Abstract

Marriage is the deepest as well as the most problematic of all human relations. As most of the modern societies are patriarchies, ‘Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to woman by society’. The wives duties and obligations towards her husbands were of utmost importance....He was to her all in all. In India the same attitude is continued till the end of the 18th century. The struggle for the emancipation of woman coincides with the struggle for independence and in fact both of them are offshoots of Renaissance in India.

Nayantara Sahgal, an outstanding Indian English Novelist and an established political columnist, in her autobiographical novel The Day in Shadow narrates the experiences of Simrit who has, many years of unhappy married life. Mrs Sahgal brings out the character of SIMRIT and through her she discusses the status of women after marriage and unexpectedly after divorce. She says, “Love may be electric, as time passed one found that though electricity was useful at night, it was not needed by day. It was when one got the milder food of friendship combined with physical love that escape was difficult. In the end there was nothing in the world stronger than friendship”.

My paper deals how lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between man and woman cause wreck to marital relationship resulting in divorce.

(Key words: Patriarchy, Subservient, Equality, Communication, Freedom)

Marriage is a social institution which plays an important role in shaping the life of a human being. As most of the modern societies are patriarchies, “Marriage is the destiny
traditionally offered to woman by society”. Sociologists define it as a “cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring”. In marriage, oneness, companionship and mutuality are stressed, and it is assumed that the interests of the husband and wife are one, that whatever is for the benefit of the one is for the benefit of the other also.

Despite these idealized concepts of marriage, woman in reality is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. In her book Women, Resistance and Revolution, Sheila Row Botham uses the term “colonialized” to show the oppressed status of women in the society. J.S. Mill is right in saying that marriage is the worst form of slavery for women. He says that “no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of words, as a wife is. Engels in his the origin of the family also points out that the Latin word familia means the total number of slaves belonging to one man. Marriage, he says is not a “reconciliation of man and woman”. Marriage for a man who “takes her”, means enlargement and confirmation of his existence. He enjoys both the worlds: of home and career. Since the women is “given “in marriage, She becomes his “half” and takes his name, his religion, family and class. Before marriage, woman is made by her parents and after marriage, as Balzac puts it, “a wife is what her husband makes her”. As Germaine Green points that, after marriage her life has “Changed radically, but not her husband’s.

The concept of woman as subservient to men (as preached by Manu), and as man’s property is deep-rooted in Indian tradition as well. Nayantara Sahgal strongly condemns the attitudes which reduce woman to an object. Sahgal is not a staunch feminist and subscribes only “to the idea of it, though not to each and every aspect of it”. She envisions marriage as a sweet harmonious relationship based on mutual understanding. “Women are persons not possessions” is the note echoed in all her works especially in her work “The Day in Shadow” we find this at length.

The Day in Shadow deals with the struggle of a young and beautiful woman Simrit who experiences agony in marriage and unhappiness because of her divorce settlement. Simrit, wife of Som and mother of four children is a writer. She is a very rich man’s wife who is happier in looking after her children and writing than in being proud of her husband’s growing wealth. She stands in total contrast to her husband who is materialistic, ambitious and without finer values and sentiments. As his business grows, Som makes and breaks friendship. She finds it difficult to share his practicality and materialism. As a sensitive and refined woman, Simrit longs for communication and understanding. She wonders why a
husband can’t and wife be friends. Som, whom she marries against the will of her Brahmin parents, turns out to be a ruthless entrepreneur who is caught in a ‘spiralling mania for affluence’. The process of rift between wife and husband is imperceptible in the beginning, but grows wider with Som’s success. Simrit finds it hard to reconcile her well-being to the arms contract which Som manages to get after several trials. He cannot simply understand for what on earth she is crying for as he thinks that he is a “damned good husband” (TDS 89). He tries to pacify her saying,

....we can go abroad anytime we want, any bloody time, buy anything we want. We can air condition this whole place, furnish it all over again....(TDS : 89 )

But Simrit is in need of a world:

whose texture is kindly and all she wants is to get to a clean cold atmosphere where there was some goal beyond self-advancement(TDS:89 )

Like Inder in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Som also belongs to the ‘he-man school’ who can relegate only the secondary role to the women. His pride of procreation is concentrated only on his son, ‘Brij’, but not on other girl children.He is a man who thinks that the woman should live under the control of a man.He shows a matter of fact attitude in all matters. He shouts:

Stop crying, Simrit. What on earth is there to cry about? I’m a damned good husband, to you, aren’t I ? What have you got to complain about? We are having a wonderful life and it’s going to get better and better.(TDS :89)

He hates woman’s individuality and her freedom. He believes in male domination and he gives least freedom to his wife. He expects Simrit to live according to his will and he considers the inequality of their relationship to be the right order of things. But he also wants to be modern,

He had German phrases on the tip of his tongue and Vetter’s mannerisms. He did most of his personal shopping in Europe. In a royal blue Jocket, a French
Silk tie and hand-stitched Roman Leather shoes, he even looked like a foreign. (TDS : 91)

There is no room for warmth and commitment in his world. He can easily change jobs and discard friendship and the only interest of him is to win the race at any cost. Inspite of the fact that the world of Som becomes suffocating for Simrit, she struggles to resist the gradual alienation from him. The physical relationship with him becomes. No more, just sex, than food is just food. She feels that once,

…the edge was off hunger a meal had to be more than food. And once past its immediacy, sex had its vision too of tenderness, of humour, of more than a physical act. Sex could be an argument or a problem shared. The same spring fed all its facets-the day’s work in office, children at home, bed at night. Simrit felt on the verge of a fatal realization. She was no longer able to follow the goals Som had set for himself, and the inability seemed to be spreading through her veins, affecting the very womb of her desires, drying up the fount within her. (TDS :90)

Mrs. Sahgal portrays the estrangement between man and woman with brutal frankness and in realistic terms. She carefully avoids to be sentimental nor does she evade facing the situations and destinies. (Shyam:164).

Som is annoyed because of her melodramatic attitude. Finally he resolves that a husband has to call it a day when, “Woman freezes up every time her husband touches her” (TDS 98).

In The Day In Shadow talk was the missing link(TDS:93) between Som and Simrit, ultimately causing breakdown of their seventeen-year-old wedlock. For an educated and sensitive woman like Simrit, her Husband’s indifference is extremely inhuman, particularly when she whole-heartedly desires deeper relationship. Like Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit often does not feel the presence of Som, even though physically he is with her.

Talking about loneliness in human relationship, Germaine Greer says: many-a-housewife staring at the back of her husband’s newspaper, or listening to his breathing in bed is
lonelier than any spinster in a rented room(Greer:244). Most of Sahgal’s women suffer in marriage because their men like to remain locked up in their solitary cells (TTM:22) and do not try to reach them. They do not recognise the fact that love is necessary to happiness and “the closer together people get, the more independent and self-contained their relation becomes”(Eric Berne:125).

As a modern woman, she rebels against the traditional society and her husband. She is humiliated in the hands of her husband Som. Because of all these reasons, she seeks divorce from him in a drastic moment. One can say that Simrit is an awakened woman of modern age who shows courage to live in this world. But she does not get any peace of mind after the divorce and it is a trait in her that makes her to feel like Rashmi in This Time of Morning. She feels that in some inescapable way and part of her would always be married to Som.(TDS : 220) She thinks that it is painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The tissue of a marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on. And skeletons could endure for a million years. Just living together, daily routine produced that uncanny durability. It made the question of whether one had loved or not, been loved or not, been the transgressor or transgressed against, trivial by comparison.(TDS : 64)

Like the marriage of Vishal in Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit’s marriage also turns out to be ‘a vanishing search for communication, though she marries Som out of love. She has done all that she can, to save the marriage, but in vain. Som cuts her off easily, when she cannot respond sensitively to her needs. (M.Narendra:70).

Thus, one can observe that an Indian woman may become modern, but she can never go away from the old traditions and customs of her own country. Through Simrit, Sahgal expounds various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Simrit soon realizes that it is basically a ‘husband-centered world (TDS:2), where a free woman has no place. Out of this struggle to be free is born a new Simrit—a person who makes choices, takes decisions and becomes aware of herself as a person. First the mind, then the body open up to new response and life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfilment in her relationship with
Raj which is an involving and an equaling one. Discussing Sahgal’s works, Jasbir Jain aptly observes:

Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even contract-or it is wrong to approach it in that spirit. It is a partnership based on respect and consideration and requiring involvement from both. (Jasbir Jain : 60)

The distress that the woman feels after divorce and alienation in Indian society springs directly from the existential predicament Nayantara Sahgal candidly analyses in her marriage:

For the first time I came across the shocking assumption of inequality, A man’s ego and ambition, I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict, the man’s will and desire must prevail --- I was uneasy and restless adjusting to the demands of a personality and an environment whose goals and texture were different from anything had known or been comfortable with. (Nayantara Sahgal : 15).

Simrit she wrote is the most interesting heroine for her passivity. i.e. quite a lesson for the yuppy generation which believes in aggressive approach to life. Simrit is a passive yet not a weak heroine. She has a kind of strength out of her passivity. It had not struck me till it was out to me. (Nayantara Sahgal:68)

Simrit appears as a free woman who has the courage to break a long marital-bond between husband and wife. She decides to divorce when another male partner is waiting for her outside marriage. She boldly leaves the sheltered world of Som not to live a life of her own, but lead a happy life under the shadow of another man. She verily does not have to fight alone for survival, neither at the financial level nor at the emotional one which leaves woman even more alienated and traumatic. In her divorce settlement, Brij (her son) alone acquires five lakhs out of six lakhs, a lion- share transferred to Simrit. Besides, Som assures Brij to send him abroad for studies. Brij on his part never tries to blink Som’s promise even if that means the amount of pain and pangs to his mother. Now Simrit gets satiation in the company of Raj who has been her sole sympathizer all along. In spite of some feminine sentiments expressed by Raj now and then, his total behaviour only reinforces the Patriarchal myth of male chauvinism over woman. He is concerned about Simrit at times: First it had been her husband. Next it would be her children. Women for use had been the rule too long. (TDS : 38)Rakesh in This Time of Morning, Raj in The Day in Shadow as one critic observes, these...
men are strikingly similar – intelligent, articulate, compassionate, committed to preserving the values of justice and moderation. (Marcia:51) Here Raj pays respect to Simrit’s liberty and individuality. She didn’t need a man for identity or status (TDS: 139)

His conscious munificence goes a step further:

It was not a question of Simrit for himself at least not until he had some sign from her. It was Simrit for herself he wanted Simrit to forsake her shadows, and begin to live (TDS: 167)

Simrit fails to understand Raj’s biased nature. She blindly pays divine respect to him and feels lively in his company: a smile from him Radiated an atmosphere of suppressed jubilation that lapped around her in waves (TDS: 7)

Nayantara Sahgal shows her acute awareness of the dependent status of women in society. Not only as a woman who had an unsatisfying experience of marriage but also as a perceptive and sensitive observer of the social scene, she realizes that their status in India is like that of a second-class citizen.
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