CHAPTER III

NAYANTARA SAHgal
A full appreciation and interpretation of Nayantara Sahgal's novels must begin with an understanding of her family background. She was born and brought up in a family where equality and freedom prevailed. In her autobiographical piece *From Fear Set Free* and in her various other articles, she mentions that at her birth she was welcomed in the family as a baby and not as a baby 'girl'. Her father Ranjit Pandit, a great Sanskrit scholar treated children as his equals and never allowed the typical Indian "sexual double standards" and inhibitions regarding women to creep into his household. This gave them moral strength, awareness of their individuality, sense of independence and self esteem. So the Pandit girls never experienced discrimination of any sort in their childhood and girlhood.

But later in her life Nayantara Sahgal had to experience 'double standards' at each and every step. She found that the attitude of society as a whole towards women was peculiar. As a result, she suffered inner conflict, tension and disillusionment in life. Perhaps, this is what every educated independent minded woman in India goes through even in the 20th century, when there is
a loud talk about justice and equality. One more thing to be noted in this context is that she was a child of the Gandhian era. She was a member of a family which wholeheartedly welcomed the Gandhian idea of non-violence, equality and self-reliance. The early lessons from her parents and her constant contact with highly learned political leaders helped her comprehend the complexities of both political and human values. This is why she has high regard for tradition, but at the same time she is against a tradition which forces people to sacrifice human freedom and equality. As Jasbir Jain puts it:

Nayantara has the conscience of a liberal and the spirit of a non-conformist.

This gives an insight into the novelist's concern for 'human beings' and 'human values'. And this concern has started at a very early stage and is fully reflected in her writings. This concern became more intense and deep because she herself had to experience discrimination as a woman. Her pen has the sharpness of a sword which can easily slay the monsters of evil customs and traditions. At the same time, she is sensitive to point out the social injustice and dynamic enough to kindle flames of revolt in the minds of the exploited. And in many of her
There is a male character who is helpful to a woman who is trying to liberate herself from a fettered life. Unlike the other 'he-man school' men, his views are based on equality. Such men can be considered the mouthpieces of the author in criticising social injustice against women. Raj and Ram Kishan in *A Day in Shadow*, Vishal Dubey in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Usman in *A Situation in New Delhi*, Rakesh and Kalyan in *Time to be Happy* belong to this group of Nayantara Sahgal's 'liberated' male characters. Nayantara Sahgal's themes, characters and views are eloquent because they are the result of her own disillusionment, clash of ideas and values. She writes about people, incidents and situations very familiar to herself and educated Indians. No wonder she writes about the anguish, dilemma, and the complex intricacies of the so-called affluent aristocracy with ease and fluency. Her characters are true to life. In this respect she is a representative of all women who are struggling to emancipate themselves. Her writings seem to reveal the uncertainties connected with her own life. She wrote in *Femina* in 1976.

Pieces of me going into the men and women I created when I really began to write.
Fact and fiction are so carefully blended and sieved through an aesthetic sieve that some of her novels become embodiments of our changing culture and society. She herself admitted this when she said in Voice of Freedom -

Fiction often fore-shadows fact.\(^3\)

She writes about the changing social conditions and their influence on the lives of the individuals, so her heroines belong to the period of transition. Her heroines are vibrant. The early novelists belonging to the pre-independence period and later had a penchant to portray their women characters as chaste, morally conscious, traditional-minded, beautiful and obedient. But Nayantara Sahgal's women characters are chaste and innocent in their own way. They try to shed the inbred inhibitions and get ready to be free and independent individuals rather than be the doomed individuals in the rigid, narrow roles of a daughter, a wife and a mother. She says about her women characters thus:

My women are strivers and aspirers toward freedom, toward goodness, toward a
compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. I think there is this quality in the Indian women.

But the heroines of her early novels do echo a sense of loss, dissatisfaction and disillusionment in their life. The leading characters are like Greek Protagonists who wait for the final catastrophe. But those of the later novels do find solutions to avoid a final doom and the chief characters are not haunted throughout their life by the seven furies. And by tracing the growth and development of characters like Mira, Mrs. Narang, Maya, Uma into full-fledged individuals like Saroj, Simrit, Prixe, one can trace the change and development in Nayantara Sahgal herself as she heralds a 'new woman' in her novels. True, her innumerable characters speak volumes about Indians, Indian tradition and culture; but more than this they speak about Indian women and their problems.
1. **A TIME TO BE HAPPY** (1957)

Though this is her maiden attempt at writing fiction, her calibre as a writer is visible here. It reflects her genuine concern for human values. *A Time to be Happy* touches upon various social issues ranging from religion to sexual morale. It explores the anomalies in our religion, particularly the blend of 'stoic renunciation' and 'stark sensuality'.

Religion is a way of life and a guideline for many Indians even if they are not very strict in observing religious rites. This preoccupation with religion permits certain social evils, attitudes and customs and they lead to discrimination and injustice, which affect women in particular. They try to hold before women the image of 'Sati-Savitri image' which is irrelevant in the modern days because the conditions have changed. How undue advantage is taken of the ignorance of women is shown by Nayantara Sahgal in this novel.

Hiralal represents the innumerable men who crave for a male child and even dare to shatter the sacred bond of a legal marriage to have one male offspring. Nayantara
seems to show that Hiralal being a 'man* was not bound by any hand and fast rules like a 'woman'. She also shows that for many Indians, English education is a fashion. It is a mask. Behind the mask one can definitely get glimpses of a typical Indian bound to some ancient custom. Nayantara Sahgal criticizes this practice of a man having two wives through Mac Ivor, a foreigner who admits that he had a good impression about Indian culture, but was bewildered at the thought of an Oxford educated 'black Englishman' like Hiralal behaving like a crude barbarian. For him it was a mystery, how a society which preaches 'Ek Patni Vrata' could approve Hiralal's action. He states:

Only one woman can be your lawfully wedded wife. Nothing you would do outside of your marriage can deprive your wife of her rights.

The narrator answers sarcastically:

All that apparently did not help his first wife to produce a son.

The novelist is more explicit about the discrimination against women which is still prevalent in India among the educated. She shows that the ways of welcome
given at the birth of a boy and a girl are different and a baby girl is always an unwanted guest. And the irony is that it is women who often express such ideas and also contribute to such hideous customs. For example, Prabha expresses her unhappiness at the birth of a girl:

"I was so unhappy when she (Usha) was born. He had wanted a son badly".7

Unfortunately many of our social maladies are the result of 'pig-like contentment' of women and their assistance and encouragement to men to carry out their evil intentions. In a way Prabha understood her husband's need and readily succumbed to his wishes and even agreed to stay under the same roof with his second wife. But the same action by a woman is unthinkable and forbidden in our society. This makes clear the discrimination against a woman and how she has to make sacrifices and how helpless she is rendered by social customs.

In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal discusses the 'things' that count for a marriage in India. A woman's worth is decided not by her skill, capability or knowledge, but by the contours of her body, her wealth and her complexion. That is why Jamuna, Kusum's ayah scolds her
brothers for taking Kusum out in the sun.

Many people nurse the idea that man is free to choose his way of life, but not a woman. Nayantara Sahgal shows that even the ayahs had for their masters' children two sets of values — one for girls and another for boys. Jamuna treated Kusum, a mere seven year old child as a marriagable girl. She, like any elderly woman, disliked Kusum's participation in her brother's activities and adventures in the hot sun. She believed that a girl is born to wed some unknown man, to serve him, to obey him and bear his children. Nothing more than keeping herself well groomed in complexion and manner is expected of her. But a man is exempted from all such rules and regulations.

A man, be at seven or seventy must go his own way and live his own life. 8

Nayantara Sahgal also refers to a typical Indian male attitude towards women. Men consider women either as a 'Mother' or a 'Mistress'. A popular impression among Indians is that only indecent women are free, forward and social. This might be the reason that prompt even educated Indians to contemplate the notion that foreign women belong to the world of sexuality and are meant only for love making.
This is seen in the case of Vir Das, an educated Indian who found himself in a nasty situation when he met a foreign woman and took her for a woman of easy morals.

Once I took a memsahib out. How did I know that the bare arms and pointed lips were not for my appreciation? But she screamed as if I had assaulted her. She slapped my face and rushed from my car.

We live in a society which has two sets of rules and moral code: one, for men and another, for women. So if anything goes wrong anywhere, ultimately it is the woman who pays the price. *A Time to be Happy* deals at length with these views about marriage through the lives of five couples - Madan-Savitri, Govind Narayan-Lakshmi, Hiralal-Prabha, Maya-Harish and Kusum-Sanad. All of them had arranged marriages except Kusum and Sanad. They have ended in unhappiness in the sense that the persons involved, particularly, women struggled to liberate themselves, knowing that a clean break-up was impossible. She stresses the need for self-expression within marriage by showing the troubled, mutilated existence of a few individuals. She feels that many a time the individuality, self-esteem, ambitions, aspirations, talents and dreams of a woman in
particular are smothered by her husband or her relatives due to the view that a woman is her husband's servant after her marriage and it is her duty to obey unquestioningly his wishes. Nayantara Sahgal shows this through the lives of a few couples, particularly in the life of Maya and Harish.

Maya and Harish were unable to communicate and recognize the other person's individuality. In a way they were virtual strangers to each other in their day to day life. And neither had the intention and initiative to come to a compromise. Though Maya was a woman of ideas and ambitions, Harish did not allow her to pursue her ambitions and aspirations. Maya wanted to associate herself with the cottage industry. But here too Harish brought his (husband's) golden cage for her and denied her the right to pursue her pure joy. As a prestige issue, Harish converted her 'innocent satisfaction' into a fashionable charity hobby by providing funds for the cottage industry. Here Nayantara Sahgal is stressing the need of self-expression for a woman and recognition by her husband of her individuality within marriage. She is conscious of this need through her own personal experience and her views of life.
As against Maya-Harish, there is Kusum-Sanad couple. Through their married life Nayantara Sahgal shows that what we need in our life is not the suppression of others' individuality and self-esteem by authority, but the recognition of other's individuality by understanding, co-operation, love and partnership. Kusum was fortunate to grow up in an atmosphere where equality prevailed. Inhibitions and complexities attached to women were unknown to her because her parents were liberal, particularly her mother, Savitri. More than this, she was lucky in having Sahadev as her brother. It was he who helped Kusum to grow up as an individual and treated her as his equal. His sincere devotion to his little sister Kusum, made her feel that she was equal to her brothers and not a little 'girl' to be treated separately.

But, later, when Kusum was married to Sanad, she felt like a fish out of water. She often felt that she belonged to another world. Kusum became aware of the wide void between them.

"Sometimes I feel Sanad and I are so far apart". But they sincerely longed and tried to adjust. This sincere longing for adjustment and readiness to
compromise distinguishes them from all the other couples portrayed in this novel. They tried to find some sort of understanding, a common ground to share the joys and sorrows of life. This gradually made them come nearer.

When the barriers of non-communication had vanished and Sanad could accept Kusum in her totality, he did not want to make more demands on her and in fact wanted to slant to her side.

Thus, Nayantara Sahgal shows that when they started recognizing each other's individuality they achieved some sort of peace and harmony. This sort of a recognition of the other partner's individuality is totally absent in the lives of most of the Indians. Through the life of Maya-Harish Nayantara Sahgal cautions us that as long as this situation prevails, many of our social problems cannot be solved. At the same time the story of Kusum and Sanad serves as an eye-opener.

2. THIS TIME OF THE MORNING (1965)

In This Time of the Morning, Nayantara Sahgal shows her concern about women's problems arising mainly out of unhappy marriages. The novel deals with the life of a few
disillusioned women like Rashmi, Mira, Maya, Uma and Leela. None of the women is happy in her life except Rashmi who at the end liberates herself from a broken marriage and sets out as an independent working woman. They all have problems in their life due to unequal marriages, suppression of their individuality and religious beliefs and practices.

Jeevan, the editor of 'Wayfarer' appears to be the novelist's mouthpiece. He criticizes the rotten social practices and a society affected by leprous tradition which makes people narrow-minded and forces them to live in a rigid framework. More than this he is sore over the attitude of men and women who are reluctant to step out of the epic world of virtue. Nayantara Sahgal shows her resentment about the prevailing conditions through Jeevan. He said to Rakesh once,

You see Rakesh, people will not get out of their grooves. They are still living in the era of Ramayana. A virtuous wife must do this. A good husband must behave thus. The hero is a saint, the villain is a devil. Nice people do not have sex organs. ¹¹

Nayantara Sahgal points out that two separate standards are applied to men and women regarding
Marriage. Marriage is considered as an indispensable vocation for a woman within a stipulated time, but for a man there is no such stipulation. The author is explicit here about the common beliefs and prejudices about men and women. It is believed that man is not an ephemeral withering flower like a woman. And for a woman, her youth is considered as her only possession and it is her parent’s duty to pack her up when she is ‘edible’. But a man’s age does not matter much in marriage, because he is the receiver of pleasures and woman the provider. So it is an accepted fact that a man is an eligible bridegroom at twenty or eighty. Knowing that there would be enough time to marry later, Sir Arjun Mitra liked to be in the world of books as long as he wished, so like many other Indian bachelors he marries quite late to a girl much younger than he.

A man could, in fact, marry at any age. 12

She also points out how marriages are arranged against the wishes of young girls. The Narangs want Nita to marry Vijay because of his status and wealth. She has vehemently opposed the conventional type of marriage which is a virtual business contract of two families by which both make a good profit. But her parents force her to
marry Vijay and at last she has to succumb to their wishes. Only Kalyan understood the primitive idea behind her marriage. He thinks:

Looking at her upturned face he knew that her kind of marriage would be an act of barbarism, and for this senseless tradition, too, there was only the remedy of ruthlessness, the blow that would destroy the rotting remains of a social order that no longer served a useful purpose.  

There is a reference to the behaviour pattern of men and women in the discussion that takes place between Uma and Neil. Uma is only expressing the author's views about our society's unwritten moral code. She feels that women are always discriminated in various matters, particularly in matters related to morality and behaviour. Nayantara Sahgal points out that what is considered normal or accepted in a man is a horrifying sin or debauchery in woman! For example, Uma's action and morality shocked Arjun as well as other men she came across in her life. And Uma is looked down upon by others. She seems to stress the point that though men are partners in her so called sin or share their sin with Uma, they blame Uma's lack of morality because she is a woman. Thus, the author
shows at it is often the women who have to pay the price and be the disgrace whereas the men are left free.

Nayantara Sahgal wants to enlighten her readers that as long as this sexual double standards and separate behaviour patterns prevail, there will not be any equality nor any status for women in our society. Once Uma the discontented woman got drunk in a party and goes to Neil's room. She has felt that he is shocked to see her in his hotel room. She, then speaks about the unwritten moral code thus:

"Did it shock you when I came in?"
Before he could reply she added, enunciating carefully, "It did. And it always amazes me that what is taken for granted in a man is horrifying in a woman. Even in this day and age. Imagine. It's a man's privilege to get drunk, for instance, and no one thinks him any the worse for it, or to be a libertine or the other thing. Impotent or frigid or whatever they call it. It never matters. Everyone thinks it's all right."

And it seems that Nayantara Sahgal wants to show that Indians are more rigid, conservative and morally conscious than the Europeans. Neil tells Uma:
"Not everyone," he said, "and in my country there isn't very much difference between a man's and a woman's behaviour. So I suppose we are less easily shocked. In fact I wasn't shocked when you came in, only surprised because I didn't expect to see you." 15

Another victim of society in this novel is Leela. She commits suicide to escape social scandal. Leela sins according to the Indian moral standards. She is from holy Banaras where the confluence of Ganga washes men and women of their sins. She is rooted in India's religious culture and morals because she had a strict upbringing. So, when she arrives in Boston she feels like a bird just released from its' captivity, enjoying the fresh, warm air of freedom. She is young and immature to decide the right and the wrong. She plunges into a world of pleasure. As she has been brought up under strict discipline, she has not developed individuality nor the ability to stand on her own legs. This inevitably leads to her unexpected pregnancy - a sudden shock which forces her to commit suicide. It is her fear that she has offended something old and ordained in her culture which prompts her to kill herself. But, what she actually has offended are man-made laws of morality. Leela could not realize it in spite of her education. And in
the shame and desperation she finds solace in A Charles river!
Kalyan speaks about the hypocrisy of our moral laws thus:

"We build our lives on layer upon layer of hypocrisy, then amount these layers and preach morality from them." ¹⁶

In This Time of the Morning, Nayantara Sahgal presents the unhappy marriages of four women, Mira, Rashmi, Uma and Mrs. Narang and shows us the reason for their frustrated lives. The life of Kailas Vrind and Mira appears to be happy and successful. This is true, to some extent in the beginning, because Mira is traditional-minded. She thinks that it is the duty of a woman to mend the married life, so she is horrified to hear her own daughter's announcement of separation from Dalip, which she attributes to tasteless imitation of modernity.

What reason under heaven would sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married under every conceivable circumstance, to brutal insensitive husbands to lunatics and lepers. ¹⁷

But, later on, there is a change in Mira. Once, while listening to the discussion of a group of delegates from Nigeria, there appears a change in Mira's ideas, attitudes
and views. Mira marvels at the outside world, culture and values different from those she cherishes, and yet she never comes across any of the distant vistas which are always alien to her. For the first time in her life Mira scans desperately to see what she has gained in her long life. She feels an unknown regret. She realizes that she could not understand Kailas Vrind fully and can never have him in whole. She also realizes that she is a virtual slave of tradition and blind beliefs. After her self-realization, she carries tension and conflict in mind because she is too subdued to challenge the existing social order. But Mira could understand her daughter Rashmi's independence and her decision to divorce her husband, Dalip, in a better way now.

Thus even a traditional woman like Mira comes to realize the need to recast her ideas and beliefs according to the changing conditions and demands of the prevailing situations. It is too late for Mira to break off from the shackles of her frustrated life, but she has a hope of a better future for her daughter, Rashmi.

Rashmi's relationship with Dalip too is a dreadful voyage in a canoe. But she leaves it aside in mid-way before it led to a terrible crash at some lofty cliff.
Dalip could not make her feel whole, nor could he provide her with a meaningful life. Though there is no actual description of her life with Dilip in this novel, Nayantara Sahgal gives us clues to find out the discontentment and frustration that lurk behind Rashmi's married life. When Rakesh, her childhood friend meets Rashmi at a party six years after her marriage, he finds her subdued and changed. It did not take much time for him to realize the reason for her detached appearance.

It was marriage, then, that had altered her, made her a moth trapped in cement.  

A frustrated Rashmi comes back to Delhi to stay with her parents. Now she was on the way of releasing her 'real self' from all her past memories of an unhappy life, to be whole again she meets Neil Berenson. Rashmi, who is undergoing a torturing period after her separation, is in quest for warmth and comfort. She was drawn to him for some unknown reason. So she tries to build a concrete relationship with Neil. But Neil could only share physical pleasures with her while Rashmi desperately wants something more than that. However, she does find comfort in his company. Neil on his part never made any sort of demands as to vex her further. This gives solace to Rashmi, but
temporarily, for she was not in a position to sort out things properly. She has not completely recovered from the emotional debris her marriage had brought on her. She herself confesses this to Rakesh.

"I don't know anymore" she said quietly. "I don't feel as sure of anything as I once did." 19

and

There is no such thing as a clean break. A break had jagged edges and did violence to some part of one's being. 20

Here Nayantara Sahgal gives a realistic picture of the emotional imbalance that divorce leads to among women. They are confused by the sudden lack of emotional security. They are often forced to grab the first straw of support, but many a time this ends up in another emotional failure i.e. unstable relationship. Rashmi's life bears witness to this fact.

Nayantara Sahgal shows that if a woman's individuality or her instincts are suppressed, the repercussions could be bad. Uma's life is an example for this. Her family, her marriage and the society in which she lives have
a share in smothering her individuality. Her dissatisfaction with life, people and their ways starts even when she was young. Her parents are embarrassed by the way their 'girl' uses her colours and selects the motif for her paintings. She has to give it up and later she has to suppress all her aspirations to be acceptable to a decent society, when she has to marry an elderly person, Arjun Mitra whom her parents selected for her. Their marriage does not satisfy either of them. Arjun Mitra tries to adjust and like any other Indian wants to bring Uma into his world. So he could never understand her real needs. When her own man retreats to his books and 'silence' leaving her voluptuous part untouched Uma is bored and idle. Her discontentment and dissatisfaction in life bursts out in different ways. She tries to drown her worries in wine and men. No one understands the torment in her which leads her to all those facades of adventure and sensuality. She has never bothered to explain her inner longings to others, because their attitudes and sexual double standards always intrigue her. She is always a sexy person to everyone, even to Neil when he first met her. Later he has become the only person to whom she opened her heart. Her brief dialogue with Neil in his hotel room reveals Uma - the real woman who has so many dreams, aspirations and longings about her future too.
But, neither Arjun Mitra nor Uma can escape from their unhappy life. Nayantara Sahgal enlightens us that in the present set up of society, there is not much scope to escape from this predicament, that is, unhappy marriages. In India there are many husbands and wives (living Mitras and Umas) who are virtual strangers, but are forced to live under the same roof and act as husband and wife. The reason is that according to Hindu law and belief marriage is a 'Sanskara', a holy bond of two individuals. And people think it as a religious sacrilege to break off the sacred marriage bond solemnized by holy Vedic rites. In addition, a separation would cause social scandal which will tarnish the reputation of the family. So each would withdraw into his or her own world, as it happens, in the case of Arjun and Uma. Here Arjun Mitra withdraws into his silent world of books and Uma to an exciting world of erotic pleasure.

Another jeopardized life is that of Mrs. Narang though she never admits it. Nita could understand that her mother is not happy in her life though she pretends to be so. Nita know that her mother had been denied of her freedom and has succumbed to a life chosen by her parents. She also realizes that her mother's unequal marriage has ruined her life; and she is just another helpless victim.
In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal airs her views on certain feminist problems. In fact she heralds the emergence of a 'New Woman' in Nita and Rashmi. She speaks about self-realization and the pangs some women have to experience to liberate themselves fully. When Rashmi decides to divorce her husband, she is moving towards her emancipation. She says good-bye to Dalip not because she hates him but because she just could not continue to live a meaningless life with him. Another thing is that her 'real self' is always intact and her individuality and self-control were hidden somewhere in her. She never surrendered it to anybody.

A part of her had married a man, loved him, given herself to the task of making a home, and suffered the wilderness that only two mismatched people could create. But there was a self that stood free from all this, the unsurrendered 'core of her, the waiting, watching guardian spirit that belonged to no man.21

And this prompts her to say bye to Neil, her lover. At last she leaves New Delhi for a job, to lead an independent life. Rashmi's decision to leave Neil and Delhi in search of new horizons - work and a new life shows her development into an 'independent individual'. It is
Compared to Rashmi, Nita in this novel is a 'growing woman', who gradually realizes self-awareness and enlightenment. She hardly knew what she wanted in the initial stages. She grows into a perfect individual with the help of Kalyan. Nita is young, independent-minded but is strictly controlled by the Narangs. They prohibit her from experiencing any freedom, which indirectly forces the girl to hide her real self. By being very strict and authoritative, some parents do not allow their children, particularly daughters to develop their personality. Nayantara Sahgal wants to show that even among the urban elite, young girls are protected and strictly controlled till their marriage. But later she is allowed to indulge in any sort of pleasures that her husband allows her to do. In a way the right is left to the husband, to decide what his wife should do and how she should behave in the company of others. So the happiness of a woman depends upon the character of her husband and she has no right to shape her life by herself. Nita questions Rakesh of the futility and foolishness of not allowing a grown up individual to decide what is right and what is wrong, for her. She has the awareness in her and she
is not a girl of limited intellect to be satisfied with the material comforts alone and sit idle, doing nothing worthwhile. She is very articulate while rendering her idea. She asks Rakesh:

"Is not it silly, not being allowed to do anything until one is married?"28

and

".... I should have a job. It is ghastly doing nothing."23

Kalyan felt the same. He said once in Sally's party:

"I see no reason why an intelligent, educated young woman should not have a job."24

Kalyan meant job in the real sense of the word—a work which brought money, freedom and self-reliance. Nita gets a job through Kalyan. Her job is a temporary escape from her monotonous and restricted life at home. But Nita wants a different thing altogether from her job, a thing which she could not name or understand, but knows it is something to do with her inner satisfaction. After gaining a job and experiencing the fresh breeze of freedom she came to realize the futility of the kind of life she and other innumerable young protected girls lead. She understands the meaninglessness of a well-patterned, well-moulded life with all the paraphernalia of traditions and
customs tied to it. She dreads the prospect of marrying a man who is introduced to her at a party. Her parents forced her to marry Vijay, but no one cares her inner pangs and longings.

Nayantara Sahgal shows through the life of Nita that in spite of all the independent ideas, individuality and self-realization, many a time women are forced to succumb to their parent's wishes. So they are bound to experience agony, frustration, and unhappiness in their life. She does feel miserable but sacrifices her dreams for her parents. At last she gets engaged to Vijay though she does not like to marry him. She only feels tension and rebellion rising in her. And whatever she does to please others is just a game of pretense for her. And she arrives at Kalyan's front door on the very evening of her engagement day to feel whole in his company. She is happy with Kalyan and gives herself freely to him, knowing that such a union is impossible with Vijay. And the sleepless nights and anxiety that envelopes her after her engagement, is a clear indication or prelude to her married life with Vijay. We can visualize her dissatisfied life which would certainly turn her into another Uma or Rashmi. How long can she prolong in a marriage that fetters her individuality,
Independence, self esteem and personal satisfaction?

Nayantara Sahgal feels that if individuality in woman is suppressed forcefully, a woman - a spirited woman will in course of time may break the chains. Quite possible that she might get lost not knowing the right path. And this makes life miserable for the woman and others concerned with her.

Kai Nicholson opines:

We can apprehend that Mrs. Sahgal is criticising a strong custom which reduces an individual to an object. Furthermore, we may ask if Mrs. Sahgal is not making a direct appeal to the readers by openly portraying the spiritual suffering, suffering of a young woman in the matter of love and sex. Here we have the protesting spirit of the novelist who wishes to see the reform of Hindu marriage traditions despite the present set-backs which she accepts. The reader is able to comprehend Mrs. Sahgals determined attitude to this problem.
Storm in Chandigarh is one of Nayantara Sahgal’s best novels. The novel deals with the complex relationships of a few couples: Inder-Saroj, Mara-Jit, Gauri-Nikhil in the background of the political turmoil of a city where they live. Saroj is the emerging ‘new woman’. Here too Nayantara Sahgal discusses a few feminist issues like unhappy marriages, complex relationships, sexual double standards, freedom of women, their economic dependence, their problems arising out of constant child bearing and the absence of normal relationship between the opposite sexes in India.

Nayantara Sahgal discusses Saroj’s unhappy marriage and shows us why her marriage has failed. This gives her an opportunity to point out the rotten attitude of the Indians towards virginity, chastity and man-woman relationship. Marriage has completely drained Saroj’s spirit. Saroj, like the author, herself is brought up in a family which recognises the freedom of expression in women and appreciates their truth and sincerity. Her marriage to Inder is a turning point in her life because Saroj has to face opposition to the values she has cherished.
Inder belongs to the 'he-man school' and like most of the Indian men believe in male superiority and female subservience in marriage. So Saroj who was full of life and vitality becomes a withered flower in due course of her married life. Gauri said:

She has more or less petered out since she married him."

Owing to her uninhibited upbringing life is a crystal clean pond for Saroj and her actions never leaves scratch of guilt in her. She had the 'curiosity' to go to bed with her friend, not knowing that it is a serious moral lapse on her side. Though she commits a sin—an immoral act according to the moral standards of the society there is not a speck of repentence or remorse in her mind. That is the reason why she in her sheer innocence discloses her teenage affair to her husband. This is a shock to Inder who believes in morality and chastity. The man made laws of morality and chastity are so deep seated in his psyche that, it turns their life into a virtual hell. Inder could never forget or forgive the shocking act she did before her marriage. Behind the gossamer veil of westernization Inder is a typical Indian who expects his wife to be a 'Sati-Savitri'. In keeping a 'soiled', 'used'
woman Inder suffers a "silent disgrace." The thought of her impurity is so haunting that he could never reach a compromise with her. He desperately wants her clean and pure. Virginity is a treasure a man expects in his wife. Inder too wants it.

No man need to be cheated of that. He had been cheated.\(^{27}\)

Her moral lapse is a challenge to his manhood.

He was maddened by it. When it came over him he sat looking at Saroj with a revulsion that had ancient, tribal, male roots. It forced him to focus on her a concentration he would ordinarily have spread over the whole area of their lives. There were people he knew who would have flung her out with the rubbish, considered her used, soiled and unfit for marriage. Somewhere he had read there were primitive societies that demanded the blood of virginity as evidence of female purity.\(^{28}\)

and

There were apparently generations of men behind her fathers, brothers, husbands who would have killed at the very suggestion of what she had done.\(^{29}\)
Inder keeps her and forces himself to love her because Saroj is obedient and dependent. He could never love her deeply or communicate with her thoroughly. And the intimacy between them does not go beyond the physical plane. Sex comes to him not from affection, love or loyalty, but from pure desire. His love is intermittent and his affection to her is a mere token of approval for the things she is doing to please him. Like many other men he believes that love is a reward given to wives in return for their obedience, chastity and their service.

There were breaches and pauses in his love. Love was granted as approval and reward.  

So, Mara’s comparison of Saroj to Inder’s "shoes" looks best fitting when we consider Inder’s idea of life and the way he treats his wife. Mara once says to Inder:

They're (shoes) special because they fit you. If they did not you would throw them away. And you cannot own a woman even if she is your wife.

In Storm in Chandigarh Nayantara Sahgal brings forth certain moral issues. Her emphasis is mainly on
social evils which oppress women. The moral laws are made by men but they never bother to abide by them; whereas the women are expected to follow them. The result is sexual double-standard. Society has always given silent sanction to men to have more than one woman while it frowns on women who do that for any sort of needs. In fact women and men are equally responsible for such a relationship, but men are often excused and exempted from any punishment. It is the woman who has to pay the penalty. Even the man who seduces her will look down upon her for cheating her husband and crossing the sacred bond of marriage. No man will ever forgive a woman who commits infidelity, as infidelity is a threat in deciding his heir. On the other hand, a woman readily forgives the husband who goes after ephemeral pleasures. This sort of double standards prevail in India among all classes and castes.

In the same way, Saroj's marriage became a mockery when Inder became close to Mara. A man who would frown at the thought of his wife's impurity, indulges in extra-marital affairs without feeling any prick of conscience. And Inder is furious when Saroj goes out with Dubey though he knows that it was just a Platonic relationship. He who is having an extra-marital affair with Mara, does
not even like that word mentioned to him. The moment Mara refers to Saroj's talk with Vishal Dubey as "extra-marital talk" there is a sudden outburst of fury in him. He bellows at Mara.

That kind of remark disgusts me. The thinking behind it disgusts me. There was a time when such things could not be spoken, or even thought, except with shame. There is no shame now a days, no barriers. Everything is taken lightly.

And women talk and behave like men.32

Being fully aware of a married woman's present status in India, Nayantara Sahgal has carried out a logical analysis of our social problems and has obviously portrayed it through her characters. She is convinced that women are treated as though they belong to a different class (inferior beings) altogether. But their interests and way of life always depend upon the men they have to live with. But men always live freely. In Storm in Chandigarh she portrays Inder as the personification of society's patriarch. For Inder, like many other men wife is just a possession if she is obedient, docile, chaste and dependent. And the other women he comes across in his life or has any sort of relationship with are mementos of his valour and manliness.
Inder is typical in his relationship with two women - Saroj and Mara. Inder's relationship with Mara is momentary. Mara was enlightened and intelligent. She is free in her ideas and behaviour. Inder could never digest her nor any woman who claims equality. But Mara tries to make him understand that women are not anybody's possession and that they too are human beings who have the right to do what they like. Mara said:

"Perhaps they (women) just behave more like human beings and less like possessions" said Mara mildly.
"I have no use for that jargon" said Inder bluntly. He leaned back in his chair and said with a savage irritation: "Put it in whatever smart new language you like, it is a lot of bilge. A thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own and command her - and that is the man she will respect".  

Inder atleast admits openly his views about a 'master-husband - slave-wife' relationship. The innumerable living Inders in our society would not do it. They, with the husband 'tag' decently and firmly tied to their neck, wander out of marriage for getting comfort and pleasure. Nayantara Sahgal speaks about our
tradition and attitudes which are suffocating to women
particularly to intelligent ones.

Old, useless, impossible ideas going on and on. We carry them around like deadwood on our backs. It is all ours all right, but some of it is rotten, we will die if we go on like this. Sometimes I think we are already dead.

Nayantara Sahgal also shows her resentment of the ways by which girls are brought up and the kinds of notions parents dump into their heads. She has at length portrayed the oppression that women suffer in both private and public life. She often sketches the individual sufferings of a woman to expose the way society treats women. So her portrayal of marital discords due to social codes or attitudes ultimately has a bearing on women's problems and their status. She feels that women are in a way martyrs who sacrifice their real needs, ambitions, dreams and inclinations for the sake of their husbands and family. This is carried on as a tradition. She is furious that society even elevates their sacrifice to some mystical importance and glorifies their self-effacement. She points out that our social code has degenerated into mere formalism and hypocrisy. The inferior social status of women can be
directly or indirectly attributed to our attitudes, tradition, dominance of man and prejudices against women. Vishal Dubey's words echo the writer's own feelings about patriarchy and the status of women.

He thought of his own country women as the subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the Chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self expression had not even begun. Whatever womanhood had once meant in India, had been lost in the mist of antiquity. In its place there had long been a figure of humility, neck bent, eyes down caste, living flesh consigned to oblivion.35

Women were not a subject for discussion. They were wives, daughters, mothers. They belonged to their men by contract or by blood. Their sphere was sexual and their job procreation. They were dependents, not individuals. When you wanted them it could apparently only be for sex.36

A woman was not entitled to a past, not entitled to human hunger, human passion or even human error. In the fires and desolations of living she ranked as not quite human.37
Nayantara Sahgal seems to reinterpret our rigid moral conceptions, so that women can emerge from their crysalis into a better world where they can enjoy freedom and equality. Her concern for women and their urge towards freedom is poignantly portrayed through her women characters in *Storn in Chandigarh* which is considered as her best novel. The self awareness or the search for identity which sprouted in young Kusum of *A Time to be Happy* has passed through many stages in characters like Nita and Rashmi and has reached full expression in Saroj. She is brought up in a family where equality prevailed. It is her marriage that shut the doors of her mind and soul and left her in an isolated, loathsome darkness. Though she acts like an obedient wife, she never wants Inder to forgive her pre-marital affair for she does not feel guilty of her relationship with a boy before her marriage. Though she does not want to hurt Inder's feelings and acts as a meek obedient wife she genuinely longs to be her real self dispelling the camouflage of 'acting' and 'hiding'. But later in her relationship with Vishal, Saroj felt real and fresh like a valley flower because their friendship is based on understanding and truth.
Vishal Dubey is an honest man who believes in truth and sincerity in human beings and with him there was no need to act and hide one's real self. Thus her coming to know a man who is so free in his thinking and ideas helps her to regain her vitality, courage, and self-esteem which she had hid somewhere in the deepest fathoms of her personality. And now she does not want to continue in the narrow limits of her marriage where Inder fetters her individuality and freedom. When Inder got the audacity to accuse her of moral lapse and asks her to restrain from her regular evening walks with Dubey, Saroj has got the courage to object to his orders and be disobedient to him. She says:

But I like going for walks with him. 38

It is natural for her to have friends who could share her interests, especially when she is famished by inner loneliness. Inder once again sinks back into his secret world of disgrace because that is the second chaos in his life. But Saroj does not feel pangs of guilt or inner emptiness. She recollects the past days when she had been like an obedient housemaid doing the housekeeping for him, bearing children for him and at times like a 'begger' thankful to him for love 'alms'. Now she got the moral courage to renounce the random 'alms of love' Inder flings
at her for her obedience and service. Moreover Vishal Dubey could accept her with all her past, a thing which Inder can not dream of. Yet their relationship is not on physical plane. At least the fact that Vishal Dubey considered her a virtuous woman makes her feel warm and comfortable again. She feels free as though the burden of sin and impurity which Inder had thrust on her has been lifted off from her shoulders. She really longs to be a 'new woman'. At last she decides to leave Inder and Chandigarh and goes to New Delhi. Jasbir Jain says about Saroj's departure thus:

Saroj's departure is a move towards personal freedom and a rejection of the role Inder had wanted to thrust on her. 39

So here we have women like Saroj and Mara who grow out of their limitations and reject the conventional morality. And Saroj is the finest example of Nayantara Sahgal's women characters who finally emerges from the 'chrysalis' as a "New Woman".
4. A DAY IN SHADOW (1976)

This novel depicts poignantly the agony, frustration and non-belongingness a woman experiences in divorce and also how by a determined will she can also emerge out of it and become a full-fledged independent woman with confidence. Nayantara Sahgal also comments on the age-old views and the status of women in society.

A divorce, even a mutually settled one can interrupt the pattern of the life a woman lived once. Nayantara Sahgal pictures this kind of agony in This Time of the Morning too. She seems to raise the following feminist questions because Simrit in this novel too felt a disorder and non-belongingness like Reshmi. Is it common to all men and women? Does the intensity of suffering varies even among women? If so why? Nayantara Sahgal has the idea that women feel it more than men because a parting cuts a women off from the material and emotional support that she was getting from her husband. In most cases man is the earning member and so unlike a woman he is not shaken economically. And for a woman brought up in strict morality, it becomes hard to adjust with the new lonely life and face social criticism. That is why the intensity
of suffering among women after a separation is more than what is among men. This is what Simrit feels when she leaves Som and occupies a flat in 'Defence Colony'. Simrit's divorce makes her feel disgusted with life around her which looked like a rotten barbaric affair. The early days after the divorce leaves her completely shattered and her future looked bleak and blank. Apart from her own emotional distress she feels that her children also are equally uprooted. Having been born in an affluent family and having enjoyed the comforts of life, they face a bleak future now. In a way Simrit feels uprooted in a male-oriented world.

I feel so disorganised.40

And

I have been in an earthquake Mr. Moolchand, and every single thing I knew is a rubble around me.41

The author questions why society victimizes a woman divorcee and degrades her, when both the husband and wife are equally responsible for an unhappy marriage. She points out that it is hypocrisy. When Simrit is introduced to a few society ladies in a party they are shocked to hear that she, a very young lady is a divorcee living on freelance writing.
Nayantara Sahgal's feminist idea about women's problems find expression in this novel too. A woman's usefulness never extends beyond the boundaries of home. She is not considered as an intellectual companion. Simrit wonders why most of the men did so, especially Som. Som never allows her to come in between his business transactions and intellectual concerns. For him she is only an unpaid nurse, housekeeper and an object for sexual satisfaction. He does not view women as persons. So Simrit is always 'woman' for him and just a woman! Raj in this novel is her (Nayantara Sahgal) mouthpiece. He says:

Woman far use had been the rule long.  

The author shows here how women are often considered as second class citizens and are exploited in every way possible. Simrit's life is a typical example of what happens to a woman at the hands of her husband when it comes to the question of worldly riches. Som used Simrit to evade tax payments by keeping shares in her name though she has no benefit or knowledge of the profit amount from the shares. Som continues to use Simrit even after their divorce. Abandoning her like a worn out cloth with so
many children itself is a hideous crime. In addition he
has a revengeful divorce settlement with her. Not satis-
ied with this he tries to put her in a predicament by
inviting her for a new, second tax settlement. Som's
exploitation of Simrit is a finest example of the patriarchal
system that suppresses a woman's real needs, exploits her
and degrades her social status. As Jasbir Jain put it:

The divorce settlement is a conti-

nation of their marriage; it pins
her down to the role of a victim
and attempts to crush her desire to
be free in a positive way.43

Nayantara Sahgal tries to reveal here man's concep-
tion of feminine character. Men dread stronger stuff in
women. They want their women to be docile, dependent,
unsure and weak. This firmly establishes their superiority
over women. The woman who treads away from the pre-set
moral conventions is a culprit who deserves serious punish-
ment. According to the social evaluation a real woman
should be "an object of pity". Display of self control,
freedom of expression and competence are expected to be
absent in a woman. So to Moolchand, Simrit was a puzzle
when he met her after her divorce. Her matter-of-

fact behaviour, inner strength and the non-display of
tears is something which he has never expected nor has he seen before in a woman. Nayantara Sahgal seems to emphasize here man's pre-conception of feminine character. To stress the point she visualizes the way Moolchand would have felt, if at all Simrit had behaved 'normally' like a woman.

Moolchand might have reacted better
if she had broken down and wept,
pleaded her plight, not displayed
this control and competence.44

Simrit is allowed to enjoy money, position, social status and material comforts as long as she plays the role of a dependent, weak wife. It seems that Som wants to punish the stronger being that lay beneath Simrit's docility by the divorce settlement. Simrit feels so. By knowing her ex-husband's nature she is sure that Som would have pardoned her if she were a weakling. This is what every man expects from any woman.
She thought:

Som would have forgiven her if she had been a weaker being, unsure dependent, even deceiving.45
Another point to note here is that a woman is expected to be poor and dependent on her male relation. When she is not earning she cannot contribute to the family income. She has to depend on a male for support and shelter. And dependence brings inferior social status to her and gives the man an authority over her and her life. For example, Priyie of this novel is provided with food and shelter by Summer Singh as long as she is dependent on him and allows him to use her as a "sex object". Summer Singh is furious the moment she decides to terminate her relationship with him to be an independent woman. In the private life the role of women is just to be "fed and sheltered" by men in the family for the services they render to them. Women are expected to sacrifice all their intellectual talents, ambitions and aspirations if they want the security of marriage and a home. For shelter, Som is happy as long as Simrit is like a nice dog, faithful and obedient, sitting in a comfortable surrounding ready to obey as she is instructed by him, the master-husband.

In return she had been fed and sheltered.
Simrit has an unhappy life; and she is left to decide between two alternatives - 'physical comfort' and 'inner satisfaction'. She has been thinking about a change, but was suppressing her real needs. But the ultimatum comes like an unexpected thunderstorm. It is Som who suggests a divorce. Now she wants to live a life that is worth living, a life that mattered. Som could never satisfy her real needs though he could provide her with all worldly riches. She wishes to get back her hidden individuality; but she does not want to wait for a man to supervise and assist her. She would not accept a society where men do things and women merely wait. The breaking or uprooting of the patriarchal institution brings confusion, agony and frustration in a woman's life at least in the initial stages. But later Simrit gains a strong feeling - an inner strength to face life in a male-oriented world without the support of Som or any other man. She feels a sudden rapture in shaping a new life with an identity of her own.

So she could be that rarity, a woman with a profession, an independent person living her own life. She did not need a man for identity of status.47

Her development as an independent woman is clear from the way she reacts to Som's offer "to use the income
from the shares if you don't marry". The independent woman in her plainly refuses the so called charity that he flung at her. When he demands for Brij's custody Simrit is matured enough to hold herself together. She the solid woman comes back to pack Brij's things and say good-bye to her son who prefers his father to her. She does not feel 'disorganized' any more, because she can live as she wishes. She lives without self pity, but with lots of self esteem. Ram Kishan also advises her to do the same.

"Well young lady? .... that could be non-violence in action for you - the refusal to bend the knee, bow the head".48

Prixie is another character who breaks away from dependence and servitude to be a liberated woman. She is poor and has to pawn her body to Summer Singh for a job and shelter. But her inner longing for independence and self fulfilment are strong. Later she breaks away later from Summer Singh. She needed abundant courage and inner strength than other liberated women to move towards self-expression and freedom. Saroj and Rashmi were well placed in their life so that they had to gain courage to face only the emotional side of the problem whereas Prixe had to take care of both economic and emotional insecurity.
And this makes Prixie different from other liberated women in Nayantara Sahgal's fiction.

Nayantara Sahgal has mixed feelings about the social changes that are taking place in our society. As a woman writer she feels that revolution and tenacity only can bring freedom to individuals. Self awareness is an intellectual and spiritual development of a human being and woman has to forsake certain patriarchal security for it.

5. A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI (1977)

A Situation in New Delhi is primarily a novel that deals with social and political problems. Though politics is a major theme in this novel Nayantara Sahgal does draw our attention to the changing social conditions which help the emergence of free, independent women; but at the same time she points out that such conditions still prevail wherein a raped girl has to end her life. Nayantara Sahgal's concern for women's problems is quite clear here also.

The action of the novel takes place during a period soon after India attained freedom. The discrimination practised against women is comparatively less.
constitution has guaranteed women equality and equal opportunities. So there is Devi. And everyone admits her as quite capable and intelligent without pondering much about her sex. Her chauffeur calls her 'Sir' as a recognition of her equality with other men of status. Another instance of the changing social conditions is the cool, natural behaviour of Skinny Jaipal. Skinny, though brought up as a doll, is quite at ease in a cemetery to talk revolution with Rishad as she is at Pinky's party to chat about social trifles. And she even shakes hands with Rishad as a sign of agreement. Time has changed. People's attitudes are changing. Rishad wonders about it.

In a country where hands did not casually meet, and greeting was distant, it took him a back to find Skinny Jaipal's thin hand thrust confidently, comrade-like towards him.

Devi is different from the other heroines of Nayantara Sahgal's novels. She is a widow in her middle age. She is portrayed as a matured and intelligent woman who is capable of looking after herself and holding a ministerial position. She has faced many challenges in her political career and personal life too. But she
has shown courage even when her dear ones departed one by one from her life. Above all she has a mind of her own. Her son thinks of his mother as an intelligent and capable woman. Usman, who studied the status and conditions of women from the 'Vedic Age' to the present period finds it difficult to place her among those women of the past. He wonders how she has derived and cultivated certain qualities which other women could not.

From where, in the long Saga did she derive her particular qualities?
Possibly right at the start. There was an air of beginnings about her, of discovery, a transparency that had never grown any tough outer crust. Her animation was not of talk or gesture. It radiated from the source of her being.

She is free, modern and liberal in her outlook. She does not mind ringing up Rishad to tell him about the fabulous looking girls in Veena's party. She behaves rather like a friend to him than a possessive authoritative mother. This same attitude prompts her to ask Veena:

How much does Pinky know about sex, Veena?
Devi is certainly different from Veena who disapproves the thought of sex mentioned in the presence of their children. Veena is a traditional person to the core; hence she does not want to discuss 'immoral subjects' with her children. Devi on the other hand, believes in equality and she wants young men and women, particularly women to be aware of their role in society. She does not raise her eyebrows at the idea of young girls knowing about sex before marriage. According to her, sex is an integral part of one's life. It is not a thing to be hushed off.

But Devi at times appears to be a caricature purposely created by Nayantara Sahgal for emphasizing her qualities as an individualistic woman. In spite of all her modern ideas, capability and intelligence, she cannot liberate herself fully. When we consider and evaluate the inbred moral values in her, we find that Devi is also to some extent a traditional woman clinging to "past", "role patterns" and "tradition". This is clear from her temporary love affair with Michael. Her responsibilities, her inbred moral values, her religious and cultural conditioning are so solid and strong that it makes her to obey her inner "roots" and sacrifice her real needs. She does not yield to Michael's love and marry
him. Devi had to deny herself of pure joys even when she was a young girl. Devi confesses later to Michael about her real pangs and also her inability to emerge as a fully liberated individual.

"O! Michael. Of course I had regrets. But I was obeying something deeper. It was obeying something deeper. It was stronger than loving you".52

She has suppressed her certain needs. In her relationship with other men also (Usman) she can not free herself from her roots, her family background and above all her religion. Here she is different from Nayantara Sahgal's liberated women characters because they do not wish to conform to any patterns or any moral conventions that trap their personal freedom and inner satisfaction.

Compared to Devi, Skinny Jaipal (Suvarna Priya) is a developed woman in the sense that she grows out of the fetters of traditional values. She emerges as Nayantara Sahgal's 'new-woman'. This is clear from the very beginning. Her reaction to Rishad in their very first encounter is calm and matter-of-fact even when she knows that he belongs to some terrorist group.
Rishad himself is taken aback by her cool behaviour and her co-operation in ransacking her own house. He has expected her to scream and shout for help. Another thing is that she never feels guilty of her actions. Her varied interests in life is shown by the subjects she selected to study in the university. She has a natural talent for dance and music; and at the same time she shows interest in Rishad's revolutionary activities. She is so natural in her behaviour and speech that the film actor whom she met at Pinky's party wonders how this little girl is so pure and wonderful of all the voluptuous women he has met in his life.

Later she falls in love with Rishad. She, Suvarna Priya as her real name suggests becomes a Priya even to Rishad who wants a life beyond attachment. It is she who teaches him the peace and serenity of a real friendship and make his life meaningful and worth living.

According to Nayantara Sahgal's ideas of "self awareness of women", "free woman", "man-woman relationship based on equality" Skinny Jaipal is a truly liberated individual. For her freedom is not just economic independence or a bohemian way of life but a mental
attitude. Freedom is a way of life. In other words it means that one must be honest with one's own self and with others rather than conform to any 'life patterns' or any moral convention that traps one's individuality, personal freedom and thereby denies inner satisfaction. And "self-awareness" is self expression of one's real needs and the recognition of the other individual's individuality. Her (or his) relationship with the opposite sex will be one based on equality. "All these views hold good in the case of Skinny Jaipal.

In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal draws our attention to the hideous and barbarous crime committed on women — rape. The ghastly way of taking revenge by a man on another or by a group on another group by molesting women has always been there. Add to it men's lust. This has continued in our days too. Nayantara Sahgal points out that this type of atrocity on women can happen even in an abode of learning. She gives an example of a situation where a lady student (Madhu) is molested to express the wrath of a few men on somebody.

Madhu has to suffer a stigma for the rest of her life. It is due to the inhibiting attitudes of the middle class and the violence of rape itself. The sudden
shock and the unexpected fury of the attack leaves a dis­
integrating effect on her. Everyone tries to console her
and keep on saying, "it is over". But no one really under­
stands the turmoil and torture she suffers. The aftermath
is so haunting that her mind and soul finds no peace after
the incident. She shouted and screams in her sleep.
The tragedy is that, her own family members can not share
her agony and embarrassment. They would not dare to speak
about it, for they feel that what has happened is a dis­
grace to the whole family. They consider her a burden for
she lost her virginity and want to get rid of her by
marrying her off. But the thought of marriage brings to
her a hurricane of fearful memories of her tormentors. She
could recognize and avoid her tormentors. What about
the stranger who would come into her life, to suffocate her,
to tear her flesh and plunder her? Her tormented psyche
makes her imagine every stranger to be a scoundrel who is
lurking behind the shadows to rape her. Thus Madhu
suffers a 'secret disgrace' and an 'unknown torture' for
a fault she is innocent of. She becomes an innocent
victim by losing her chastity because she is considered
as a decayed rotten thing. Madhu could no longer tolerate
the humiliation she experiences at the hands of both her
family and society. She tries to sort out a way for an
escape from that torture. While her family hunt for a bridegroom, she is preparing for death. She is not afraid of committing suicide.

Madhu's self immolation is symbolic. After all it is the fate of many unlucky, unwanted women and she is one of them. Thus the shocking scene of a young innocent girl setting fire to herself speaks about the cruelty of man and society. Nayantara Sahgal deserves to be congratulated on showing how innocent girls become victims of inhuman practices and beliefs. Her concern for women's welfare is great.
CHAPTER III

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