

Nayantara Sahgal's Novels Address the Problem of Domestic Violence Against Indian Women

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ABSTRACT

One of the main problems in India, and the globe at large, is patriarchal society's treatment of its female members. Violence against women is a pervasive problem in male-dominated societies throughout history and into the current day. That which is violent is an act of strength used against weakness. Because men are physically superior to women, they often take advantage of their position of dominance by abusing their victims physically or verbally, and by treating them as objects rather than human beings. Nearly all female authors have taken notice, seeing a pressing need to speak out against domestic abuse, which may have devastating psychological and physiological effects on women. In her writing, Nayantara Sahgal is among the many Indian women who have consistently addressed the issue of mental violence against women. This article is an effort to examine Sahgal's fiction, in which she gives a powerful voice to Indian women who have been oppressed by males in our culture. Nayantara's emphasis is on the more deadly and long-lasting consequences of mental abuse, as opposed to Kamala Markandaya's concentration on physical violence against Indian women. Sahgal's subject matter is narrow (she doesn't write about regular ladies) and her writing is inconsistent. She is revered as a defender of India's upper-class women, and in her works, she explores the difficulties women face at home and in the wider world by focusing on the emotional and psychological toll it has on them.

KEYWORDS: physical aggression, Divorce, animosity.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of violence against women is a global one. It is a result of aggressive or angry behavior. In reality, violence is the use of force by a powerful individual against a weaker one. One's wife or children are often the targets of a man's abusive behavior.

Types of violence:

- Assault, shoving, hurling, kicking, burning, and other forms of physical aggression. The user of this item is aiming to inflict harm onto others.
- The use of mental, emotional, or psychological violence (abusing, taunting, passing derogatory words and actions, making signs symbols and cartoons etc.)

The perpetrator uses both types of violence to inflict emotional and physical harm on the victim. Consequences for the victim include increased feelings of animosity and betrayal toward the person responsible for the incident. Some psychologists argue that emotional violence is much more hazardous than physical violence since physical wounds may heal within a few weeks or months, whereas the effects of mental violence can last for decades or even until the victim's death.

Nayantara Sahgal's books and other works include graphic depictions of mental abuse. Born in 1927, Nayantara Sahgal is part of the wealthy and powerful Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty. From her first novel....A Time to Be Happy (1957) through The Lesser Breeds (2003) and many of her later publications, she stands out as a novelist who focuses on the emotional anguish of women from privileged backgrounds in India. Taking on the role of a psychotherapist, Nayantara Sahgal dives into the protagonist's psyche to reveal the extent to which domestic violence has affected Indian women in her novels. For these women, financial security is not an issue, and she has articulated their emotional brutality. Divorce, having an extramarital affair, a husband's lack of commitment and faithfulness, a failure to communicate and an inability to comprehend one another, a desire for independence, equality, and social recognition, etc. all contribute to the emotional abuse they experience.

Maya, the protagonist of Sahgal's first book "A Time to Be Happy (1957)" is a quiet victim of emotional assault. She is a devoted wife, but the inability to have meaningful conversations and work together has broken her heart. Like she says, all she needs from her spouse is a reaction to her presence, and not even necessarily a positive or affirming one. To some, not even whether or not we survive is significant. (p. 34-35)

As a result of her marital dissatisfaction, Maya becomes more involved in volunteer work and religious gatherings. Because she insists on being herself, she has to endure much pain.

Nita Narang, daughter of Dr. Narang and wife of Vijay after their marriage, suffers emotional abuse at both her father's and her husband's homes in This Time of Morning (1965), the second novel by Sahgal. Mrs. Narang states, ".....we don't let our daughter Nita go out alone." This statement shows that Nita is not autonomous and that her father limits her independence. Her strict dad wouldn't stand for it. (30)

Nita suffers emotional abuse in her loveless marriage, which was planned by her parents.

The Indian women's emotional violence is the subject of Sahgal's book Storm in Chandigarh (1969). Saroj, Inder's wife, is the one who has been victimizing Saroj throughout the story, ever since they met in college. Saroj is branded a "sinner" by him. Inder is a cruel guy who tortures his wife and makes their lives miserable by dwelling on the past and never moving on. If I could persuade one person of my acquaintance before I die that the world comprises of humans and not men and women in

watertight compartments; I'd regard it as a success, Vishal says Saroj as he tries to ease her mental anguish: (p. 188)

Vishal, in this sense, is an advocate for gender parity. Saroj finds great solace in her presence as an escape from his monotonous and gruelling domestic life.

Sahgal addresses the problem of mental violence in her autobiographical book *The In Shadow* (1971). Through the narrative of Som and Simrit, the author demonstrates this concept. Som works in business, while Simrit is a trained freelance reporter. They couldn't be more different in their outlooks on life. Som constantly has Simrit under his entire control without considering the sentiments of his educated wife. As Simrit explains, "Som would squeeze and stroke her arm, rest his hand warmly, heavily on her thigh, keep her physically in the room mentally out." Simrit puts up with Som's mental abuse for a long time, but eventually she realizes that she has had enough and decides to divorce him so that she can finally be free and live a life of happiness, freedom, and dignity. (p. 127)

For others, life is easier in a world where females just do not exist. He takes advantage of women in his own ways. He still doesn't understand the importance of considering women's perspectives and emotions. He is unmoved by the idea of violence against women. He informs Simrit that his previous wife was very attractive, but he eventually caught her in the act of sleeping with another guy. Then and then, he took aim and fired a shot at her. That's something he hopes never happens again to him. Consequently, Simrit is Som's oppressed wife and is subjected to emotional abuse on a regular basis (p. 127). Despite not being a woman herself, Simrit stands in for all Indian women of means.

One of the novelist's other outstanding works, *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), also centers on the theme of psychological abuse. This story examines contrasting worldviews via the lens of the dynamic between the protagonist, Devi, and her husband, Ishwar. She gives up the rest of her life when her husband dies so she may take care of her brother, and she never remarries. She and Shivraj, as written by Sahgal, will age together. They planned to spend their newfound free time gardening, listening to music for hours on end, catching up on literature they'd put off reading, and marveling at Rishad's maturing manhood before moving on to Rishad's offspring. (p. 15-16)

As a result, all the way to the end, Devi retains neither identity nor feelings.

Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) is another outstanding work that focuses on the suffering of women in patriarchal societies and the brutality that they face. Ram Swarup is a stereotypical man and a product of today's male-dominated culture; he treats all of the ladies he has wed poorly. Although he is been married twice, he is hopelessly smitten with Marcella and would stop at nothing to win her heart. Sahgal presents three distinct women from varied origins in her novel: Rose, Mona, and Sonali. Mona, who takes care of the kids and the home, is very important to Ram Swarup, while Rose is just there to

fulfill his sexual needs and keep him company at work. Both ladies are experiencing apprehension and feelings of insecurity. Sahgal thus harshly condemns the mindset of a guy who sees women just as a means to an end (sexual pleasure). In her research on Sahgal and Dorris Lessing, Neena Arora makes the following points: *Nayantara Sahgal's Novels Address the Problem of Domestic Violence Against Indian Women*.

When men are not married, it is considered acceptable male conduct to indulge their emotional and sexual needs.

His formerly kind and caring attitude towards his wife has shifted, and he now treats her with hostility and violence. (p. 61)

Mona exemplifies the average Indian lady. She is compared to a river and constantly treated as if she were less than human by her husband Ram. Rose was born in England to a typical household. Due to Ram's confinement, she has been used to a life of shame. She feels envy and pain as she watches Dev grow up, and she longs for a child for the same reasons he does:.....without a kid she will never be mistress of the home. (p. 70)

Ram torments Mona and Rose by making them go through emotional and mental anguish.

Plans for Departure, another book by Sahgal, published in 1986, likewise addresses the topic of emotional violence. An American preacher named Croft has a profound impact on Lulu's life in Marlow. In time, Lulu finds herself falling in love with him. Lulu marries Croft, but she soon comes to regret the decision. They couldn't be more different from one another, and she's grown disillusioned with both Marlow and her marriage. There is a lack of communication and affection. When Marlow decides to adopt a sweeper's kid, Lulu's emotional anguish reaches a fever pitch. Lulu's aspirations and dreams have been dashed by this remake, and she is in anguish over the fact that, in her mind, she is no longer a decent wife and that her commitment to her husband is at its breaking point. What little she had built for herself with him was now destroyed. (p. 147)

Lulu suffers intense emotional distress and plots her escape from Himapur; however, she is tragically murdered in an accident before she can carry out her plan.

Mistaken Identity, a 1988 novel by Sahgal, also addresses the problem of violence against women in India. The book centers on Ranees of Vijaygarh. She disregards authority and establishes her own norms, marking her as a social outcast. She was married when she was just five years old and had her first child, a boy named Bhusan, when she was thirteen. However, her husband does not provide any emotional support for her or their kid. She experiences cruel sort of mental assault and exploitation. In her mental suffering she becomes a rebel against her spouse and societal standards. "...she refuses to accept his of pursuit of pleasure and new Raneesand bids good bye to reality and this is the

conclusion of mistaken identity," writes Jasbir Jain in *The New Indian Novels in English: A Study of the Novels of the 1980s*. (p. 262) Nayantara Sahgal's last work, published in 2003 and titled *Lesser Breeds*, explores the mental trauma women in Indian culture, where males are seen as superior and women as inferior or lesser breeds, and more susceptible, must endure.

CONCLUSION

Author Nayantara Sahgal is unique in her craft. As if she were a psychotherapist, she delves deep into her protagonist's psyche to understand her mental anguish, and she has very realistically shown violence against women of the Indian upper class. She has extensive first-hand knowledge of the plight of Indian women of means and has written movingly on their mental anguish and the violence they endure on a regular basis. She has done a masterful and amazing job of describing her own life and herself via a number of female personas.

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