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## Suffering, Pain, And Anxiety In The Selected Novels Of Nayantara Sahgal: An Analysis

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**Abstract:** The objective of the present study is to concentrate on Sahgal's major issues throughout her novels which is the suffering, anguish, pain, and identity faced by the women in the male-dominated society. I have done my best to convey that Nayantara Sahgal's journey as a female writer begins with her quest for selfhood and culminates in her achievement of it. She detests cruelty and pain because of humanitarianism. She supports Indian women's rights and emancipation and is very sensitive to their plight. Sahgal delves deeply into female psyche in almost of her novels. She has the ability to examine them with empathy and tenderness. As a female novelist, her primary goal is to advocate women's empowerment. Sahgal is incredibly worried about her women's personal fear, the loneliness and alienation, and by the fallout of marriages. Sahgal's female characters suffer because they are always fighting to maintain their uniqueness and individuality at whatever costs. She plays married women who endure a lot of hardships, and when their marriages become oppressive, they ultimately decide to file for divorce. She depicts her women's life filled with suffocation, pain, anxiety and suffering. To get free from this suffocating atmosphere the women choose only divorce.

**Keywords-** Identity, Agony, Pain, Suffering, and Patriarchal society

### I. INTRODUCTION

In her novels Sahgal focuses on the struggles, traumatic pain, anxiety, and pain that is very common in the male dominated society. Her women experience a cruel and treacherous society in which they are treated like puppets. They don't have their own choice to live their life accordingly. Here the novelist wants to portray that even though the males are free from the slavery of Englishmen, but they are still slave in their behaviour towards the women.

## 1.1 Research Objectives-

- Investigate the identity crisis, pain, and depression by exploring their struggle in order to articulate their identity in the society.
- Identifying the reasons behind this kind of crisis.
- The use of common terms such as identity, feminism oppression, and anxiety in this research paper.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Identity crisis-

The word “Identity” derived from the French noun “Identiti” which means “Identity”. The term “identity” in postmodern age (after 1945) is very complicated. It always takes different forms according to each stage of life. Actually, it is an ongoing process throughout the life. We start finding our identity when we born until we return to the grave. We are zero without identity in the society. Identity has been a controversial issue in every age. Therefore, the concept of identity does not a clear-cut concept, it is just imagined which leads us to the crisis.

According to Erik Erikson, the coiner of the term ‘identity crisis’, “In the social jungle, of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive, without a sense of identity”.

Again, Marshall McLuhan (Canadian Academic and Media theorist) argues,

“Violence, whether spiritual or physical, is a quest for identity and the meaningful. The less identity, the more violence”.

### 2.2 Identity, Feminism, Oppression, and Anxiety

In "A Doll's House", Nora directly outlined the fun that Nora and her husband had in the playhouse.

“.... But our home has never been anything but a playroom, I've been your doll-wife, just as I used to be Papa's doll-child”. This quotation clearly shows the struggle for Nora's identity as well as naturalism. As the play comes to an end, she realizes that being a "doll is not the reality of her life. (Act III, 748)

The term "feminism" refers to a variety of socio-political movements and ideas that seek to define and promote gender equality in terms of politics, the economy, the individual, and society. According to Roxane Gay, (cultural critic and novelist),

“Feminism is a choice, and if a woman does not want to be a feminist, that is her right, but it is still my responsibility to fight for her rights. I believe feminism is grounded in supporting the choices of women even if we wouldn't make certain choices for ourselves.

Sarita in Vijay Tendulkar's play “Kamala”, wife of Jadhav, (a journalist) opposes his oppressive inclinations and decides to free herself from oppression. She says:

“ But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away.

I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it." (Tendulkar Kamala 52).

Jaisingh exploits not only Kamala but also his wife Sarita. Arundhati Banerjee aptly comments:

"Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in Jadav's life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort".

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this article, the researcher will use the descriptive method in order to explore the suffering, pain, anxiety, and identity crisis in

the selected novels of Nayantara Sahgal (**A Time to Be Happy (1963), This Time of Morning (1965), The Day in Shadow**

**(1971), and Mistaken Identity (1988)**). A special focus will be placed on the female protagonists and their issues. Further, the

researcher will utilize a few related critical approaches such as feminism, post-colonialism, and cultural studies to explore the protagonist's issues.

### 4. DISCUSSION

An observation on the position of women in our patriarchal society brings to the fore, the pathetic condition of the being ones. A woman who has been created, defied and at the centre of the human existence has been robbed of her own identity in the patriarchal society. She has been robbed in all the ways, physically, mentally, and financially. While playing different roles such as mother, daughter, sister, and a wife, she has forgotten her own self completely. Man has used her, exploited her, and taken her support to climb the ladder of success but at the end of it all discarded her just like that without thinking about her major role, importance and need.

Women are born free as men in this world, but they are not allowed to be free for long whether they are with their parents or with their husbands. In fact, feminists assert that women are made by patriarchal society. It is a person who gives birth, but it is society only, turns them into women: According to the French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." This creature, called feminine, is the result of civilization as a whole and is roughly halfway between male and eunuch.

In fact, this is one of patriarchal society's shortcomings. From her birth, she is so instilled with so-called feminine values and graces that she forgets she has an independent identity as a person in the male dominated society. For man, his will is law, but for woman, there are pre-determined moulds set by man into which she has to fit herself with no choice or else she is smashed and crushed.

Feminism is concerned with the needs of a society in which women have been colonized by men for the reason of their sexuality. Nayantara Sahgal breaks down the freedom maxim in the perspective of Indian Sensibility feminism. In her novels, she deals with many unsettling questions, such as the sorrow and pain of women. Her works demonstrate her strong concern for women's freedom and emancipation; she wants them to be aware of their own existence and identity as individuals. Though most of her female characters

are depicted as spouses, mothers, and daughters, her feminist views are expressed through these domesticated figures. Nayantara Sahgal, a self-proclaimed feminist, describes her journey as a woman writer as beginning with the search for selfhood and culminating in its achievement.

The first novel, *A Time to Be Happy*, is simply a draft of what Sahgal would later elaborate on in her later writings. Despite the fact that the world described in Sahgal's novel is not a dream world for women, the majority of the female characters seem to take to it like a fish takes to water. Maya, on the other hand, is a misfit in this world and attempts to find a world that is only for her own. Despite her prudence, she is nonetheless far ahead of her time. As a result, she is opposed not only by her husband, but also by her family. Lakshmi and other women hold the concept that a wife's existence must inherently take precedence to her husband's. She must be crazy if she does not support her husband in his endeavors. Sahgal has nothing but pity for women who marry into families that are not their own. Maya comes from a family that is full of laughter, love, and companionship. She requires Harish's help in adapting to her unfamiliar surroundings, but she is met with indifference, that leads her to wilt:

“Married life had deprived her of the joyous atmosphere of that full bustling home without providing her with the warmth she sought”.

“This Time of Morning” depicts numerous aspects of female oppression. Women are oppressed not only in their roles as wives, but also as daughters, and oppressors' hands extend to their workplaces as well. Rashmi is fed up with her spouse Dalip. Dalip has had a bad impact on her personality.

Rashmi's resolute determination to leave Dalip stems from her awareness of a frustrating experience, whereas Mira's cosy security has insulated her from all odds, rendering her insensitive to the dilemma that new women like Rashmi may confront. As a result, it is not always men that victimise women; sometimes women also display disinterest.

In her novel “This Time of Morning”, she addresses the role of women in Indian society via the character of Nita. Mr. Narang, Nita's father, enjoys dancing, drinking, and playing bridge. He has a roving eye, in spite of his age. Even though he is the father of a young girl, he cannot resist the temptation to gaze at beautiful women. But when it comes to his daughter Nita, who is very beautiful and charming daughter, a complete blend of Eastern and Western culture, he somehow adheres to Victorian tradition. There is a set of regulations in his family and being a part of this family, Nita is required to follow all the rules and regulations. Mrs. Narang is overjoyed and says, “We don't allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it.” Men have the convenient belief that their dignity is untouched by their horrible moral offences; on the other hand, their honour is put at risk by a single mistake by their female relatives. Due to this, they are able to enjoy all of life's pleasures, while the women are forced to give up even the most basic and innocent pleasures.

Nita aspires to live her life independently as she is very modern in all the ways, but her parents' is planning to wash their hands by getting married of her. She is scared of even being physically close to Vijay in a private room, and she abhors the idea of getting married to him. With the help of Nita's character, Sahgal tries to satirise the so-called sophisticated culture, which tolerates women smoking and drinking in the name of modernity but raises hell when they choose who to marry.

The novel "This Time of Morning" is full of such victims like Uma Mitra facing and tolerating rules and regulations by the Indian society. She also a victim of conventions. A cheerful, nineteen-year-old girl is married to a thirty-three-year-old, person, who is serious, and responsible bureaucrat. Arjun is a loving spouse, but he's also capable of being irrationally angry. Uma wants a younger love that goes beyond Arjun. Arjun is more committed to his business. His indifferent behaviour and isolated nature make Uma frustrate emotionally and sexually. She needs regular attention. Her marriage fails to satisfy her needs as her husband fails to satisfy her physical needs. She is actually a victim of a social structure that forbids personal inclination. Through the character of Uma, Sahgal says that a "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".

In "The Day in Shadow", Simrit continues Saroj's struggle to survive in a world governed by men. Simrit is a strong, vibrant and ambitious woman. For the sake of her marriage, she practically stifles herself. Nevertheless, her spouse shows her the door at the end of it. Som is an insensitive human being who perceives a good life entirely in terms of financial comfort. He denies the existence of the soul, particularly in women. He wants Simrit to dance to his music because he is a self-centered husband. He continues to provide for her comforts as long as she yields, but Simrit comes from a very different background. She is determined to make her marriage work just because she chose to marry Som. But she feels degraded at all times. Urvashi Bharat observes: "Having chosen her husband, Simrit finds out that she is unable to decide on anything else, not even such petty domestic matters as "chair covers and curtains".(19) She is very different from her husband in terms of her preferences, beliefs, and values, but Som's will and desires ultimately the win, suffocating her initiative and her will to live, till she ultimately feels that she is just "a cog in the machine."(20)

A sensitive lady like Simrit has no place in Som's "husband-centered world," (21) which excludes her. He is so susceptible to sexual orientation bias that even his pride in having children is focused on his son and not on all of them. She keeps compromising and putting up with the lesser status that Som has given her, which goes against who she is. Even though she had long since realised how pointless it would be to try to make right with Som's world. She doesn't know what to ask for when Som gives her all that money can buy and wants to give her something extra special to celebrate his achievement. Her heart is continually being tormented by Som's inability to comprehend her. Divorce seemed to be the only possible alternative for her. It seems to be the same as freedom. However, Som's reach goes beyond marriage. His oppression continues after a divorce. As a matter of fact, Simrit views his divorce as a personal challenge after it occurs. Som refused to forgive Simrit, just as he had not forgiven Vetter.

Financially, the divorce is finalised, but morally she finds power within herself she never knew existed. She doesn't understand that people can't be normal with a divorced woman until after the divorce as she is not treated like a normal woman. They either feel sorry for her, want her, or are envious of her. For men, it doesn't really matter; however, women are treated as though they've suddenly become destitute or untouchables. People treat them like outcasts, and their opinion changes. They start looking at her, "as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks." (23) Although divorce should be a relief for a woman in Simrit's conditions, divorce cannot be seen as a sign of independence when Som is on the other side of the coin. Even though Som was no longer physically present, she lingered in his clutches. She is permanently



crippled by the divorce settlement's tax implications. This trap was like “a hangmen’s noose around her neck”. (24) Simrit appropriately compares Som to Shylock and remarks: “This agreement I’ve signed is his pound of flesh”. (25)

Actually, Som's last, greatest, and deadliest weapon against Simrit is the terms of the divorce. She is overwhelmed by hate for Som and cannot comprehend the document at all. She was aware that Som was a callous, uncaring man who had no empathy for anyone. Even still, she finds it hard to accept the reality that she is now the object of Som's brutality. “There must be a mistake, she told herself. No one treats another person like that, even when forgiveness is impossible.” (26), When she does comprehend the document's impacts, she feels as though she should tell Mool Chand how serious it is:

“I’ve been in an earthquake, Mr. Moolchand and every single thing I knew is rubble around me or the problem. Mr. Moolchand is that I have been pushed off a fifty story building and every bone in my body is broken.” (27) Sahgal remains silent on Som. Man is now the uncrowned ruler of woman's universe, and Som is just one piece of the system that makes this happen. The world is to blame; women are treated like trash and like lifeless objects by our own civilization. Their lot is to get kicked and still have tails wagging.

Pixie becomes a victim of this system as well. Pixie is a child-bearing widow. She is without a Raj who can help her with care. Actually, Pixie needs a shoulder to cry on much like Simrit does, but unfortunately, she ends up with Sumer Singh, who is quite like Som in many ways: “Pixie looks upon Sumer Singh as a leader, “and to her that meant a man of dedication.” (29) Pixie was equally in awe of Sumer if Raj had indeed gathered Simrit. Sumer was provided with a much-needed break from the competitive, complex, and envious world by her. However, Sumer was unable to provide emotional stability in exchange. He believes that by getting Pixie a job and a flat, he has shown her more than just kindness. Sumer takes advantage of Pixie in the same way that Som had taken advantage of Simrit, and just like Som had done with Simrit, he turns her out and abandons her like a hot brick.

Som has been telling Simrit over and over that he has given her everything and that she could not possibly desire anything from him. The threat from Sumer is merely a reflection of Som's “Do you realize……. I gave you a place to live in and a job? Do you think either of those is easy to get in this city?” (30)

Thus, Sumer provides Pixie the same emotional assurance that Som does for Simrit. Without ever attempting to find out what the woman wants, they both force their will on her. In the hotel room with Sumer and Pixie, the scene from Som and Simrit's bed is re-enacted. Sumer commands Pixie to leave as she recoils at his contact, saying, "Get out before I throw you out." (31) The disparity between Simrit and Pixie's stories is partly coincidental and partly character-centered. Compared to Pixie, Simrit is far stronger. Pixie is only a concubine; Simrit is a wife. In the novel, Raj is described in the book as being like a cool breeze—a unique individual. Raj is the perfect partner for a lady on her own journey since he is a complete man. Raj is a Simrit's dream come true, and Sahgal may be trying to convince us that on the day when this world will be able to change its Som and Sumer and full it with Raj, it will also be the day of equality for men and women.

In Sahgal's next novel, “Mistaken Identity”, a man named Bhushan Singh is the main character. However, the novelist also shares the related stories of four women through Bhushan. These women are Willie May, Razia, Sylla, and Bhushan's mother. Sylla is a fully emancipated Parsi woman who has never encountered

opposition to her independence. Since Willie-May is a foreign character in a Western setting, her story is devoid of all of these conventions as well. The only other woman who truly confronts threats to her independence is Bhushan's mother.

At the age of thirteen, the rane of Vijaygarh was brought to the palace as a bride together with her twin sister, having just been married for five years. She lived, but her sister passed away under bizarre circumstances. She has been fighting for her life ever then against forces that are oppressive, especially her own partner. The Raja is incredibly cold-blooded and unaffected by the wishes of the rane. He continually marries new women, which enrages his first wife. She won't put up with his constant quest for pleasure and new targets. The Raja disappears from her life after his third marriage. She shrinks back to her world with her one and only kid. Her spouse feels excluded from that culture, despite the fact that even the female attendants are a part of it. Actually, there isn't even a hint of a conjugal relationship between them. Thus, Sahgal analyses the life of a woman who is oppressed on several levels in the story of Bhushan's mother, including purdah, polygamy, the horrific slaughter of a female embryo, and the husband's complete lack of response.

The author uncovers the skeletons of deplorable cultural practises in 19th and 20th century India through her gentle historical novels *Rich Like Us*, *Plans for Departure*, *Mistaken Identity*, and *Lesser Breeds*. These practises include, to name a few, ritualistic female foeticide, witch-hunting of pregnant child mothers, sati, polygamy, and purdah.

However, Sahgal is more of a humanist than a feminist when it comes to her concerns for women. What Sahgal describes are deeper emotional and spiritual gaps brought about by egoism rather than physical loneliness. In "Women: Persons or Possessions," Sahgal criticises ideologies that treat women like property and stop them from being distinctive: When I overheard someone comment "we never allow our daughter to go out" or "I can't do that, my husband would not like it", It seemed like really strange. In a traditional community, a girl's movements are restricted when she reaches maturity, whereas her brothers are not bound to any limitations at the same age. Boys are encouraged to get involved in outdoor pursuits, while girls are constantly suggested to stay indoors.

One of the most significant novelists, Nayantara Sahgal, portrays post-colonial beliefs in her works and urges for novel perspectives on humanism and feminine ethics. Sahgal understands that her primary objective as a female novelist is to promote women's emancipation. In her works, Sahgal eloquently explains how society and individuals alike still take advantage of women today.

In the end, we might conclude that the reasons her female characters suffer are due to their insistence on holding onto their unique identities and reluctance to let go of their uniqueness. Sahgal's works portray liberal and eccentric women.

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