Chapter III

Women and their Roles

In India, the Post-Independence period has witnessed the emergence of women novelists. The Indian women novelists depict Indian situation and characters in their novels. They are also rooted in the history and culture of the soil of India. Besides their Indianness, they try to view a feminine perspective. In the novels of the Indian English women writers, Indian woman has been studied and analysed in her traditional background. Women novelists portray the struggling, conflicting and frustrating Indian woman in their novels. It shows that women writers are interested in portraying the conflict between tradition and modernity, images and roles, career and expectations, and so on. K. Meera Bai in “Tradition and Modernity : The Portrayal of Women by Women Writers” is of the view that

The conflict between tradition and modernity finds a prominent place in the portrayal of women by women characters. Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and codes and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men, and reactions to familial frictions can be termed as traditionalists. Those who defy traditions and opt for modernity are non-conformists. (35)

Indian woman in general is expected to be gentle, acceptable, adjustable, accomodative, pliable and service-minded. She is conditioned by traditions and conventions as she upholds them. However, the modern woman does not find any sense in being
acquiescent. She refuses to accept the role of a suffering and sacrificing individual. She feels the need to have an image for self-expression and individual fulfilment. She in her multi-pronged roles, questions the conventions and defies the traditions. She has the inner craving for freedom and independence. It results in the breaking up of family and other relationships. Her sense of individuation leads to clash of personalities and the risk of losing her own identity. Further, K. Meera Bai observes: “In the novels of women writers, we come across women who are traditional in their way of living but modern in their outlook and capacity to retain their individuality” (36). That is why, commenting on the need to study women characters, J. Samuel Kirubahar in “Longing for Connectedness in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust, Nayantara Sahgal’s Plans for Departure, and Bharati Mukherjee’s The Holder of the World” says:

A study of women characters in the fictional world of women writers writing in English whether in India or abroad establishes the fact that women writers have shown admirable psychological insights and fresh outputs in the form of oeuvres while creating their women characters-be it major or minor. Women novelists' concern is to probe, analyse, and delve deep into the secret recesses of their women characters and present them in flesh and blood to strike a sympathetic chord and to have an easy access to their psychological reactions and responses, and broodings. The women writers with their sensitive perception of the human bondage tackle the situation from the perspective of the relationship between man and woman in or out of marriage which is intimate and most complex and also they
handle the problems of the expatriates with their psychological turmoil and cultural schizophrenia. (48-9)

Sahgal, being an Indian English woman novelist, is interested in portraying women and their roles and voice in her novels. She assigns mostly traditional roles to her characters and later makes those women voice their expectations and frustrations in life. All her women are seen docile in their lives but later made to be rebels to rebel against their husbands or patriarchal domination. They are not able to adjust themselves to the society’s expectations when their needs and aspirations are nullified and as a result they are muted and their voice is castrated. They are made to voice their needs but there is no one to listen to their genuine longings. All her protagonists are from middle-class Indian families, but they remain failures as they are doomed by what the society needs from them. They are ignored and sullied / soiled / defied / tainted / stained. Commenting on the women in her early novels, Sahgal in an interview with S. Varalakshmi admits:

To me, these women of my early novels are very conventional, traditional heroines, even rather boring and I don’t view them as very dynamic or at all revolutionary. They are extremely conformist (sic), and get the point I am making is that at some stage even the worm turns. The most traditional, the most passive, the most conventional creature at some point will dig her toes in and stay, thus far and no further. Likewise, each of these women, conventional though they are, at some point walk out. (9)
Equally, when questioned by Varalakshmi about women of the later novels, Sahgal admits that “There are three whom I think, convey themselves that way : Rose, Anna, Sylla. I think they convey themselves in a powerful manner because they are whole characters, by which I mean not that I’ve written them whole but that they spring from whole cultures” (13).

The first pattern of thematics related to the image / role of a woman is that Sahgal is against dehumanication of women. She is also against their subjugation by men and against treating them as mere possessions. Kavita Dubey in Power Politics and Women Empowerment in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal : A Critical Assessment observes : “What she aims at in her novels is not to set one sex against another but at the elimination of injustices, inequalities and inequities perpetrated by men on women so that they can realize themselves and live as free individuals” (48). It is as Sahgal spoke to R.S. Sharma : “I feel that Indian women are conditioned to stay, put in the home, no matter what difficulties they face” (1). Her women characters try to become themselves by staying within the limits of Indian tradition and its values. Further, Sahgal admits to Sharma : “Some of my women characters are caught up in traumatic domestic situations, and they show great staying power through their trials” (1). Commenting on Sahgal’s portrayal of women, J. Samuel Kirubahar and R. Meena in “Theme of Marital Dissonance in Nayantara Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow” aver :

Nayantara Sahgal has an independent approach to women's problems in India as she does not accept the social tradition emphasized through religious mottos and economic needs that failed to give the meaning to the
concept of marriage and woman's individual identity. Woman has never been accepted as a full-human being and as a result it causes her consistent suffering and miserable life in which her life ends in self-immolation. (13)

Sahgal portrays women of the upper and middle class in modern India. These women consider home as their best place. Most women in Sahgal’s novels seek their fulfilment within the institution of marriage. However, marriage is considered one more slavery. Even Sahgal, after her divorce, did not marry Mangat Rai but lived with him for many years. Sahgal’s attitude is not anti-marriage stance but just indifference to the ritualistic aspect of marriage. Most of Sahgal’s women characters become captive in marriage even though they are from the good educational background. They want to assert their identity even though they have been tamned within marriage. What they want is not political freedom but freedom that concerns an individual. So that only commenting on the role of women in Sahgal’s novels, J. Samuel Kirubahar and R. Meena further delineate:

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. Even though her novels deal essentially with the woman's identity crisis, there are however, minor instances in the narrative that highlight the novelist’s awareness of socio-political problems and individual freedom, because they are eventually concerned with human beings. All her novels deal with the freedom in both public and private life. Her women characters like Simrit are unhappy, because they feel thwarted in the absence of individual freedom. However, Nayantara
Sahgal does not deal with the plight of widows. Nevertheless, she is as much concerned about the emancipation of woman as she advocates inner freedom for her woman and demands recognition as equals, be men at home and in society. (13-4)

Sahgal is not only interested in portraying Indian women in her novels, but also equally interested in portraying non-Indian women or western women in her works. Her Departure is an opt example of the portrayal of non-Indian women like that of Jhabvala in Heat and Dust and Bharati Mukherjee in The Holder of the World and Anita Desai in Bye, Bye Blackbird. Commenting on the characterization of non-Indian women in Departure, J. Samuel Kirubahar in “Longing for Connectedness in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust, Nayantara Sahgal’s Plans for Departure and Bharati Mukherjee’s The Holder of the World” says:

The characterization of non-Indian women (Western Women) provides similarities in character and situation where they are stranded as vagrants moving from their native land to India and back to their homeland. The western women are subjected to emotional, sensitive, and sentimental problems irrespective of the differences in race, religion, culture, and creed. They have sexual freedom and remain strange to others to reconstruct their lives. They are the translated souls in search of peace and fulfillment but they are all lovable and loving, sensitive and sentimental, individualistic and assertive with the common weakness to gratify their sexual needs in the labyrinth of their hearts. (49)
Hence, it is important to study Sahgal’s portrayal of women and their problems, voices, and roles in a detailed manner. Even though studies have been conducted earlier on Sahgal’s women, fresh critical insight into the literary canon of Sahgal would enrich the critical outlook and broaden the vistas of knowledge and insight. It is as Ralph J. Crane in an “Introduction” to Nayantara Sahgal’s India: Passion, Politics, and History says that “All Sahgal’s work, like that of Shashi Deshpande, is firmly rooted in India (despite her own education abroad, and frequent travel outside India), though western characters in India frequently play significant roles in her fiction (Michael Calvert in A Situation in New Delhi, Rose in Rich Like Us and Anna Hansen in Plans for Departure)” (vii).

Communication is an important one. An individual has to communicate his / her own feelings, sentiments, emotions and so on. If one is not able to communicate, he/she will definitely find a void within the psyche, which may lead to mar meaningful human relationships. Commenting on such a problem in communication, Rollo May in Power and Innocence: A Search for the Source of Violence details:

Communication recovers to original ‘we-ness’ of the human being on a new level [...] one relates to another not as a receptacle for the expression of one’s own sexuality, or as a being to be exploited for assuaging of one’s loneliness, or in any other way of an object, but as a human being in the full meaning of that term. Communicating leads to community – that is to be understanding, intimacy and the mutual valuing that was previously lacking. (247)
The need for talk or dialogue is stressed in Sahgal’s novels. Due to lack of communication and mutual understanding, Sahgal’s women are not able to voice their problems in their assigned roles or thrusted moulds. They suffer from the private torment of broken marriages. The women, who live together, experience emptiness, loneliness and alienation. It becomes their problem. Their voice is muted and stifled. However, the problem is not related to physical loneliness / alienation / isolation / segregation but deeper emotional and spiritual voids created by the broken marriages and also by egoism – the major problem identified among women in Sahgal’s works. Marriage is the main hindrance in their lives. Michael Haralambos and Robin Heald in *Sociology : Themes and Perspectives* are of the view that marriage is “where the spouse live together, remain legally married but their marriage exists in name only” (360). On the surface, her women characters seem to be happy and contented in marriage but in the deeper levels of their psyche, they feel being alienated and humiliated and they are not able to voice their aspirations and longings in their roles as married women. Saroj in *Chandigarh* voices / laments : “It’s nothing being alone I mind. I enjoy that, It’s the loneliness. I’m alone when even Inder is here” (223). Saroj’s past and her premarital sex make her loose her role as a married woman. Her husband treats her not as a wife but as a woman corrupt and manipulate. Jasbir Jain in “The Aesthetics of Morality : Sexual Relations in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” brings out that there is something “within him which shuts her cut, and is impervious to her affection. He, on his part, treats her merely as a wife and not as a person” (44). Hence, she decides to move towards Vishal Dubey to voice her expectations in life and for physical and sexual fulfilment. Neena Arora in
Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison avers: “It is his ego and his sense of supervising that stands in the way of sharing and caring Saroj’s quest for communication and sharing naturally leads her towards Vishal, whom she finds more understanding and considerate” (66). He never approves of Saroj’s overtures and turns violent towards her. He finds no meaning for Saroj’s fervent plea for sharing. Inder admits: “After all, we are so unlike, and it’s natural we should need friends, who share our interests” (SC 20). The problem with Inder is that he neither loves his wife, nor does he want that she should be loved by any other man / men.

Jit and Mara in Chandigarh too have “no intimacies in bed” (232). Their marriage is an arranged one. At the time of marriage, Mara “young and desire was ripe and easy to confuse with the most complicated need called love” (100). Mara has all the comforts of life, beauty, wealth and social status. However, her problem is that she suffers from a personal void – voiceless, muted, strangled, smothered, and inarticulate creature. The search for communication makes her come towards Inder. She requests him to “meet more and get to know each other” (171), both figuratively and metaphorically. But, soon she becomes disillusioned when she finds Inder a hypocrite. She breaks all relations with him. Jit also realises that something is lacking in Mara and as a result Mara and Jit decide to resume their life together. Communication takes place. Sahgal relates:

Strength that was almost physical in its impact reached out to her in his words, the kind of strength that she had never thought she would need as she went her proud way alone.
She said what she had never been able to say before, ‘I need your help’. (233)

In *Shadow*, “talk was the missing link” (93) between Simrit and Som, ultimately causing breakdown of their seventeen-year-old wedlock. Som is described as “a dammed good husband” (89), who is a wealthy businessman. He wants to keep Simrit happy with worldly objects. He never tries to understand the reasons for sensitive and intelligent wife’s unhappiness, who only wants to talk to him: a “good talk, about books, events, ideas, people” (93). She is not able to voice her expectations in her role as a married woman to Som and a mother to her children. Som used to exclude her when he talks to his friends. And as a result, she begins to feel alienation/isolation and gets a feeling of being muted, castrated of her voice. Som and his friend talk endlessly “to each other in Punjabi in her presence, ignoring her. But Som would squeeze and stroke her arm, rest by hands warmly, heavily on her thigh, keep her physically in the room, mentally out” (27). Both the friends would share their memories of pre-partition days of India: how they were uprooted and so on, but they did not look at her during their conversation, thus giving immense mental torture to Simrit, who always wanted to be a part of them and a part of their talk-voice. They would never discuss business details in her presence, as if it was something “obscene and unmentionable, or women were morons wasn’t sure which – so most of Som stayed cut off from her. Her usefulness to him had never extended to the areas of the mind” (77). Simrit feels her husband’s indifference extremely inhuman and callous. She does not feel the presence of Som—whether it is in a room or in a car: “Oh God no. I sat in the car with him, that was all” (36).
The second pattern of thematics which emerges in the novels of Sahgal is the theme related to woman, woman’s voices and their roles and woman’s quest for self-fulfilment and so on. In Happy, Maya is burdened by the taboos and the conventions of Hindu orthodox society. She does not revolt against marriage but seeks fulfilment in the service of the people. “She heralds the growth and powers the way for the Indian woman’s awareness of her self” (Talwar, Women’s Space 80). Morning brings out the woman who savours the act of living. Rashmi tells Rakesh: “It’s just being alive. I am sure I would rather live in pain and misery than not at all” (TM 41). It is this which urges her to revolt against her marriage and seeks divorce. It also deals with the themes like the compulsion of routine life for the women, the question of women’s sexuality, the problem of getting uprooted from one’s own culture and society and conventional morality. Chandigarh and Shadow have two women characters who suffer in or out of marriage because of male chauvinism. Saroj and Simrit come out of their shadows and become themselves. They achieve their own images – a self reliant women. However these two novels have themes like premarital sex, the woman’s need for emotional fulfilment, the issue of sexuality and the miseries and hardships of a divorced woman in Indian society. Delhi and Rich are the novels about women who have found space for themselves in man’s world and yet their life is not without trials and tribulations. Devi is neglected in the cabinet. She finds the ideals of her brother deliberately pulled down by those who followed him. Sonali in Rich has to struggle hard to maintain her identity and keep her individuality being inviolate. Besides these, the novels also deal with the stigma of rape, the issue of arranged marriage, and revolution. Departure and Identity deal
with woman’s quest for self-fulfilment. The central characters are foreigners. Anna Hansen and Willie-May need no liberation like Sylla, a Parsee girl in Identity but Razia needs liberation as she makes efforts to liberate herself and takes lead in her love affair with Bhushan Singh.

Kusum of Happy in her role as a married woman finds marriage to be full of tension and unhappiness in the beginning of her married life but later she reconciles to it. Jasbir Jain in Nayantara Sahgal considers that “They are in love but their responses are timid and turned to normal expectations” (18). Further, Jain relates that she considers her marriage to be “half way between the two worlds of orthodox and freedom” (76). Kusum is incapable of positive action and progression. Her approach is rather traditional and ineffective. Both Maya and Kusum are young, docile Indian girls at the time of their marriage. Marriage creates new problems for them. Maya realises that she cannot fit into Harish’s framework of life. She tries to achieve something for herself. Kusum, in contrast, tries to make Sanad happy by learning to be fashionable and modern. In the process, she wears high heeled-shoes and starts drinking. Maya has no time to be with Harish, as her husband. Harish is caught up in the mesh of career building. He has no time for the gentle and docile girl he has married. In his obsession for success in life, Harish foreshadows Inder and Som, who are similarly caught up in the web of affluence and have no time for tender feelings of their wives. It echoes Saghals’s belief that no human relationship can develop in a vacuum – it requires love, care, and understanding to nurture its growth. Similarly, Rashmi in Morning feels smothered in her relationship with Dilip in the absence of communication. Harish has failed to see her as an individual.
The narrator has, however, understood her need for love and tender feelings, and is not ashamed of his lack of self-control. He ruminates about a party saying:

There I spent what remained of the night, going over and over every minute with Maya, the discovery and the loss of her, the beginning and the end. 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 altogether. She with her woman's vision had realised this even before I had, in the move she had made to free herself from my arms, in her mute appeal to me not to touch her. She had realised this and remained calm. I was broken by it and all night I could not stop my tears. I had lived alone all my adult life and it had never mattered. Now the knowledge of my empty future overwhelmed me. (TH 69-70)

Maya has different experiences with the narrator and Harish. However, Maya emerges mature from this incident. The woman in her has succumbed to passion but she has withdrawn herself from such emotions. It shows the strength of Maya. She remains calm. Her fortitude and womanliness stand in good stead in her work with the refugees at the Rehabilitation centre. Maya’s pathetic conditions become even more poignant in comparison to Lakshmi’s contentment, within the Shivpal House, as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Lakshmi has been fortunate in life and is more happy in catering to the need of her husband and children in her role as a wife and a mother. She is visibly shocked on hearing Maya’s decision to join the village upliftment programme and work
in the villages. Maya possesses courage and is conscious of the need for fulfilment in life. She has had no satisfaction from marriage and family life. So, she decides to join the village upliftment programme. Maya has the courage and strength to work with the refugees. She goes about her work with calm and efficiency. She, thus, achieves fulfilment not through marriage in the Indian traditional sense but through social work.

Maya has a frustrated life with Harish in Happy. The narrator is aware of the differences between them, and the situation is further aggravated by her childlessness. It is the cause of annoyance for Ammaji. Ammaji makes no secret of her preference for Govind Narayan. According to the Narrator, Maya and Harish are ill-matched from their wedding day. The Narrator reminisces: “[...] Maya’s misfortune from that day forward. Harish’s very presence was flambouyant while hers was subdued. She had the cool purity of the eucalyptus as compared with the extravagant gulmohar. She was the mirror smooth lake to his rushing water fall” (42). They fail in their married life. This is more because Maya belonged to a family of young and old-a joint family with emotional security. Harish has never known this kind of life. Gradually, Maya withdraws and her withdrawal results in her being labelled unapproachable and incapable of emotions.

Though Prabha in Happy and Mona and Rose in Rich hide their misery in their marriage, there are women in the fictional world of Sahgal, who complain about their marital problems. Maya in Happy is the wife of prosperous Deputy Collector and has all the comforts in life. However, she is unhappy. She likes to reach her husband, which she cannot. She needs a response from him: “Not a good one or an approving one, necessarily just a response of any kind. Even whether we live or die is not important
unless it is important to someone” (TH 65-6). She gets response from the narrator in the end of the novel. However, she is not able to yield her to the narrator, as social reality is very strong in her. And as a result, Maya, in order to overcome her frustration in her marriage joins the movement for India’s freedom and starts preaching Gandhian ideology.

Sahgal presents Veena, Sanad’s sister, in a very different role. She is a member of Shivpal household. She is young, gay and full of praise for the new political freedom. She incepts the changed realities without any resentment. The Narrator has seen her grow from a small school girl into a young woman and is keen to know her mind. She is the direct contrast to the changed atmosphere of Claudette’s – a one time luxury hotel in Lucknow. The hotel is the symbol of past. Sahgal in Free writes : “Lucknow had changed since then (since 1937). Claudette’s, the teashop, was no longer there, nor Fernando’s, the hair dresser, nor the Prince of Wales Cinema” (95). In the newly murky disjointed atmosphere of Claudettes, the Narrator wonders about Veena’s reactions : “would they repel her, as they did her father, or distress her as they did Sanad?” (249). But Veena is neither distressed nor repelled. She willingly accepts the change in Post independent India. Her mature ability to analyse and embrace the changes surprises the Narrator. Veena accepts things as it is. She refers to the dirt and filth all around and explains : “Yes, what does it matter, It’s our’s, isn’t it, and that’s what makes it, so exciting. One can have an ugly child, but its one’s very own” (250). The Narrator sees in her a new woman. She is young, energetic and full of new ideas. She suffers from no complexes. The Narrator accepts:
Here was a young woman, forthright and candid who would never be bowled over by sentiment or buried in outworn tradition, but who would passionately cherish what was her own, just because it was here. Service had many meanings, I had found. It could spring from duty, or inspiration.

But here was service in its purest form, born of love. (252)

Uma in Morning is not so strong as a person as Maya in Happy. She is unable to cope with the torrent of hungry sensations. She is young and beautiful. She is married to a top westernised bureaucrat. She finds her husband obsessed with the success of his career and irresponsive to her physical and emotional urges. Her husband, Arjun Mitra, thinks that she should, instead of feeling bored and idle, take interest in the library and neighbourhood. The result is that Uma breaks down. She takes to drinking and seeking sexual satisfaction from anyone who comes her way ignoring public humiliation and scandal. In her response to the questionnaire given by Neena Arora and appended as Appendix in Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing : A Feminist Study in Comparison, Sahgal gives her response to the question on the character of Uma as follows :

Woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thinking. She has to be ‘good’ and good means virtuous in the sense of chaste. Uma was a woman with appetites that her husband couldn’t satisfy, so she indulged them elsewhere. (114)

Sahgal sympathises with Uma.
Mira in *Morning* is able to find happiness within the conventional framework of life through strength of her character. She is able to break away from the engagement to Ravi Krishnan. She represents the attitude of a typical orthodox Indian woman. Married to Kailas, she considers it her sacred duty to look after him, to be dedicated to his cause and to share “him with his country, with his foil and not share him so much as fake what was left of him afterwards” (48). She finds no reason for divorce but is shocked when her daughter decides to seek divorce from her husband:

What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstance, to brutal insensitive husband... to lunatics and lepers. (146)

Rashmi in *Morning* has sexual affair with Neil Berensen, a stranger. Sex with him comes natural to her. She does not find emotional stability with him. She accepts:

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 another total commitment; another portion of weakness and strength, good and bad, courage and fear? (157-58)

Diversion and deviation are the escape routes of the pent-up suffocation for all women to overcome their physical and emotional thirsts, either by transcending them or by submission to frivolities of life. There are women who rebel against orthodoxy. Rashmi of *Morning* is one such woman, who rebels against orthodoxy. She is married to Dalip.
She finds herself entrapped in an unhappy marriage. She feels herself as a ‘moth trapped in quant’. She complains: “How like prolonged starvation wrong marriage could be, robbing lustre, defeating courage and will” (13). She always has feelings of being hurt by her husband. She seeks communication with her husband and an involvement and commitment. She asserts: “We have to invade each others privacy of little, forces things a little or we shall stay just where we are” (156). However, in the end of the novel, her unhappiness in her marriage culminates in divorce. She goes back to her parents and moves closer to her childhood friend Rakesh, who seems to be loving her.

In the character of Nita in *Morning*, Sahgal explores the role of a woman in Indian society before marriage. Nita is the young and beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang, who is a queer blend of Eastern and Western cultures. While Western life-style-drinks, dance and bridge-is part of his culture, when it comes to his daughter, he would act in the most traditional manner, imposing severe restrictions on the movement of his ambitious daughter. The Narangs never send their daughter unescorted to Parties; as Mrs. Narang puts it: "We don't allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it” (30). The Narangs's concern for the safety and protection of their daughter exemplifies their conformity to traditional values. Sahgal refers to the rigid social codes in her *Happy*, where Sanad, a young officer working in a foreign company "Selkirk and Lowe," wants to spend his evening with girls like his English officers but dare not do it, because "well brought up young Indian women did not go out with young men unchaperoned. To be seen alone in public with a man would have been scandal enough for the rigid code of a provincial town.” (116). In her essay “Women: Persons or Possessions," Sahgal
condemns such attitudes which 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)

In a traditional society when a young girl reaches puberty, her movements are restricted, whereas there are no restrictions for her brothers at that age. The double standards start operating more overtly from this stage, binding girls indoors and encouraging boys to develop outdoor activities. A spirit of competition, exploration and challenge is inculcated among boys and they are taught to assert their supremacy over the world in general. Girls, on the contrary, are discouraged from showing aggressive modes of behaviour, and, instead feminine virtues of grace, modesty and self-effacement are frequently demanded from them.

Nita's parents would not allow their daughter to smoke, to have drinks or attend club dances till she is married. When Rakesh, as an escort, takes her to a ball one evening, en route she questions these conventions:

"I really would like a cigarette," said Nita.

"You can't have one."

"Well, I keep cigarettes in my room. Daddy doesn't know. Isn't it silly not being allowed to do anything until one is married?" (32)

Marriage seems to be a licence to do things hitherto prohibited. Mrs. Narang who speaks fluent English, and "had been a beauty" (148) once, has friends who would gather around
the card table and discuss marriage plans of their daughters. There is a "parade of coffee-drinking, canasta-playing women who streamed through the house" (148) of Narangs. Nita abhors this "Victorian culture" and only pines for a "little latitude, some breathing space" (148). In her book, The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan has suggested that a woman can find fulfilment only in some creative work of her own. Nita too has a thirst to do something, and does not want to be bound by nuptial knots as yet. She requests Rakesh to influence her parents in the matter: "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. It's ghastly doing nothing." (32) Later, her parents do allow her to take up a job but for very different reasons. Kalyan, a Minister, had offered the job and they simply "didn't have the heart to refuse" (147) a Minister's offer. But Nita looks for something more than merely a job. She strives for independence and her individual identity. She thinks: "A job was never enough .... A job led to money and freedom, and freedom demanded a flat of one's own, away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices" (148) of men and women who do not permit women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfilment. Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique accuses society of considering "identity crisis" as man's problem only. The "crises of growing up, of choosing his identity, the decisions as to what one is and is going to be, (68) are considered only male prerogatives, and women are told that “truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence and the opportunities” (13). Conforming to these tenets, in Indian society, the efforts of most of the parents are to find a suitable match of their choice for their daughters. Nita's parents also want to settle down their daughter in marriage and wash
their hands off. 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. Nita's suitor is an eligible bachelor, rich and pleasant-mannered and "she had nothing against him, only she did not want to marry him" (TH 149) because she cannot reconcile herself to the fact that Vijay is a stranger "with whom she would spend her life, whose name and children she would bear." (150) However, she fails to assert herself in refusing to marry a man of her parents's choice. And Mrs. Narang is certainly a woman who subscribes to the conventions where women not only accept stereotype images but also pass them on to their children. She also proves to be an oppressive force when she compels her daughter to marry "one of those men they introduced her to at parties." (148)

At a patty in Rakesh's house, Nita dances with her fiance Vijay. Rakesh, glancing at the pair, says to Saira, “She does not look very happy," (167) to which she replies sarcastically: "'She says she doesn't know him very well.' The American girl from U.S.I.S. looked at them puzzled. ‘She doesn’t? Why’s she marrying him?’ ‘She’ll know him better after they’re married,’ said Saira” (167-68). Nita feels utterly unhappy and a sense of uneasiness over-powers her when she learns about her parents's decision to marry her off to a stranger. But the desire to be her own self in her role as a Wanton and loving woman leads her to commit a faux pas, when she gets involved with an elderly man, Kalyan. When she first meets him, she "stood mesmerized in front of him” (135). She finds a strange comfort in his company and visits him frequently on the pretext of decorating his drawing room. Once, she refuses to go home and frankly expresses her love for Kalyan:
"But don't make me go."

He rose from his chair, "Nita ..."

She got up, too, and came like a sleep walker into his arms, clinging to him. "Don't make me go, please don't make me go."

He took her by the hand and then to his room. (152)

Nita's pre-marital involvement is not the result of the Western liberated life-style; it is an attempt to fulfil her inner desires for love and communication. As Jasbir Jain in “Aesthetics of Morality : Sexual Relations in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” opines about Nita's sexual involvement with Kalyan: "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 turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by conventions” (42). Though Nita is engaged, emotionally she is still dependant on Kalyan and often meets him to shower her tenderness on him. She tells him: "You gave me the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I'd never have known it but for you," (219) and she finally admits: "I've been so happy with you" (220). Nita, in fact, is the product of the dichotomies in her up-bringing. On the one hand, she is brought up in accordance with the liberated life-style, but when the time comes to decide about her marriage, her parents decide her future and she is supposed to silently submit to their wishes. She succumbs the role of a passive sufferer.

Through the character of Nita, Sahgal seems to be exposing conventional narrow-
minded Indian society, where life-partners are chosen by the parents: the parents arrange for the two young souls to live happily ever after. Sahgal strongly attacks this social convention and names this kind of marriage just an organized rape. Though she sounds like avant-garde feminists who reject the institution of marriage and motherhood, yet she does not reject either of the two but advocates harmonious relationships and individual liberties in her novels. She also condemns the hypocrisies of the affluent upper-classes where women are encouraged to take drinks or to smoke in the name of freedom and modernity (which, however, is a taboo for women belonging to the middle or lower classes in Indian society), but are not allowed to take independent decision in choosing their life partners.

Celia, like Barbara, is aware of Kalyan Sinha’s incapacity for love and tenderness and yet loves him. Kalyan, Celia feels:

Possessed it against all the rules. He did his best, if anything, to be disliked. What was there about him, she wondered, was it realness? He never pretended to be what he wasn’t. His disdain for convention was genuine. (62)

The relationship between Celia and Kalyan is not the reciprocal one of love. Kalyan has never belonged to her even in his moments of passion. He had never given any indications that he had a heart. If he is lonely, the loneliness is that of his own creation. Later, his relationship with Nita follows the same familiar pattern and it is a relationship of yearning and longing on one side and indifference on the other till the moment of his personal defeat.
Another kind of victim is Mrs. Narang of *Morning*. She has had no opportunity to realise what she wants from life and therefore there is no question of defiance or rebellion. In her case, it is abject resignation and Rakesh finds her tense and unhappy when he visits the Narang. She has long ceased to be a person in her own right and has become a mere puppet trying to fulfil the role conferred upon her.

There are other women characters who assume the role of victims and oppressors both like Uma Mitra of *Morning* and Leela Dubey of *Chandigarh*. They are victims of a social system which leaves no scope to individual freedom because they make no effort to overcome it. Uma, married to a man much older than her, refuses to conform to the expectations of her husband. Uma is young and gay and she finds no means of self-expression within her marriage. She gives free rein to her wilderness and flaunts her non-conformity in her husband’s face. Arjun and Uma drift apart and are estranged both physically and emotionally. It is many years later that Arjun realises his own share in the failure of their marriage and regrets that “though we give our enemies another chance... we never forgive those we love” (167).

The female characters in *Chandigarh* wriggle out of the strait-jacket of virtuous stereotype images and emerge as individuals. This is brought out clearly in the portrayal of far from ideal marriages of three young couples-- Vishal-Leela, Inder-Saroj, and Jit-Mara. The novel chronicles the tempestuous tale of a city torn by divided political loyalties. It portrays the young hearts broken up by compulsions of matrimony and call of new-found love. Vishal, a young civil servant, gets inadvertently involved in the private lives of estranged couples. Married to Leela, who radiates health, vivacity, a
mood of bubbling gaiety, Vishal tries to reach the person in her, "the friend with whom one could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself" but she leaves him empty of the reality of herself. Their marriage "turns out to be a vanishing search for communication" (23) because mutual "infidelity" was something at the core of their dreams and longings that proves "fatal to fulfilment through marriage" (70). After bearing the tortures of remorse with which his relationship with Leela abruptly ended due to her death, Vishal then strays accidently into the region of Gauri’s natural, luxuriously feminine bounty. She is married to Nikhil Ray, an industrialist, but madly in love with Vishal who "could leave her with ease and come back to her with the certainty of a welcome" because everything about Gauri, discovers Vishal, is "lovely and languid and opulent" (19). As she passes warm and pliant into his arms, she makes no emotional demands on him because she was happy with her husband. She has no pretensions about her virtuosity. She takes the image of a "social butterfly with positively no interest in life beyond my own (her) comforts and pleasures." (162)

While Gauri derives comfort and pleasure in her extra-marital affairs, Saroj suffers under the brute male heel of an uncompromising and fickle husband, Inder. They are two entirely different kinds of people. Inder is a man with a confident, muscular grace, radiating energy, a product of the he-man school, while his wife belongs to the sphere of intense, sharpened sensibility. When these two people with diverse ethnic background and temperamental incompatibilities get married, it is but natural, comments Gauri that “every effort at growth on the part of one can look like an act of betrayal to the other" (160). It is not Saroj's assertions that fracture her marriage but the nasty fact about
"the other man, the one who had known Saroj before he [Inder] had" (93) The revelation continues to haunt Inder and fills his mind with revulsion against Saroj, a situation reminiscent of Hardy's Tess who suffers for her loss of chastity. As a result. Saroj forfeits the "right to radiance the day she had told him of her first experience and been branded sinner" (95). Though in normal moments Inder absolves Saroj of her fault, he cannot however, exercise the ghost of the other man and blames her for her impurity. Saroj suffers abjectly, but in order to make living with Inder possible, she surrenders to the terms and conditions that had "ancient, tribal, male roots" (96). Though she might be considered used, soiled, and unfit for marriage, Inder loves her, not as a person but as a possession, thus undermining the genuine basis of conjugal bliss that flows from their relationship. His attitude sounds anachronistic in the setting of the novel because, in spite of his westernization, Inder turns out to be a prisoner of an outdated male cult which clearly demarcates "the roles of men and women" (96). But sex with Saroj comes easily and satisfactorily to him but even that cost him an effort to make it, for it calls for his lingering attention and demands that he gives her part of himself for a while for specific reason. That kind of companionship has always been difficult for him, just as to take a walk with Saroj becomes meaningless expenditure of time because of his keen absorption in his Weaving Mill. So Saroj, like most of her ilk, remains “subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self-expression had not even begun" (189). But with the advent of Vishal in their home, Saroj begins to believe in her own purity. Vishal becomes a liberating agent for Saroj as he tells her that it is life's precious obligation to rebel, arid humanity's right to be free. Influenced by Vishal's
views, Saroj understands that "within the desirable woman, behind the eyes, the mouth, the breasts, there was a struggling, imperfect human being to be valued for her own sake" (192). She is struggling out of the blind alley. She finds her way out by renouncing "her begging bowl and with it her capacity to be broken" (202). She feels familiar warmth and security enveloping her in the circle of Vishal's arms and learns to "live without pretence" (201). The new awareness prepares her to "leave now because this was not home" (237) but a prison where she was incarcerated physically and spiritually. By moving out of Inder's house, Saroj moves out of the virtuous stereotype which consigns a woman to perpetual humiliation and denies her self-expression.

Unlike Saroj, Mara suffers from an acute sense of emptiness in her life. Slenderly feminine, she possesses strength and resolution, and wants all the worlds, "a perpetual seeking beyond her own safe domestic frontiers" (55). Her marriage with sweet-tempered and considerate Jit has its share of estrangements and misgivings, but their differences dissolve in the compromising disposition of her husband. As Jit is away to Delhi to attend to his business, the howling loneliness assails Mara. She begins to take stock of her situation, and wonders if the man she had met at a party and married eight years earlier was, after all, her destination. The privacy of her thoughts is ruptured with the arrival of Inder who has developed a peculiar intimacy with her. As he guzzles down two drinks, she enquires about his wife's extramarital talk with Vishal. Disgusted with Mara's audacious but candid remark, Inder thinks of times when such things could not be spoken, or even thought of. He discovers to his horror that women talk and behave like men. But Mara, who has been brought up and educated in foreign countries, is quick to
disillusion Inder’s mind and put the whole issue in proper perspective by remarking that now-a-days women "just behave more like human beings and less like possessions" (102).

As a person who is characterized by her independence, resolution, brilliant education and deep awareness, Mara is unable to diagnose the cause of her discontent. Jit is also seized of the problem that bedevils their marital bliss, and looks for ways to bring Mara's unhappiness to rest. May be, he thought, it has something to do with the chemistry of their character, but is mistaken. In fact, Mara needed at times to be "pried loose from her attitudes, shaken into yielding" but the sweet and "soft" Jit "lacked the coarser grain of behaviour that could have accomplished it" (105). It is this coarseness in Inder to which Mara is drawn, in spite of her obvious dislike for his manners. But trying to know Inder is like walking on a soapy surface. Mara does not wish to make love to a mystery. Above all, she wishes intensely that she does not live "two lives." The duality of it tears her asunder. However, as they sit down clinging on the sofa in Inder's office in a terrible, longed-for intimacy, a frantic thought flashes through her mind. With an effort she struggles up as Inder clasps her but she wants him to meet more and get to know each other, rather than stumble into love-making. This encounter exposes Inder to a new realm of awareness. He experiences a strange but exquisite thrill in such things and an aimless fever drops off him and he recognizes a new feeling, respect that was missing in his relations with women. Mara’s love had allayed the sharp distinction between bed and not-bed that lay buried in Inder's consciousness. Through this self-induced process, Mara finds an answer to the storm rising in her against placidity, “against the belief that
everything went on and on uninterrupted and unchanged" (106).

Through the portrayal of Leela, Gauri, Saroj and Mara who enact peculiarities under the facade of fidelity, Sahgal holds no view for their attitudes. Yet, focussing on their actions and inter-action with others, she author holds a mirror to the society that subjects its women to worst type of inhuman exploitation, and perpetuates the myth of her "otherness." Leela, Gauri, Saroj and Mara define themselves through their revolt against the obsolete ways of the world, and experience the thrill of emancipation in their flight from the virtuous stereotype that has been thrust on them since patriarchal times.

Even after four years of married life and having two children, Inder continues to develop a deep seated doubt about Saroj's loyalty and brutally pesters her with persistent questions on her pre-marital affair:

"A friend? To go to bed with? How many times did it happen?"

"I don't know. I can't remember"

[...] For each time she had lived through a night's torment,

[...] "How many times?" He repeated in the flat, taut monotone of illness.

"Four, five. It was so long ago. I'm not sure."

"You're not sure." The voice, remote and dangerous, unpredictable as a rawhide whip, flicked at her nerves. (94)

Once when they as a family are on a picnic, all on a sudden Inder starts questioning Saroj about her past:

"Well, why did you do it? That is what I keep coming back to?
Why did you do it?"

"I was fond of him," she said wearily, "and I was curious. Is that a crime?"

"Good God [...]. Wouldn't your curiosity wait till you got married?" (129)

Inder can love Saroj only in the capacity of an obedient slave, a possession or commodity. He can never think of her as a person with ideas, feelings and emotions. To Inder, a business man "A wife was one half an enterprise, the compliant partner, who presided over home and children and furthered her husband’s career” (53). Inder is unable to view any other kind of relationship other than this with Saroj. M.L. Malhotra in Bridges of Literature rightly points out the male-chauvinism in Inder thus:

Belong as he does to the he-man school and born and brought up as he is in an atmosphere, where male-dominance is a formidable cult, there is no question of any freedom or self-expression or growth for Saroj, nor of any mutual co-partnership between them. (230)

Saroj willingly accepts her role as a wife to Inder and tries her best to adjust, compromise, and strengthen her relationship with Inder but in vain. She has been living in the house entirely on Inder's terms. Yet, she finds no happiness or satisfaction in her conjugal relationship. She has to strive hard to build a working relationship with her husband who bars her entry into his world. She does not feel free to express her thoughts and she is all the time afraid "of saying the wrong thing or of being misunderstood, just of being oneself and being punished for” (89). She feels alienated and expresses with deep anguish and distress, “I am alone even when Inder is here” (23). She boldly puts up
with Inder's idiosyncrasies for the sake of her two children and as she is expecting her third child, she finds it very difficult to keep on living with her husband under the same roof with no real bond between them.

The case of Simrit in Shadow is different that of Saroj in Chandigarh. But both of them remain victims of male prejudices of a patriarchal society. Simrit has never had a premarital sex like that of Saroj. She married Som by her own choice. Som is flashy and vulgar. She is quite withdrawing and look loving in nature. In her married life to Som, she finds herself drifting away from him. Sahgal relates

They had got on easily enough the surface and they had created a game of its own in which intensity, depth and devotion were never brought into play at all. Nor was partnership. Som, the rougher element had led. Not that she had wanted to lead only to be thought that would have meant a battle and she had never been prepared to fight. (4)

Annis Pratt in Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction calls Simrit’s marriage to Som as an “enclosure in the patriarchy” (39-40). She finds that she has been robbed of her freedom – her freedom to be and her freedom to choose. To Som, Simrit is a property. He proudly tells Lalli: “Look what I’ve got. Good enough to keep under lock and key” (27). Simrit is a companion only in bed. Sex with him is “an act with beginning and an end with nothing in between or even afterwards” (Jain, Nayantara 57-8). Som avoids her in business deals.

Simrit opts to dissolve a marriage seventeen years old. After divorce, she has
problems not only in coping with her own irrational fears and tensions but also with society which does not recognize a woman's role and her identity apart from her husband's. The role and images divorced woman is stigmatized for ever. She is curiously watched by others as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks. The mere habit of living with someone for many years makes it difficult for Simrit to accept the idea of living alone, all by herself. The frightening dream that she has gives an idea of her inner disintegration where pain follows her like a shadow never leaving her even for a moment:

She was clinging to a balustrade at the very top of the building, within reach of the sky, when her fingers were wrenched loose, one by one, and she was hurled to the pavement below. The queer thing was that no one took any notice of her fall. Cars and people kept going by. A deafening scream, her own. went on and on. . . . She picked herself up in panic and was relieved to find she did not fall apart. She held. She took a deep breath. . . . My skin is whole, not even a break or a split in it anywhere. It's the inside that has gone to pieces, and I'll just have to go along very carefully from now on... The pain, a leper-like thing, detached itself from her and walked beside her to the end of the pavement, the end of the road and beyond. (DS 50-51)

Outraged at the brutal implications of the "Consent Terms," Simrit in her role as a deserted woman feels very diminished and humiliated. The huge amounts of tax she will have to pay on an income she cannot even use are staggering and she accepts her role as a
"over-loaded donkey ... with its back breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can't see it, but because it's a donkey and loads are for donkeys" (56). In the renewed anguish, while talking to Som's lawyer, she sees her life with Som as no different from her present one. She visualizes her role / image:

May be she had always been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told. And in return she had been fed and sheltered. (57)

Simrit assumes the role of a "liberated" woman who has the courage to break a long relationship which has become meaningless with no sense of companionship or partnership between husband and wife. But she opts for divorce when already another male support is waiting for her outside marriage. The situation, in fact, is rather a fantasy. She steps out of the sheltered world of Som not to live a life on her own, in her own way but to step into the shadow of another man. She really does not have to struggle alone for survival, neither at the economic level nor at the emotional one which leaves woman even more disintegrated and vulnerable. Commenting on Simrit’s concept of freedom, T. Asoka Rani in “Nayantara Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow : A Feminist Perspective” says:

Simrit’s concept of freedom cannot be mistaken for more political or economic independence. It is a way of doing things one believes to be right and thus assert one’s individuality. She is disappointed to realise that there is no place for free communication of ideas, friendship and partnership in the world of Som, dominated by overwhelming ambition and money. This denial of freedom leads her to a state of suffocation.
Som’s growing obsession with power and wealth, his opinion of Simrit as an object fit only for physical pleasure naturally lead to gradual estrangement between them. (69)

Simrit draws upon Raj’s strength and understanding to resist the desperation of her situation. Raj-Simrit relationship begins with the mind and not the body. They seek fulfilment not as possessions but as individuals. Listening to Raj, Simrit feels that she is lifted out and soothed. She muses: "After all attraction had to start somewhere and what better starting point than the mind?" (160). Ramkrishan perceives the fatal combine of love and friendship in their relationship. He knows that physical love alone cannot sustain a relationship unless to it is added a milder food of friendship. Only friendship can last long and he sincerely believes that Raj and Simrit "would enjoy even a distance between them" (182). Simrit is aware that in marrying Raj, there is every possibility that her physical as well as psychological needs are met without losing her dignity and sense of equality and that she can live a truer life without any pretence. Shyam M. Asnani in *Critical Response to Indian English in Fiction* says:

The personal world of Raj and Simrit, grounded in sympathy and understanding, human communication and friendship, rather than bestial sensuality and cruel insensitivity, seems to be the world that Nayantara not only wishes to depict but also prescribes as the only sane and sensible alternative to the machinistic world of power, atrocities and greed. (30)
In the process of emancipation, it has become necessary for Simrit to get rid of her fears and inhibitions. She has to overcome social opinion and orthodoxy on the one hand and personal hesitation and reluctance on the other. She continues to think, despite divorce, that her connection with Som is continued through her children and hence is besieged by feelings of guilt at her association with Raj. When Simrit meets Som to discuss the Consent Terms, Som's meanness comes before her in full proportions and perhaps this is the reason of her sudden feeling of being liberated from guilty feeling. She announces to Raj: "I'd got rid of my guilt. It was gone without a trace and in its place there was a strong, positive feeling" (DS 208).

Though Simrit loves Raj, she is not prepared to marry him, at least till her problems are solved. But Raj is particular that they should marry immediately so that he can share her problems and make her happy. Simrit is a middle-aged divorcee without money but with children and a tax problem. Hence, no motives can be attributed to Raj's eagerness other than love for her and when she too loves him, he does not find any reason to prolong the relationship without the sanctity of marriage.

The woman’s quest for self fructifies in Sonali in Rich. She is with what Ravi calls “burning brightness” (260). She is brave. She has strong individuality. She cannot stand for dictatorship “not even of the prolefariat, not even as a passing phase because who knows the phase might get stuck and never pass” (112). Sonali is critical of Emergency. She says:
We knew this was no emergency. If it had been priorities would have been quite different. We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stale for a family race. And we were involved in a conspiracy of silence which is why we were careful not to do more than say hallo when we passed each other in the building. (29)

She is distressed at the conditions of people. She is distressed at the distress of Rose and does everything in her power to help her. She loves Ravi but she does not regret having not married him. When Ravi admits his love for her and tells her that he had to marry someone else because of his mother, he tells her: “Its too late now, but if we had our time over again, I’d work it out differently” (261), Sonali breaks him into crumbles:

This admission of waste, of years gone and opportunity lost, filled me with a sweet relief. Isolated from all that happened outside our private creation it had the wonder for me of broken ends mending, of Kechru becoming Ravi again, of friendship resuming of love having been really loved and not a mistake, he had been trying to forget. (261)

Sonali thinks positively. She has so many vicissitudes in her life.

In Delhi, Dev’s role is too uncommitted to emerge as an individual. She is forty-four and is deprived of both her past and future. She has lived too long in the glory of her illustrious brother’s charismatic hold on people. Now, when she is on her own, she finds herself isolated and lonely. Her marriage with Ishwar has left her with only one reality – the birth of their son Rishad. And her sexual relationships with both Usman and Michael
are temporary and based on pretensions which she does not acknowledge. She does not have the courage to defy conventions. She is not able to free herself from the past. Her sense of duty towards Shivraj and attachment for him are life-denying for her. Sex under these circumstances is only a release from her emotional tensions and an act of renewal. She uses men for her survival. They—Michael with his broken marriage and Usman in distancing from Nadira—allow themselves to be used.

In Departure, Anna assumes the role of a committed feminist and she has a semi-inarticulate need to be herself before her marriage. She is employed at a remote hill station for three months by an Indian scientist, Sir Nitin Basu. In fact, she has been originally invited by Nitin's sister, Didi. Anna is also a seeker. Anna's Danishness is designed to keep her outside the power struggle. Her Danishness is a guarantee of her impartiality. It makes her outlandish and unsettling to Sir Nitin. Anna's independence of mind and her feminism are integral to her character and influence her sympathies and her perception of events in Himapur. Anna has a revulsion against power and dominance and a passionate and practical belief in self-liberation. Gun Organ in "The Western Woman in India: Contextualising Plans for Departure” says:

Anna's characterization is markedly similar to that of the unnamed narrator in Ruth Jhabvala's novel Heat and Dust, who herself represents a radical rewriting of the conventional image of the English woman in India [...]. At a first glance Anna and Jhabvala's narrators show similar
characteristics: they too are 'unfeminine' in contrast to the ultra-feminine
'memsahib' images that we are accustomed to, conforming neither to the
English, nor the Indian conventions of feminity. (118-19)

Anna has an image of the mixture of the traditionally stereotyped masculine and feminine
qualities of strength, instinct, and vision. Though Anna mirrors the early models of the
western woman, she inherits feminism as she decides to breakout and be herself.

Anna’s difficulty is with the ‘tangled’ nature of ‘present truths’ typified by her
endeavour to unravel the mystery behind Stella's departure from Himapur. Fascinated,
and increasingly infatuated by the District Magistrate, Henry Brewster, a man who
suffered from philosophy, and had chronic attacks of ruling class conscience (28), Anna
feels compelled to understand his deep unhappiness, but no one in Himapur seems to
know exactly why Stella left, and whether she would be back. In her search to
understand Stella, Anna is faced with two contradictory representations of her: one a
touched-up and artificial studio picture taken by the local photographer, Madhav Rao and
the other a group of pictures taken by her husband, showing her and their daughter Jennie
first sitting peacefully under a tree, then her jumping up and trailing her daughter behind
her, then her walking away agitatedly even as her husband was taking the pictures.

Trying to take in the impressions offered by these photographs, the confusion that marks
the rest of Anna's stay in Himapur starts:

Which was more like Stella Brewster, the gypsy under a tree after apple
harvest time, who had jumped up impulsively and gone? Or this solemn,
brown-eyed woman, official and majestic against red plush and Corinthian pillars, who seemed to be there for all eternity? ... Anna felt confused.... Present truths were so tangled. They yielded almost nothing willingly, to one's gaze. It was easier to deal with the distant past, and even the distant future. (54)

Anna's vision for all her 'European efficiency' and purposeful uphill strides around Himapur lets her imagination, as well as her beliefs – in feminism and in independence - colour and form her impressions. Trying to figure out the Brewsters' domestic crisis, she compares Stella's departure with the plight of earlier, literary women:

The Portuguese nun deserted by her French chevalier had spent the rest of her days clawing at the walls of her Franciscan convent. Madame Butterfly had died of song... And the one or two who had run away had come to a sticky end, in suicide or disgrace. But Stella, instead of falling about in a faint, had had the guts to pack up and leave and make a life somewhere else, though she, too, might as well have been the figment of someone’s literary imagination. There was nothing to prove a flesh and blood woman had ever been here, except two clashing photographs of her and a white bedroom, sterile as a gauze bandage. (76)

Anna's mental picture of Stella's departure indeed proves to be a figment of her imagination in many ways. Her admiration of Stella’s unconventionality in having the
guts to leave her husband to 'make a life elsewhere' proves unfounded, as she finds out later that Stella was making a gesture towards convention, by leaving her husband whose ruling-class conscience and ambition to join the newly-founded Labour Party she did not share. Anna's failure at forming an objective view of the Indian present is flung in her face once again, when she, detective-like, wrongly believes she has found 'evidence' that Henry Brewster had killed Stella the day she 'packed up and left' Himapur for her lover. Anna had wanted to believe, with a mixture of romantic yeaming and feminist idealism, that Stella's departure had been an expression of independence, but the reality is disappointingly undramatic.

A similar liberated character is presented through Bhushan Singh’s mother in Sahgal’s latest novel **Identity**, despite the fact that she is a product of a highly conservative age and society. Bhushan Singh recalls, for instance, how his mother had originally been confined to 'Zenana' (women's section of the house) with its high walls blocking it off from the rest of the mansion:

Mother saw the world through the slit between her carriage curtain when she went out, more rarely through tinted glass after Father bought cars, because she preferred her carriage. And, otherwise, she saw it through barred windows (MI 26).

The senior ranee (Bhushan's mother) of the princely state of Vijaygarh in the novel is hardly allowed any exposure to the outside world. She was married at the age of five and brought to her husband's home at thirteen and she had to wait for nine long years to be blessed with a son. Bhushan's father married thrice while his mother suffered literally in
that prison house of marriage till her elopement with Yusuf.

Bhushan's mother was in no position to voice her disapproval when her husband took his second and third wives. In fact, after the third marriage of her husband, according to Bhushan "she has never been the same since. She has another ambition. She wants to turn into stone" (32). Oddly enough, society encourages such ostentatious life style of men and willingly approves of such marriages. The third marriage as Bhushan recalls : "is very public and a very popular wedding. Our public buildings were electrically illuminated by special generators and there were more singers, dancers, wrestlers, acrobats, food, drinks and poetry than the first or second time" (33). With scant regard for the feeling of Bhushan's mother, society bestows blessings on his father's marriage. Bhushan's mother believes that she alone has the right to be his wife and she is certainly not content to be the mistress of the household.

As a discarded Ranee, deprived of freedom, choice and fulfilment, Bhushan’s mother comes to know Yusuf, her son's prison mate, very late in life when her son is about to marry Yusuf's daughter. Yusuf turns out to be an extremely kind man, sensitive to her every need and equally desirous of freedom. Deep within herself, Bhushan's mother has been all along an emancipated soul and when she comes across the right opportunity she freely expresses her thirst for freedom. Her rejecting the social convention is like coming out of a chrysalis. Ironically enough, the same society which had celebrated grandly each of the weddings of Bhushan's father taking his mother's acceptance for granted, feels quite outraged when she decides to take on another partner. Bhushan dismisses with contempt the stand taken by the society and says:
Society has not forgiven this liaison between an illiterate ranee and her communist lover and the shameless public exhibition they make of it. But Mother and Yusuf are so love mad, they haven't noticed their notoriety, I can't say any of it surprises me as far as Mother is concerned. (193-194)

In fact, Bhushan's mother "who has been sentenced to that greenish light of unfulfilled desire" (194), ill treated and despised by her husband leaves the family mansion for a fuller life with Yusuf. Bhushan recalls in vivid yet poetic terms the moment of his mother's departure:

Early one morning she left the family mansion. I saw her hesitate for a second at the entrance and hold her breath before she walked out to start in the most sensational scandal of the generation. (193)

Yusuf takes the travel hungry ranee straight to Leningrad in winter to show her the fall of snow flakes. Thus having thrown the taboos of the Zenana to the dust bins, Bhushan's mother goes happily to live with comrade Yusuf. Shyam M Asnani and Ramesh Chanda in “Female Quest for Identity in Nayantara Sahgal’s Novels” observe:

Unorthodox, unconventional and rebellious, she daringly breaks all traditional taboos and steps out of the palace (symbolic of traditional anchorage) forever to live openly with her son's erstwhile prison comrade the urbane Yusuf all for love (72).

In one of her interviews with S. Varalakshmi on being questioned about her women characters in Identity, Sahgal observed:
The mother of Bhushan Singh is one of the strongest in the book and partly this is the story of her liberation. She is the archetype of the woman in purdah. The woman who has been shackled all her life. She had had no say from childhood about whom she would marry, when she would marry, whether she wants to have children, how many and I have hinted that two were disposed of because, they were girls. In all this she has been an object. She has not been a subject. And yet this woman breaks loose and becomes the most outrageously liberated creature by getting this handsome Muslim lover and they are madly in love. (17)

Bhushan's mother like Sahgal's early protagonists Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit, steps into the shadow of another man Yusuf, who can understand her and communicate with her better than her husband.

Other images of victims of society are young girls like Leela in Morning and Madhu in Delhi. In their role as women they suffer injustice at the hands of society and at the hands of an individual. Leela, coming from Benares, the heartland of Hindu civilization, the ancient, sacred city on the banks of the Ganges, the city of changeless antiquity still in the strangle hold of the past, finds her confrontation with modernity to be a disastrous one. Unable to seek help from others, when she becomes pregnant in America, she commits suicide. Pankaj K. Singh in "Feminism and Nayantara Sahgal's The Day in Shadow and Rich Like Us: From the Particular to the Ideological" argues that Sahgal has been moving to 'a recognizable feminist position, from the subjective point of view in Shadow to the objective evaluation of social conditions in Rich:
"Unlike The Day in Shadow which almost naturalizes the arbitrary power dimension between the genders, Rich Like Us firmly rejects the arbitrary distribution of power, be it on the purely political level as it was during the Emergency or on the interpersonal and familial level as in the gender roles in society" (145). Singh substantiates her point by analyzing Shadow in detail. She sees a "central paradox" in "Simrit's overdependence on Raj": "In a novel that seemed to begin with a woman's decision to seek freedom, ironically it is man [sic] who constantly provides the norm" (140). She rightly points out that Simrit "passes on from one man's world into 'another man's" and that she "fails to see Raj’s prejudices, biases. superficialities" (139-40). The book, in fact, ends with Raj's one-sided announcement of marriage before Ram Krishen.

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 the strong sense of individuality and analytic mind but shuttling between two places: traditional and modern values. Sahgal’s women are so oppressed and suppressed and dominated by patriarchal society. Yet they are the created images of the Indian society. The image created by Sahgal is bound by the collective and related assumptions of Indian culture which groups them and labels them as inferior. Hence the need to assert their identity comes when they are valorized and victimized. So that only Sree Rashmi Talwar in Woman’s Space: The Mosaic World of Margaret Drabble and Nayantara Sahgal says:

In the fictional world of Sahgal, the complex of womanhood therefore cannot be visualized without relating it to the Indian socio-cultural
context. The Indian image of woman, as in every other enduring culture, is bound by the collective and related assumptions of culture and society. The first one is the disallowing of an effective role playing of woman, an accretion over long periods of anticipated precepts. The next is the symbolic identity of woman as one victimized and made captive of man. Inspite of the fact that culture often makes woman ‘reactive’, confining the individual to operate within its parameters, it has positive aspects. (101)

Sree Rashmi Talwar further observes:

This is precisely why Sahgal juxtaposes two prototypes of woman, the traditional and the not so traditional Indian women. What initially may seem to be a conflict of tradition and modernity in reality suggests an endorsement of the continuity of the livingness of tradition and not its fossilized forms. Though Sahgal politicizes the issue, Sahgal is not iconoclastic. Rather she is a reformist. Her image of the New Indian Woman is an amalgamation of the last of the old and the best of the new dispensation. (102)

Sahgal’s creation of the images of woman as submissive and revolting is due to the oppression and suppression of women in one way or the other. Women are made to be voiceless and ignored in the form of marriage, sex and so on. She never questions the validity of marriage rather questions women’s role in marriage. As a result, her novels
treat the themes like love, marriage, sexual fulfilment, and exploitation of women. It is as Sree Rashmi Talwar further details:

As no individual is divorced from his/her social culture, Sahgal’s fictional women-Maya, Rashmi, Saroj, and Simrit – are products of a particular milieu and race. In her treatment of womanhood, Sahgal does not so much question the emphasis on the role making or playing of the woman as much as the social forces in the name of tradition and culture stifling a woman’s personality. As a result, in her fiction the concepts of arranged marriage, chastity, of sexual love, fulfillment and the exploitation of women are unravelled within candour… (102)

Sahgal has a keen perception of woman’s mind. Though she has chosen themes related to women in her novels, she is optimistic in delineating man-woman relationships in her novels as they enact the drama of the two-man and woman. Her men characters fail to dominate in her works. It is her women who become admirable and who are caught up in a struggle. They try to gain their selfhood and sympathy. They want to assert themselves as human beings. They want unfettered freedom from the cultures of Male dominated society. It is as G. Damodar in “Selfhood Assertion in Sahgal” asserts:

The portrayal of men-woman relationship in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal revolves round two dominant themes – a changing India with the times and the communication gap between individuals, especially wife and husband. The conflict in changing scenario causes unhappiness and prevents them from fulfilling themselves as human beings. Nayantara,
being a humanist, is for unfettered freedom. She pleads for a new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centredness. Her artistic vision is intensely moral with profound respect for the affirmative values of life. It is with these themes and ideals that Nayantara portrays her women characters to bring about their selfhood assertions in the changing social milieu. (39)

Sahgal as a trenchant defender of human values pleads for enduring comradeship, frank and friendly communication, a compassionate approach in order to untangle the personal and social problems, more particularly the problem of man-woman relationship.