



NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S *THE DAY IN SHADOW* : AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Day in Shadow is Nayantara Sahgal's fourth novel and one that can be considered almost autobiographical in nature. It is an honest depiction of the trials and tribulations of a divorced woman borne out of the author's bitter personal experiences. The novel also revolves around a male Protagonist Raj who believes ardently in the concept of freedom and refuses to take things passively. The other protagonist is the vibrant young capital of a newly born independent nation, Delhi which acquires a character of its own to change the destinies of people. The Sunday Times in its review mentions about the author, " She is a moral writer-though not a moralist. She sees art as all great artists of the past have seen it, as (among other things) an instrument for discerning and affirming the difference between the right and wrong, Very refreshing." The paper attempts to review the novel at various levels to decipher the autobiographical elements, decode the social history of Post Independent India with a colonial past.

Keywords : *Autobiographical, Post colonial, Post Independent*

INTRODUCTION

Simrit Raman is the main protagonist in the novel and is cast in the traditional mould of an Indian woman. A married woman whose whole world revolves around her family with her life confined to the four walls of her home. She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family who are upset with her choice of a non Brahmin life partner. She marries a flashy Businessman Som who sweeps her off her feet in a whirlwind romance and she is more than willing to be led into a sweet marital bondage. Marriage is all about compatibility at various levels

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emotional, sexual and most importantly intellectual level. Through the years, Simrit realizes the vast difference between them, on the contrary her husband Som is happy and content and goes about his work. He is the eternal self centered male around whom the world revolves and caters to his own needs, while Simrit is left with a feeling of a growing vacuum within her marriage in her life. Their outlook towards life is a great contrast, he is materialistic and ambitious in nature and wants to rise quickly and make a lot of money. While Simrit is simple and is happy with the simple things in life. Their political ideologies are also at conflict, Som blames all his family's problems, troubles and huge ancestral losses on Gandhi and the Freedom Movement. While Simrit is a staunch supporter and has a realistic view of the latest developments happening in the country. Simrit in spite of the differences tries in her own way to repair her marital life by getting pregnant repeatedly, so that she could get her husband's total attention to herself. She foolishly believes this to be a solution to her restlessness little realizing her folly and the growing burden of bringing up kids.

However the breaking point in the marriage soon occurs when Simrit is unable to accept the immoral implications and consequences of the International Business of Armaments which Som was getting into in collaboration with the Germans. She wants to have a discussion with her husband about the conflict in her mind, while Som is unable to understand her need for a dialogue, his only understanding is limited to sexual interaction which defines their relationship. The disparity in the mental attitude of the two genders is clearly the sole reason for the break down of their marriage, Som's ego prevents him from seeking any kind of communication and cuts her off totally from his life just as he had done with his closest friends. Simrit goes in search of Raj who understands her deep need for intellectual companionship and is a strong pillar of support in her times of crisis. The characters are based on real life people, Raj is based on Mangat Rai who was her real life friend and who later became her husband. Som is a replica of her first husband Gautam Sahgal. All her children figure in the novel as well. Jasbir Jain calls this novel as an "emotional autobiography" in which there is an outpour of her innermost emotions and feelings. Simrit gets a raw deal during her divorce. She is overburdened with cunningly worded documents which are beyond her comprehension and signs them dutifully unaware of the consequences, trapping her into paying taxes beyond her means on a corpus fund which was on her son's name till he came of age. Simrit is a proud woman and does not bend, she is not one to cry over spilt milk and is determined to rebuild a home for herself and her children without any sort of financial support. As a divorcee she faces the attitude of the society who treat her, "as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks". She learns to fend for herself and finds contentment in her freedom to live as she liked.

The Indian society is undoubtedly patriarchal in nature with men in the forefront. Nayantara weaves her characters and stories around this mould with the women in traditional roles. If it



is man who oppresses and represses her, it is also a man who tries to bring an awareness ,upliftment ,supports and motivates her to fight back. Raj is there to shake Simrit out of her stupor and bring her down to reality . His disgust, outrage and shock is evident when he analogises the state of the country with that of Simrit and wonders for how long would women be used and misused and would it ever end, “First it had been her husband, next it could be her children. Woman for use had been the rule too long”.

There is a strong parallel thread of discord running in Simrit’s life as well as the nation in the larger picture. Simrit is a lost soul ,with her life in scattered bits and pieces and she trying to put each piece in order and rebuild it bit by bit after her divorce. The same thing was happening in a country torn apart by the partition and dislodging and disrupting lives of millions of people across both the countries and the country itself trying to stand on its own and prove to the world that it can set its house right. The author gives a distinct identity to the capital city of Delhi by making the reader a privy to the happenings in the inner circles of Politics, Political Personalities and their games in their social parties. Delhi acquires a new vibrant life all of its own in the following sentences:

This city, its past lost in antiquity, expanding now into suburbs, blossoming into new street lighting, fountains and parks, restaurants, shops and discotheques, bore no resemblance to the slow, sedate empty capital of his youth in which Old Delhi with its University and mosque and markets had had pride of place. No resemblance either to the sad, dark, stricken Delhi of the refugee migration just after the Partition.

The novel brings out the innate skill of the author as a mistress of her craft. The main protagonist Simrit is a free lance writer and Nayantara uses her as a mouthpiece to bring out the beauty of nature alive creating graphic visuals in the process. A sample of the poetry interwoven into prose.

There was the way spring came to the hills with its delicate pastel display of almond blossom, tulips, narcissi and bluebells, its startling autumn fanfare of poppy and saffron and all year round forests of blue pine and fir a day’s walk from the snowline.

There is an underlying critique on religions which is interwoven subtly into the narrative text which is a brilliant stroke of a genius. A critical paragraph on the inhuman untouchability displays how Nayantara Sahgal passes on her ideas without appearing to be too obvious:.

But Hinduism couldn’t be turned into action at all worse it could become inhuman action. What other religion sanctioned that a man shuns contact with his own kind, with another Hindu?



Nayantara Sahgal, her Uncle's favourite niece considered Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as her third parent. His Personality and Vision for the country find reflections in every novel. She pays tribute to him by elucidating on his ideas by placing them strategically in the subtexts.

This was a peasant country, people would say, and agriculture logically should have pride of Place. Besides the country needed grain. But the Prime Minister knew it needed something else even more, the vision of a life different from the one it had known, the vision of a future that only science could produce.

CONCLUSION

A work of literature takes its place among the classics by virtue of its profundity in thoughts, language, characterizations, reflection of the times in which it is written, the engrossing narratives and the various sub texts and above all the beautiful gems of wisdom which stand out as quotes. Here are some of the outstandingly penned sentences pregnant with meaning, sarcasm and subtle humour.

"He was studying her solicitously, as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks".

"The only thing you could get without a hitch was a divorce".

"The Hindu Code Bill had jumped two thousand years of tradition to confer that particular twentieth century blessing".

"And Independence has no meaning unless it's economic".

"The Hindu race-mute acquiescent, letting things happen to it, from a country to the mind and body of a woman".

"The problem of religion is the problem of evil—poverty,disease,earthquakes".

The novel lingers in the mind of the reader long after it is read and kept aside . It can be read multiple times with every reading the reader discovers and uncovers fascinating aspects.

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