have been married for long years and have three children. As a businessman, Som's ambition in life is to move up fast. At one point, Simrit is shocked to find that she has become irrelevant in his scheme of things. After moments of hesitation and with guilt feelings, she finally walks out of her home, because she finds a supportive friend in Raj. She leaves all the wealth to Som but takes the children with her at the time of divorce. Simrit suffers from marital incompatibility. She respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. Here Sahgal portrays how the lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between man and woman can cause wreck to marital relationship resulting in divorce. It is the clash of ideals that leads to their separation. Through Simrit, Sahgal expounds various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Sahgal reflects her own shadow of life after her divorce. She confesses it in an article “Of Divorce and Hindu Woman” that this book tries to figure out something that has happened to her. It is the shattering experience of her own divorce. She wants to show how even in a free country like India where women are equal citizens; a woman can be criminally exploited without creating a ripple. Simrit’s friendship with Raj provides her the anchor and helps her come out of the shock and stupor and establish a life of her own. First, the mind then the body opens up to new responses and life affirms itself in a sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj. "The relationship which she builds
with Raj is thus an entirely different one - it is born out of a real need, not a habit and it begins with the mind, not the body" (Jain, “Aesthetics” 46). In fact, Raj never discusses marriage with Simrit but only encourages her to be assertive and independent. But in the last part of the novel, he suddenly declares that they are going to be married. He can be aptly described as a Christian by birth, a liberal thinker by temperament and training and a fearless exponent of his ideas as a matter of faith.

Simrit, a sensitive being in her own right, longs for communication and understanding, which she is unable to find in Som’s world of ambition and money. Som expects her to conform to his ideal of subdued womanhood. He considers the inequality of their relations to be the right order of things. Simrit finds this denial of freedom a suffocating experience. She has no voice in the ordinary decisions of everyday life, not even in the choice of curtains and chair covers:

Even there Som had a veto. Not even about servants. She had dismissed the cook twice for drunkenness and bad behaviour and Som had kept him on. Little things she had thought at the time, nothing important, nothing to quarrel about, but building up into a frightening situation – herself a log in a machine – with which it had become impossible to live. (DS 38)

Simrit is finally estranged not by Som’s rough–shod methods but by his growing obsession with power and possession. Som’s is a male-centred world. His pride of
procreation is concentrated only on having a son. He does not view women as persons and hence does not want to have a daughter. He finds it easy enough to condone Lalli’s murder of his wife. He has no qualms about jobs and discarding friendships on his way to the top. Simrit reaches the breaking point when Som and Vetter finalise a new deal to make armaments because to her it is indicative of the final erosion of Som’s humanity. He is caught up in spiraling mania for affluence and tells it to Simrit: “think of it, we can go abroad any time we want, any bloody time, buy anything we want… We can aircondition this whole place, furnish it all over again […]” (89). Simrit’s life with Som lacks continuity and warmth. She feels isolated. It is an act with the beginning and an end and with nothing in-between or even afterwards Simrit feels completely alienated from Som that the physical act can not longer transport her unresisting to a comfortable place. Simrit feels bored even in sexual acts. Sahgal writes:

And once past is immediacy – sex had its visions too-of tenderness, of humour, of more than a physical act. Sex could be argument or a problem shared. The same spring fed all its facets within her. (90)

Som, obtuse in many other ways, senses her non-involvement in the physical act, which he feels is an insult to him. Lacking the tenderness to respond sensitively to her needs, he simply cuts her off as he had cut off Merriweather and Lalli. To Simrit, divorce is not an easy one. Simrit feels uprooted and abandoned in a male-centred world. Divorce is not easy. Simrit also feels that a “part of her would always he married to Som” (220). Sahgal narrates:
It was painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The tissue of marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on. And skeletons could endure for a million years. Just living together, daily routine produced that uncanny durability. It made the question of whether one had loved or not, been loved or not, been the transgressor or transgressed against trivial by comparison. (64)

Simrit finds her life disrupted and herself in the midst of a financial problem. The heavy tax payment is an attempt to enslave her in every way. All her attempts to make others see the divorce settlement from her point of view fail because people do not see her as a person seeking freedom and fulfillment. As long as it provides for the future of their son, it seems to others to be a fair settlement. Moolchand, Som’s employee, and Shah, a rich industrialist, see nothing wrong in the settlement. Simrit likens her position to that often overloaded donkey whose burden attracts no notice and draws forth no pity for “loads are for dinkeys” (56). The divorce settlement is a continuum of their marriage. It pins her down to a role of a victim. It attempts to crash her desire to be free in a positive way. She has to face it bravely to get rid of the bonds of marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Out of this struggle to be free is born a new Simrit – a woman who makes choices, takes decisions and becomes aware of herself as a person. Her body and mind open up to the new responses and especially to Raj, her lover. Commenting Simrit’s divorce, Jasbir Jain in *Nayantara Sahgal* interprets:
Simrit's divorce in *The Day in Shadow* does not imply that marriage has failed as a social institution or that it has outlived its utility. On the other hand it clearly demonstrates the need for reciprocal relationships in marriage. Nayantara's viewpoint appears to be a desire to place marriage in the proper social and emotional perspective. Man-woman relationship whether within or outside marriage needs to be liberated from conventional approaches to it in order to become a satisfying and fulfilling one. Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even a contract-for it is wrong to approach it in that spirit. It is a partnership based on respect and consideration and requiring involvement from both. This relationship has been subjected to an unusual strain in a number of ways. Partly the break-up of the joint family system itself is responsible for the increase in friction between husband and wife. Partly social and religious conventions have not kept pace with the changing social expectations. Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* believes that if marriage can be unhappy, too, with ‘the right ingredients' (141). And in *The Day in Shadow* Raj and Simrit plan to get married, they have enough confidence in their own selves and the future to want to take that step. Marriage has a permanence and stability about it and does not become a superfluity even when divorce has become a social reality. What concerns Nayantara most is the need for a mature approach to marriage, the need
to nurture it with love and care and candour. She wants communication not perfection, for men and women have their own limitations. Though she is fully aware that men can be as unhappy as women when the relationship is not a satisfactory one, she stresses the point that ordinarily it is women who suffer more and are denied the right to self-expression. (60-61)

In Delhi, the relationship between Usman and Nadira follows almost a similar pattern. Unlike Uma and Leela, Nadira is in love with her husband and wants to reach him. The failure of their relationship is not due to any contrary views but due to the limitations of their individual natures. Nadira is both beautiful and desirable but Usman’s need is for a different woman – one with intelligence and with receptivity to ideas. Nadira, preoccupied with her own role of voluptuousness and langour, is more concerned with the physical side of marriage than with the exchange of ideas. Usman has never gone beyond the merely physical in his relationship. “Whatever he might have succeeded, with Nadira he had failed. May be she had created an Islamic fortress around her, imprisoned herself, a princess in a tower. But he had failed to reach her, and the failure was his” (SND 137). Their relationship is saved by just one gesture of Nadira’s – she joins him at Michael’s house after having initially stayed away. They can continue to care for each other, because she has the “will to understand, even if understanding was not yet there” (138). This will to understand has also saved Sanad and Kusum and Jit and Mara.
In Delhi, it is once again a middle-aged woman, Devi, who is chosen as the protagonist to project the image of changing India in the late nineteen sixties. In Rich, Sonali, a young woman IAS officer, is the first person observer-participant-narrator who describes the striking details of a constitutional breakdown and the consequences of an unethical exploitation of political institutions to weaken not only the parliamentary democracy established after a hundred years of freedom struggle but also the time-honored cultural and moral values in inter-personal relations. The novel projects the failures, frustrations and exploration of a woman—a faithful wife, a middle-aged unmarried civil servant or a cockney English woman. There is a remarkable blend of the two worlds here, the public and the private. The novel is a fearlessly presented account of the harassment caused to all sections of people during the period of National Emergency, As Dev, one of the principal characters, states early in the novel:

This emergency is just what we needed. The trouble makers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed. The way the country's being run now, with one person giving the orders, and no one being allowed to make a fuss about it in the cabinet or in Parliament, means things can go full steam ahead without delays and weighing pros and cons forever. Strikes are banned. It's going to be very good for business (213).

Besides depicting the anguish during Emergency, the novelist takes the reader to the scenario of the Second World War and nostalgic pre-partition days and describes the
magnetic, transforming influence of Gandhi on the masses. The novelist weaves a narrative around a number of characters: Ramlal Surya; his English wife, Rose; his Indian wife, Mona; Sonali Ranade, the I. A. S. Officer, the narrator; Dev, Ramlal's son; Ravi Kachru and Kishori Lal are the principal characters while the Prime Minister and her staff are in the background. Beginning with an ironic title with multiple meanings, the flow of action in the novel constantly fluctuates between the past and the present through two consciousnesses, one of Rose and the other of Sonali. Both Sonali and Rose are typical Sahgal women. Here, Sahgal introduces three major female characters. Each one of them is different in their outlook and background.

The novelist traces the impact of the Emergency on a large number of characters, simultaneously highlighting the responses of these individuals to the social tension created by the Emergency. Among many victims, Sonali, a conscientious Civil Servant and Rose, a cockney shop-girl turned an Indian businessman's foreign wife who tries her best to make a passage to India and at last meets her death in the hands of a hired men employed by her step son, Dev, appear to be the victim of the corrupted society. Dev can be reported as one of the small tyrants the Emergency has created. Apart from him, the readers have Kishori Lal, a petty merchant, arrested and harassed by the police for being associated with the RSS, a youth from the Nehru University severely manhandled and imprisoned for being a member of the Marxist Party; and Ravi Kachru, a shrewd administrator who manages to ride the tide of
popularity in the early days of the Emergency. These are the representative of the common predicament shared by the majority in the period of National Emergency.

Rose's life is changed after she meets Ram. When Ram first meets Rose, she is a twenty-year old lower-class cockney English girl. She is the daughter of a factory worker. Her life before Ram had not prepared her for a life-time commitment to someone like Ram, far less to his life-style. Rose had broken her settled engagement with Freddie in order to marry Ram, a Lahore based businessman. Though she knew all about Ram's first marriage and a son of him, she married him for love. She believes in the ideal of love. There was something romantic about her attitude to Ram:

She had entered an emotional labyrinth and she was drawn magnetically on, with Ram doing no more than holding her hand for the entire two weeks before he asked her, a victim of casual unthinking sorcery, to marry him. And it was a sign of the distance she had travelled. (41)

Rose has undergone silent suffering with an undeclared war around her in Ram's house and the bonds of blood and flesh and the laws of the Hindu Undivided Family coming in the way of her freedom and privacy. She realizes that "without a child of her own she would never be the mistress of the house, not even her half of it" (71). The cold war between Rose and Mona reconciled only after Mona's attempt to commit suicide. Once again, Rose finds herself the unwanted third in a love triangle when
Ram falls in love with Marcella. In all her troubles, Sonali remains her friend and fights for her right to property. And finally, Rose is murdered. But people are made to believe that she invited death on herself.

Mona, Ramlal's first wife comes from a typical conservative traditional Punjabi family. She takes refuge in, and draws strength from prayers, 'bhajans' and 'Kirtans'. She leads a conventional life. In fact, Rose in those early years at Lahore, had never seen her, even though they lived in the same house. She is secure in her status as the lady of the house. She instructs the servants in the daily running of the house, sometimes only to assert her role. Mona has unshakeable faith in astrology. Her marriage with Ram had been arranged with the help of astrologers and horoscopes. But all this had not prevented Ram from taking another wife. Even then, Mona continued to be ruled by the predictions of astrologers. When she focuses all her attentions on Dev, her son, all dreams and hopes for her son's future are once again ruled by the planets. Earlier Mona was suffering because of Ram's love for Rose and then Rose also suffers in the same manner because of Ram's love for Marcella.

Ram enjoys life fully with both the wives, with Mona looking after the household affairs and the child, and Rose providing sensual pleasure and a company in business. Both the women feel lonely and insecure. Sahgal strongly condemns the attitudes which reduce women to an object. In her study of Nayantara Sahgal, Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* observes:
Man considers it as normal male behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage while at the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting her. (61)

Sonali is a thirty-eight year old I.C.S. officer who as a narrator, is far from being a passive observer. During the Emergency, her strong opinions on democracy cost her job, an event she accepts as symptomatic of changing times. In Sonali, one can find a woman whose life is deeply affected by the various twists and turns that the Indian politics take. Sonali falls in love with Ravi Kachru soon after independence. The three characters-Sonali, Kishori Lal and Dev, act as the centre of consciousness. There is an interaction among each of these three characters and the events which brings out the inner tension between diverse points of view and raise a number of socio-political, moral, ethical and human questions. She gets demoted and transferred to U.P. because of her honest adherence to the Government, declared industrial policy in rejecting a multinational company's application for a license to produce a fizzy drink called Happyola. She is replaced by her former class-fellow and present colleague, Ravi Kachru. She resigns from the service rather than be cowed down by a hypocritical government. She recalls her past days when fifteen years back she had topped the list in the competitive examination for the civil service. On this achievement, her father had tears in his eyes with the hope that her new responsibility could bring a peaceful historical change. Though the fires and fevers of Sonali were different from
her father, it touched both of them with its magic. Her memories of it had been her inheritance. The distinction between politics and the service had become badly blurred over the last few years. Sahgal demonstrates:

The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politicians meddling in administration and favourite like Kachru, the prime example, playing politics as if his life depended on it. .. suddenly he was indispensable here, there and everywhere, the right hand and left leg of the Prime Minister and her household. (28)

Her witty and ironical voice never rises above the levels of decorum and culture as when she talks about the attitude of the civil service administration towards the Emergency:

We knew this was no emergency If it had been, the priorities would have been quite different. We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule. And we were involved in a conspiracy of silence, which is why we were careful not to do more than say hello when we passed each other in the building, and not to talk about our work after hours, which made after hours sessions very silent indeed. No one wanted trouble. So long as it didn't touch us, we played along, pretending the empress’s new clothes were beautiful. To put it charitably, we were being realistic. We knew we were up against a power we couldn't handle, individually or collectively. Though I am
sure the true explanation is that we are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth. (102)

In fact, the novel delineates different incidents such as the murder of the narrator Sonali’s great grandmother in the name of sati, the mutilation of the sharecropper because he asks for his due; the rape of the village women by the police because their men folk dare not resist the landlord; and the murder of Rose, the large-hearted Englishwoman in New Delhi just because her frank talk is an embarrassment to her stepson Dev. The novel ends on a note of hope that in the midst of sycophancy, there are persons like Kishori Lal, a petty shopkeeper, who has the courage to protest against tyranny.

It is vital to note the importance that Sahgal has given to women emancipation in a society. She strongly believes that a society's upliftment lies in the enhancement of women's position in it. It is noteworthy to consider Sahgal’s concern for female community as a part of her social consciousness. Likewise her women in the novels achieve emancipation from very unfaithful, unreasonable and domineering husbands. So, Rashmi in Morning Saroj in Chandigarh, Simrit in Shadow, Sonali in Rich emerge as a liberated women. Marriage often makes the enlightened and sensitive women very unhappy and discontented. In Morning, Rashmi's divorce and her extra-marital relationship with Neil are not to be mistaken for a "tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity" (146), but an inner urge for communication and emotional involvement of the self. Marriage makes Rashmi "a moth trapped in cement" (35).
Sahgal seems to be deeply concerned with the need of freedom for women. In *Shadow*, Simrit does not want to be known as her husband's wife but as her own self. When someone asks her about the profession of her husband, she thinks:

Wasn't it odd, when you were standing there yourself, fully a person, not to be asked what you did? There was such an enormous separating gulf between herself and these women, most women- most people. May be the question would be different in the twenty-first century. (6)

After divorce, the woman often experiences a sense of inability to control her life while a man feels free from all social, moral and financial responsibilities. Through Simrit, Sahgal expounds the various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Through Simrit's divorce, Sahgal thus makes a strong plea for a change and revitalization of the Indian society. It is her courage which frees Simrit from the bonds of marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Sahgal confesses in an article:

In this book I tried to figure out something that has happened to me - the shattering experience of divorce. I wanted to show how even in a free country like ours, where women are equal citizens, a woman can be criminally exploited without creating a ripple. Again, I am not speaking of any recognizable form of exploitation against which most people will naturally raise a cry. If a man beats his wife, for instance, hardly anyone will condone the fact. But if at divorce he inflicts a
financial settlement on her that enslaves her with taxes and makes it impossible for her to make a decent living, no one will take any notice because this is a kind of beating where blood and bruises don’t show. (“of Divorce” 7)

Rich is filled with social commitment and contemporary relevance. It pictures the social activities of that society. While they are mainly seen as fictional expression, they also point to social and historical realities; for example, in their depiction of sati during the twentieth century. Although sati was outlawed in 1829, it has never been fully eradicated. Sahgal also provides fictional narratives of female infanticide, child marriage and 'purdah' in Identity. Her perspectives offer valuable insights into the dynamics and complexities of human relationships, and her feminist concerns can be placed within historical and theoretical frameworks.

Sahgal's novels also suggest that even women's clothing (more than men's) takes on political implications as a public signifier of cultural identity within India. If the 'purdah' (for Muslim women) is uncomfortable and restrictive, so too is the sari (for Hindu women) which Sonali complains about in Rich "Ravi, as a man, had never had a sari throttling his legs, making walking in the wind and running to catch a bus threat to lift and limb" (RU 112).

Overall, her novels offer the sharpest critique of marriages. She presents the only female character that explicitly rejects marriage because of the constraints it places upon women. Remembering the weddings she had seen in her childhood,
Sonali in Rich resolves never to marry, for the brides seemed to her like prisoners, with their clothes like tents, their jewellery like chains and their postures submissive. Sahgal's novels deal with men and women in eternal search for freedom to express themselves, freedom to be their own selves. The novelist feels strongly about female exploitation and male sarcasm towards the issue of women's identity crisis. She demands social justice for women, her focus being on freedom.

Sahgal's world consists of two types of women characters. The first group consists of women who are happy in the confines of Hindu orthodoxy, and the other of those with a strong sense of individuality and an analytical mind but shuttling between traditional and modern values. Her women are not career women treating men as their rivals in a highly competitive society. Rather they wish to relate themselves to the people around them; they would like to be treated as equals. Her women are of the view that they should move with time and they should not compromise with the issue of their individual freedom in the male-dominated society. Lakshmi Kumari in “Identity of Women and a Quest for New Paradigms in Nayantara Sahgal” admits that “Nayantara Sahgal places her women characters mostly with good educational background, in conflict with a parochial society and depicts their struggle to pop out of their shells though there is much about sufferings within marriage, yet we also get a glimpse of the attempts made to condition her personality along sexist lines before marriage” (18).
Sahgal does not adopt any radical attitude towards divorce. Commenting on divorce, Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* elaborates the effects of divorce on a woman:

Divorce which is admittedly a relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage is hardly enough to re-establish the woman socially, psychologically or financially. Even after divorce, the aggrieved or relieved woman does not find herself in the same situation as before marriage. Despite the wounds inflicted in the unsuccessful marriage which have to be borne for a long time, a woman has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society which does not allow her to be free and happy. Divorce is the beginning of another phase of troubles. (91)

In Sahgal’s novels, many women seldom prefer divorce. Maya of *Happy*, Uma of *Morning*, Mona and Rose of *Rich* do not prefer divorce. They try to cope with the marriage. Only Rashmi of *Morning*, Saroj of *Chandigarh* and Simrit of *Shadow* opt for divorce and that too after a long endurance of suffering in marriage. What Rashmi seeks in her marriage is emotional involvement and communication, which she finds it difficult to achieve. She decides to seek divorce. She knows “A break had jagged edges and did violence to some part of one’s being” (TM 13). Saroj in *Chandigarh* has a premarital sex before her marriage to Inder, which results in, as Jasbir Jain in *Nayantara Sahgal* relates: “Inder’s attitude in keeping with the rest of his character – he has no time for finer things, for emotional involvements, or for tenderness – his whole nature is ruthless and aggressive” (52). It is also due to her dissatisfaction in
love-making. Simrit in **Shadow** is cast in the same mould as Saroj. She is a misfit in the world of her husband, who is obsessed with ambition and money. On the contrary, Simrit yearns for love and understanding. She understands that it is very difficult to endure life with Som. Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* states:

Simrit is surprised to find that people around her mourn the divorce and hesitate to accept it as soothing and life-giving at least to the person who had suffered prolonged suppression and domination. When Som’s company lawyer Moolchand visits her, he begins his conversation condoling, ‘as if someone had died’. (93)

The conditions that Som imposes on Simrit at the time of divorce are financially crumbling ones. She has to pay by way of heavy taxes on the shares Som has transferred to her name to be kept in custody till Brij, their son, comes of age. In Sahgal’s works, the reasons for divorce are fear of loneliness, insecurity, unjust division of responsibility, ex-communicated, financial burden, physical and sexual dissatisfaction or gratification of impulses and so on.

Rashmi in **Morning**, Saroj in **Chandigarh**, Simrit in **Shadow** and Bhushan Singh’s mother in **Identity** have a mind and will of their own and they are brave enough to question the established norms of conventional marriage. Chaman Nahal in *The New Literatures in English* observes that Sahgal’s women are not outright rebels against marriage, but women who simply seek a better quality in marriage.
Sahgal is not opposed to marriage as a social institution. She stresses the greater need for loyalty and mutual understanding in any lasting man-woman relationship. In this context Chaman Nahal comments: “In each case (Saroj and Simrit) the attack is not against the institution of marriage but against the inequality and injustice that is forced upon women by men using the institution of marriage” (102). It is also proved by Beulah Ranjit Singh, where in “Sahgal’s Female Protagonists: A Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow” she says: “Alienation, resulting from lack of communication, and mutual fidelity, forms the ‘stoff’ of Storm in Chandigarh whereas The Day in Shadow shows how lack of understanding and inability to strike a sympathetic chord in marital relationship ultimately, lead to divorce” (95). It is also voiced by Neena Arora when she states that divorce is the result of dissatisfaction between man and woman. Commenting on marriage and divorce in Sahgal’s works, she in Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison observes:

Sahgal’s women, e.g. Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit quite often feel smothered in marriage and miss the elements of *eros*, *philos*, and *agope* (the terms used by Greeks for desire, friendship and affection respectively) in their relationship. Divorce is an expression of their dissatisfaction over their stale and sterile marital relationship. It also expresses their desire to live a life of intense, absorbing and more congenial relationship. (92)

In her novels, Sahgal is extremely outspoken and factual. She is concerned with wide range of issues but in essence they all reveal her concern for the growth and
development of the individual—whether the individual be a man or a woman. She firmly believes that ‘no human problems will be understood or solved unless human beings regard one another as equals” (TM 6). And this is also applicable to the relationship between men and women. In this connection, Sahgal highlights the need for sex education and self respect, for a change in the social customs and attitudes. According to Sahgal, women are also individuals filled with feelings and marriage is a partnership not an institution. But the whole social setup is geared towards the domination of men or women: in marriage, in sexual relationship, in childbirth and even in adultery. It is the woman who is victimized. This is amply illustrated in Sahgal’s novels. Sahgal’s characters display that a new age would begin the day when women are accepted and treated as equal partners in human relationships. Commenting on Sahgal’s women characters’ attitude to marriage, Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* says that “some of her women act defiantly and severe the already splitting relations after giving sufficient time and thought to the delicate and sacred issue of marriage. Sahgal envisions marriage a sweet harmonious relationship based on mutual understanding, depth and truth. ‘Women are persons not possessions’ is the note echoed in all her works” (60).

Hence, it is understood that Sahgal’s women are pliable and flexible, tender and sweet, fragile and weak and so on. But when it comes to the institution of marriage they become flesh and bones and expect a lot from their partners. When their demands are satisfied, they find no problems in their marital bond. But when
they feel that they are ignored, suppressed, oppressed, and mutilated and made to be voiceless, they rebel against the sacred marital bond and challenge it and break it. They become new women to occupy the new spaces of their own. Though Sahgal seldom goes to the extreme, she is in favour of her women’s rights to her separate identity, to her own perceptions of life and pursuit of her own interests and aspirations. She is also in favour of her freedom of choice. Sahgal is in full sympathy with women like Rashmi of Morning. Saroj in Chandigarh is denied equality of status with her husband. While Saroj exhibits how a woman should exercise her will and assert her freedom, Simrit in Shadow shows what trials and tribulations one has to undergo once this has been done. The novel is the story of the pangs of a woman who has sought divorce from her husband, who has denied her equality of status and treated her as his plaything. Simrit demonstrates how a woman can achieve her goal in spite of the heavy odds. Likewise, one can see that Sahgal’s women are mutilated in marriage. They have no voice of their own. They feel ignored and unwanted except for a physical gratification. Their minds are boiled and aggravated to the edge of madness / hysteria. They are forced to breakout from their relationships with men silently. They are the passive victims. They turn to be silent rebels – rebelling against male domination, aggression, and dominance.