

## Agony of Women after Divorce in the Fiction of Nayantara Sahgal

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### Abstract

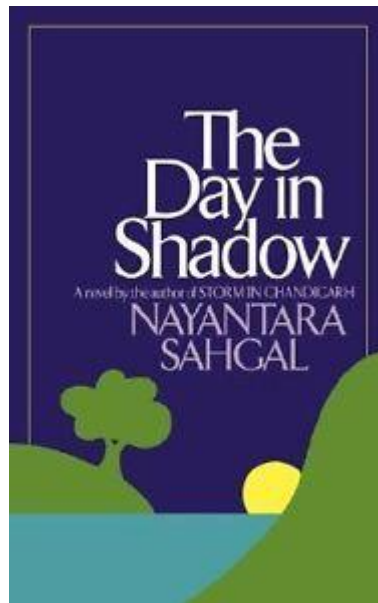
In Indian society divorce in general is considered a social stigma and a big scandal for a woman who is treated as if she is accursed with some dreadful disease. That is why, most of the oppressed women hesitate to break their unhappy marriage and silently accept physical and mental torture. However, the trends have changed in recent times. Instead of clinging to a sterile and oppressive relationship, more and more women are asserting themselves and are seeking freedom by way of divorce without minding the wrath of society or their family. For many centuries marriage was considered to be the destiny for a woman whether she was happily married, or was miserable because of constant oppression by the man in a patriarchal society. Later divorce, separation or annulment of marriage under law enabled women to get freedom from endless suffering in unhappy marriages. The process of giving legal recognition to the breaking up of a relationship already shattered by irreconcilable disparity in the character of two persons, or by broken trust, and bitter tensions is called divorce. An acceptance and adjustment of the wishes, attitudes and sentiments of both partners ensures harmony in marital relations. But when the needs, wishes or individuality of one partner is ignored, the marriage ends in discord. As Marilyn French rightly observes: "Divorce, like marriage, is morally neutral, it is good in so far as it ends a long term intimacy, it is to be lamented". (*Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* 504) But certainly divorce gives freedom to women to get rid of a constant condition of suffering due to male-aggression, gender oppression, or just terrible disharmony.

**Keywords:** Social stigma, Patriarchal Society, Male Aggression, Gender Oppression

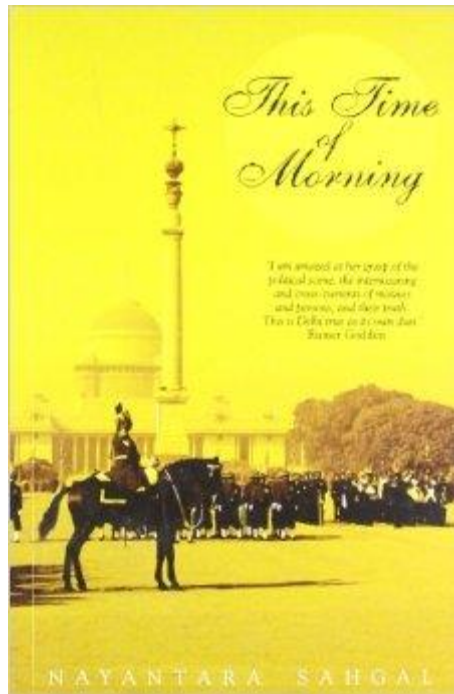
### Introduction

In India, traditionally, the matrimonial ties are considered irrevocable. The “Hindu Dharma” expects from a wife, complete obedience and devotion to her husband. She is expected to merge her ego completely with her husband’s and follow strictly the ideal of *Pativrata*.

The Indian woman is well on her way to move from the feminist phase to the phase of displacement and self-discovery. Self-assertion seems to have become the keynote of the expressions of the evolving woman. To escape the deadlock perpetuated by the unilateral dictates of a perniciously effective patriarchal form of society, the new woman comes out in more prominent contours in recent works. War is the last resort - and the new woman of India has recourse to divorce as the only means of salvaging her lost self.



This centrifugal revolt takes definite shape in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels. Divorce has been depicted as an alternative way of life to escape the drudgery perpetrated through discriminatory laws promulgated by lawmakers like Manu and enthusiastically supported and implemented by succeeding generations of men deeply steeped in their complacency to make women toe the line. Two of her novels, *This Time of Morning* (1966), and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) need special mention in this regard. Sahgal is an iconoclast - in her own right as she succeeds in demolishing the hitherto held myths and images of the Indian women - the Pati-Parameshwar image: the husband is God.



### *Sati*

In India, the blessing for the married woman is always ‘May you never lose your husband’. To have a husband was the greatest blessing for a woman even if he was evil, because society recognized a woman only through the husband. A single woman had no status in society. Hence, there were practices like “Sati” (Self- immolation of widows on the pyre of the deceased husband) because a woman’s existence without a husband was thought to be meaningless. While some widows performed Sati willingly, knowing the plight of women in that society, others were forced to die on the husband’s pyre.

Sonali while reading her grandfather’s manuscript written in 1915, finds how if a widow could not bear the flames and, tried to get out of the pyre, her relatives would thrust her back into the fire and beat her with logs of wood so that she fell unconscious and did not try to run out of the fire again. Sonali’s grandfather was a crusader against Sati. He was very happy when in 1829 the horrid rule of Sati was abolished. However, when he died, a couple of days later his wife who herself was a non-believer in Sati, was forcibly taken to a pyre next to her husband’s and most cruelly burnt by her relatives in the absence of her nineteen year old son. Even today some stray cases of Sati (like Roop Kanwar’s performing Sati in 1987) take place, but now the outcry against such practices is great. In this kind of set up, the question of divorce or separation

for a married woman did not arise. Hence, for centuries there was no provision for a legal divorce. A woman could not remarry even after the death of her husband, though a man could abandon his wife and remarry at any time.

It was only in 1857 that judicial divorce became available in England. And it was only in 1968 that the divorce laws were made more liberal. The liberalization of divorce has come as a great help to save women from endless oppression, or torture in marriage. Divorce can be granted on the mutual-consent basis, if both the partners agree and are bent upon final separation; in America this is known as the “no-fault” divorce.

### **Suffering and Stifling**

Sahgal shows women suffering in marriage and then deciding to come out of the stifling bondage by opting for divorce. They are not concerned with the legal aspects of the divorce, like the delays in legal process or rigorous legal clauses, which make divorce difficult for women. But they are concerned with the repercussions of divorce on women. Sahgal depicts her women deciding to prefer divorce to living suffocating lives of injustice and agony. Simrit and Rashmi leave their husbands or break the marriage, which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. Sahgal depicts that though divorce frees them from agony and suffering of an unhappy or unjust relationship, it still does not solve the problems and women have to continue to struggle and suffer on various levels - economic, emotional and psychological.

### **Divorce**

Divorce is admittedly a relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage. But it is hardly enough to re-establish the woman socially, psychologically or financially. Even after divorce, the aggrieved or relieved woman does not find herself in the situation as before marriage. Despite the wounds inflicted on her in the unsuccessful marriage, which have to be borne for a long time, a woman has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society, which does not allow her to be free and happy. Divorce is, indeed, the beginning of another phase of suffering.

### **Role Assigned to Divorced Women**

In the past, the role of the divorced woman was to withdraw from society and hide her shame. The divorce was shunned by friends, and spoken of in hushed whispers by her relatives. The woman who opted for divorce was not sure whether she was expected to grieve or to celebrate, to feel ashamed or relieved. The Indian society still does not consider divorce to be something good or healthy, despite the liberal divorce laws. As Rama Mehta remarks, “The position of the divorced or separated woman (has) only marginally improved for the upper middle class”. (*Divorced Hindu Woman* 168)

### **Divorce in *This Time of Morning***

In Indian society divorce in general is considered a social stigma and a big scandal for a woman who is treated as if she is accursed with some dreadful disease. That is why, most of the oppressed women hesitate to break their unhappy marriage and silently accept physical and mental torture. However, the trends have changed in recent times. Instead of clinging to a sterile and oppressive relationship, more and more women are asserting themselves and are seeking freedom by way of divorce without minding the wrath of society or their family. In *This Time of Morning* Rashmi annoys her mother who does not talk to her when she learns of Rashmi’s decision for separation. Rashmi’s mother belongs to the generation in which women were judged by their endurance, submission and devotion to whatever fate provided them in the form of a husband and his family. She firmly believes that endurance was a test of character for which her daughter could not qualify.

Sahgal’s women, for example, Rashmi, and Simrit quite feel smothered in marriage and miss desire, friendship and affection in their relationship. Divorce is an expression of their dissatisfaction over their stale and sterile marital relationship. It also expresses their desire to live a life of intense, absorbing and a more congenial relationship.

### ***The Day in Shadow* – Brutal Divorce Settlement**

Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow* primarily deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring woman trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement. The agony and unhappiness suffered at the hands of a cruel and unjust male-dominated society of India is well depicted through the character of Simrit.

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The novel has a theme of survival of a sensitive individual in a ruthlessly materialistic society. The novel narrates the story of Som and Simrit who seem to get on well in their first few years of marriage. But Som's inability to understand her, except as an object of physical attraction, compels her to seek human communication outside the marital bonds. Som believes that a wife is one half of an enterprise and the inequality between man and woman is the order of nature. It is this denial of equality that Simrit finds stifling. Despite her passive acceptance of Som's domination, Simrit retains an individuality of her own.

She wants to be a good wife but not at the cost of her individuality. She feels suffocated in the world of Som, for whom self-advancement is the only goal of life. It is the clash of ideals more than the clash of personalities that leads to their separation. Out of this gender domination is born a new Simrit, a person who makes choices, who takes decisions, and becomes aware of herself as an individual.

Through this novel *The Day in Shadow* Sahgal has portrayed how even in a country like modern India where women are almost becoming equal citizens in the last decade or so, a woman can be criminally exploited by a man without creating a ripple. Sahgal's women seek to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves, where there is no need for hypocrisy and where character is judged by the purity of heart. Thus according to Sahgal: freedom is not a gift, it is an achievement and every generation has to do its job in order to continue and preserve the tradition of freedom.

It is a brilliant, unsparing novel about divorce and its implications in Indian society. This is the story of Simrit, lost and bewildered as she struggles to cope with the emotional shock of a divorce plus a brutal divorce settlement inflicted on her. Ostracized, victimized and shackled by memories of the past, her only bridge to a new life is Raj, a brilliant, rising Member of Parliament. *The Day in Shadow* can be read at several levels. It is about Simrit, who emerges from the shadows to find happiness with Raj. It is the story of Raj, who passionately believes in freedom and refuses to accept fate as the answer to human problems. And, finally, it is the story of Delhi on the threshold of momentous changes, and a new breed of politicians far removed

from everything Gandhi stood for. Sahgal's book is a starkly understated revelation of what it is like to be a divorced woman in a nation in which domination of women has been the rule too long. It is a love story but it is also a social history presented by a talented writer who knows whereof she writes.

### **Feminist Polemic?**

Sahgal makes the inheritors of Gandhi and Nehru come alive. Subtly, without sentimentalizing and with a special gift for telling sentences that must be read a second time, she traces two parallel courses that come together at last, giving her protagonist the comrade she needs, giving him a partner in hope and trust. The author has transformed her reflection on reverence, irony and change into a powerful story. She is often impatient but she has a leader's vision. "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 right and wrong. Very refreshing.

### **Wife as Personal Possession**

In *The Day in Shadow* Som draws immense pleasure in showing off his wife as his personal possession. He would often boast before his friends: "Look what I've got. Good enough to keep under lock and key". (27) Som treats his wife Simrit as a priceless object good enough for his priceless pleasures. His job is finished with adorning his wife with jewellery and fine expensive things. Simrit, however, finds the materialistic world of Som, consisting of beautiful and choicest clothes, jewels and trips abroad, quite meaningless. She only craves for some other goal, some meaning beyond the world of self-advancement, a "world whose texture is mainly Money. Simrit finds the materialistic existence offered by her husband inauthentic and superficial, and a barrier to her self-realization.

Simrit's desire to be her own self brings the separation between Som, her husband and herself. At the opening of the novel we see her looking like a loser and learn that in her relationship with Som intensity, depth and devotion were never brought into play at all. Nor was partnership.



Simrit feels, “talk was the missing link between her and Som, between her and his world. She had a famishing need for talk”. She expects that the physical intimacy between them should spread and envelop every act and gesture of their life with tenderness and love. Som like Inder considers physical satiety a thing in itself.

Inder cannot forgive Saroj, because in spite of the harsh treatment he perpetrated on her, she does not break; it only makes her unyielding and upright. His ill treatment of her does not leave Saroj a physical or emotional wreck. With a calm that frightens him, she carries on the business of living. Saroj has the steady flame that burned and glowed in the shelter of her being which unnerves Inder. Simrit too is basically tough with the toughness of undivided integrity. Som cannot forgive this strength in her. Simrit finds it impossible to have physical intimacy with him without emotional involvement. When Som finds her cold and withdrawn, he takes it as an insult and drops her without any qualms of conscience. If Vishal Dubey’s friendship provides the necessary strength to Saroj to protest against injustice, it is Raj who uncarves Simrit and makes her aware that she can make potential choices.

### **Curious Metamorphosis**

There is truth in the observation, “Simrit’s story in *The Day in Shadow* is in many ways a continuation of Saroj’s”. But the readers feel the intensity of Saroj’s life lived with Inder, whereas Simrit’s marital relationship with Som is a thing of the past and hence lacks emotional intensity. Saroj comes alive because she is fully involved in life. We sympathize with Simrit as we observe things happening to her. Simrit, despite her sensitiveness and respect for human values, lacks the intensity of involvement which is unique to Saroj. Both Saroj and Simrit try their best to adjust, compromise and strengthen the relationship with their husbands. They want to be good wives but not at the cost of their individuality. Meena Shirwadkar’s observation on Sahgal’s women seems to explain the heart of the matter: There is a curious metamorphosis about the wives who are part of both the worlds, who hover between the Sita and Nora images. Both Saroj and Simrit seek a meaningful relationship based on confidence, trust, understanding, companionship and stability. Both are fond of children and take refuge in them when the gaping void threatens to oppress them. When they find the world they co-habit with their husbands to be uncongenial for the development and fulfillment of their individual selves, they break away



from them. The path they choose to travel is untrodden and hence thorny. They bleed and suffer in the process of breaking away from an established tradition.

### **New Morality, Not Confined to Physical Chastity**

Excepting the first novel, all the other novels of Sahgal portray women who herald a new morality, a morality not confined to physical chastity. It demands accommodation of individual longings for self-fulfilment and seeks consideration not for just the deed, but the heart and feeling too. Sahgal stands out from other women writers in that she presents licentiousness in women boldly and without hesitation.

### **Alienation**

Husband-wife alienation resulting from lack of communication and temperamental incompatibility form the theme of Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*. Sahgal presents her women as strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world and she believes their virtue is quality of heart, mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. She thinks there is this quality, in the Indian women.

Simrit in Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* also fails to build up a satisfactory relationship with Som. Simrit respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. But, for Som, the end is more important than the means. He does not hesitate to shut out a friend, or even his own wife - if he feels he or she no longer serves him any purpose. He fails to comprehend the sensibilities of Simrit and takes her withdrawal as an insult to him. When Simrit feels sad thinking of the disaster connected with the armament deal he has entered into, he revels in the prospect of his prosperity. Simrit withdraws from him emotionally, which naturally impairs their physical relationship. An egoist that he is, Som reacts wildly, walks out of her life without bothering to think of it from her perspective. Simrit has no other alternative than divorce. What forces Simrit to rebel against the conventional security of marriage is her yearning for a free communication of ideas with her husband, a companionship with her spouse.

### **No Participatory Talk**

In *The Day in Shadow*, talk was the missing link between Som and his friends. They would never discuss business details in her presence as if it was something obscene and unmentionable, or women were morons - she wasn't sure which. So most of Som's life, and thoughts stayed cut off from her. Her usefulness to him never extended to the areas of the mind. For an educated and sensitive woman like Simrit, her husband's indifference is extremely inhuman, particularly when she wholeheartedly desires deeper relationship. Like Saroj, Simrit often does not feel the presence of Som, even though physically he is with her. She recalls the experience she once had during the long drive along the Beas.

### **Men Not Reaching Out to Their Women**

Most of Sahgal's women suffer in marriage because their men like to remain locked up in their solitary cells and do not try to reach them. They do not recognize the fact that love is necessary for happiness and the closer together people get the more independent and self-contained their relation becomes.

### **An Autobiographical Novel**

*The Day in Shadow* is Sahgal's very closely autobiographical novel. It narrates the experience of Simrit who has, like Saroj, after many years of married life decided to put an end to her unhappy marriage. Through Simrit, Sahgal expounds various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Simrit's desire to be her own self brings the separation between Som, her husband and herself. Simrit accepts divorce because she was led by an absolute conviction greater than right or wrong. Her decision of divorce lands her in multifarious problems.

In the traditional society, where a married woman is respected more than a single woman, a divorcee is more or less ostracized or shunned as if she were some pollution. The husband's social status or official position becomes a touchstone for measuring the worth of a woman. Sahgal's Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* longs for communion and friendship from her husband Som. For Som, a wife is no better than a possession or ornament. He fails to respond to Simrit's longings. He expects that she should be happy and grateful to him for providing her with all the things a woman would love to have. It is beyond his comprehension that what Simrit wants is not worldly possessions, but a little companionship and recognition. The incompatibility

between them springs from the difference in their attitudes. Som is so selfish that he would not think of the harm done by the armament deal that is going to fetch him lots of money. Simrit is sensitive and cannot appreciate Som's stand. She withdraws from him, first mentally and then physically. When finally they get separated, Simrit feels the bond continuing.

Sahgal shows Simrit go through the ordeal of separation from her husband, with deep understanding and sympathy. The dream Simrit has had evokes the shattering experience that divorce is for her. She dreams that she had fallen from the highest floor and felt that every bone in her body was broken, each in splinters, every nerve laid raw. Inside her smooth unscarred skin, she was all in pieces. She has been getting past each day as if large pieces of her had been cut out with scissors, with an icy wind blowing through the gaps.

Simrit walks out of Som's life when she feels that it is no longer possible for her to live with him. Sahgal presents Simrit undergoing the shattering experience of divorce and her attempts at rehabilitating her own self, with the perception and insight only a woman writer can command. After her divorce, Simrit soon realizes that it is basically a husband-centered-world.

In such a world a free woman has no place. Her individual contribution and social standing are meaningless in this male-oriented society. Like Sahgal, Simrit is a journalist and a more well-known writer. But she finds that people are more interested in her husband and often ask, "What does your husband do?" (*The Day in Shadow* 6). They do not show any concern for the organized lonely woman. Instead they add fuel to the fire by insisting on the husband and his status, and so on. Simrit reflects on the whole graceless affair thus.

Shortly after her divorce, in a posh party being attended by top bureaucrats of the ministry of petroleum and aristocrats and sahibs of Delhi's upper strata, people are surprised to find her alone. One of the organizers of the party was studying her solicitously, as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks. Simrit is a woman with a strong sense of individuality and had never accepted a world where man did things and women waited for them. Her independent, bold, self-reliant attitude separates her from traditional women, who religiously follow the footsteps of their husbands and worship them like gods. She is surprised to find that people

around her mourn the divorce and hesitate to accept it as soothing and life-giving at least to the person who had suffered prolonged suppression and domination. The Managing Director of Oil products Ltd., Mr. Shah, whom Simrit meets to seek his advice on the consent terms, also does not consider divorce to be something positive as he believes that divorce is not part of our tradition. Sadly no one tries to look into the reason for the divorce. Divorce, when it comes to Simrit, is not easy either,

### **Freedom from Marriage Begins another Battle**

Freedom from marriage is not the end of Simrit's sufferings. It is, in fact, the beginning of a battle, with the consent terms of divorce heavily weighing her down. Sahgal confesses that in this book she has tried to figure out something that had happened to her, the shattering experience of divorce. The non-conformists who strive for individual fulfilment have to face many challenges at home and in the society too. Their refusal to play the traditional role of wife or mother who is to submerge her identity and live for the welfare of the family does not assure them a happy life. In their quest for self-fulfilment, they have to undergo the painful experience of severing the family bonds and re-establishing themselves. It is not even an easy task for them, for Indian society is, by and large, still governed by age-old traditions and conventions. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* has to suffer a lot in their attempt to achieve self-fulfillment. Likewise, girls who flout conventions and seek freedom and happiness also find it hard to realize their ambitions. Even highly placed women like Sonali in *Rich Like Us* find it difficult to swim against the current.

After divorce a woman often experiences a sense of inability to control or mould her life. In *The Day in Shadow*, Sahgal reveals the psychological, financial and other existential problems, which a woman has to face as part of her punishment for leaving her husband. After divorce, while a man feels free from all moral, social and financial responsibilities, a woman feels as if her inner self has gone to pieces or like a person thrown out of a train in the night and forced to find his way home in the dark. Even after divorce or separation, which a woman mainly seeks peace, freedom and independence, she finds herself in troubled waters again. The male jealousy and cruelty operate against her even after divorce.

Even in *The Day in Shadow* Sahgal reveals the ubiquitous pattern of behaviour. Som Raman, a business magnate agrees to divorce his wife for ultimate commercial benefits. Also, in order to take revenge on his wife Simrit, he imposes cruel divorce terms on her in a satanically shrewd way. Simrit signs the consent terms out of ignorance and good faith without really reading them.

*The Day in Shadow* gives a sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society when she opts to dissolve a marriage seventeen years old. After divorce, she has problems not only in coping with her own irrational fears and tensions but also with society, which does not recognize a woman's identity apart from her husband's. A divorced woman is stigmatized forever and she is curiously watched by others as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks.

The mere habit of living with someone for many years makes it difficult for Simrit to accept the idea of living alone, all by herself. The frightening dream that she has been having, gives us an idea of her inner disintegration, where pain follows her like a shadow never leaving her even for a moment.

Outraged at the brutal implications of the consent terms, Simrit feels very diminished and humiliated. The huge amounts of tax she will have to pay on an income she cannot even use are staggering and she feels she is an over-loaded donkey [...] which is back breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can't see it, but because it's a donkey and loads are for donkeys. Woman is just a beast of burden. In the renewed anguish, while talking to Som's lawyer, she sees her life with Som as no different from her present one: May be she had always been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told and in return she had been fed and sheltered.

Simrit is a woman who is bleeding to death with taxes. She had been used as convenience. Even after the divorce, her husband, in order to save his own income tax, thrust cruel consent terms on her according to which she has to pay huge taxes on the shares, with six lakhs of rupees, which are presently in her name but will go to her son Brij, aged sixteen, after nine years, when he reaches age twenty-five. Simrit pleads with Som's lawyer: "I don't want the

shares left in my name. As long as they are, I'll have to pay this crippling tax and whatever I earn will just be wiped out by the tax". (56) The lawyer believes that these terms are quite reasonable and was drawn with the consent of both the parties: Simrit meets Som to appeal to his conscience and to find some way out, but he proposes a fresh agreement, which is more cruel than the previous one.

Simrit rejects the fresh terms outright and thus the problem remains unresolved. Simrit continues to be in a state of agony till Raj angelically emerges to protect her and later marries her. The agony that the woman feels after divorce in Indian society springs directly from the private experience of Sahgal, in whose own life divorce was still a recent happening. Coming from the first hand experience of Sahgal, the description of Simrit's suffering has an intensity which carries the reader along and which also gives the impression of the novel being a feminist text.

### **Stepping into the Shadow of another Man**

Simrit looks like a liberated woman who has the courage to break a long relationship, which has become meaningless, with no sense of companionship or partnership between husband and wife. But she opts for divorce when already another male support is waiting for her outside marriage. She steps out of the sheltered world of Som, not to live a life of her own in her own way, but to step into the shadow of another man. She really does not have to struggle alone for survival, neither at the economic level nor at the emotional one, which leaves a woman ever more disintegrated and vulnerable.

Raj does not feel genuinely concerned about Simrit at times: First it had been her husband - next it would be her children - woman for use had been the rule too long. He seems to respect her independence and her individuality: "She didn't need a man for identity or status" (*The Day in Shadow* 139). In his conscious generosity he can go 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. However, the patriarchal attitudes are so deeply ingrained in him that they have become a natural part of his personality. He constantly maintains a stance of superiority towards Simrit.

Simrit for her own sake ironically does not even ask her about marriage, a decision even Simrit feels was supposed to be at least mutual. Simrit is surprised at the abrupt announcement, but then accepts it simply. The need for marriage is actually more desperately Raj's than Simrit's who had already tasted this institutionalized relationship for too long to be tempted into another such bond so soon. Once this sign of love has come from Simrit, Raj, like any other male chauvinist, starts taking her for granted. And Raj's indoctrination in the patriarchal set up with its unequal gender roles is so deep-rooted and so thorough that he finds nothing unnatural in this kind of command of a man over a woman.

Simrit fails to see Raj's prejudices, biases, and superficialities. She blindly adores him and feels exhilarated in his company: a smile from him radiated an atmosphere of suppressed jubilation that lapped around her in waves. Genuinely grateful to him, she feels "Raj had uncarved her" (11), never for a moment suspecting that Raj might be only carving her into a shape he himself likes. She gets easily subdued under his over-confident postures. She is taken aback at the abrupt announcement of marriage, yet surprisingly no protest comes forth from her. The indoctrination of unequal gender roles promoted right from the birth, sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly, is so deep-rooted in Simrit as well, that she too accepts the gender hierarchy assumptions as natural and even remains oblivious to any injustice inherent in them.

Despite the sudden one-sided announcement of marriage by Raj, Simrit continues in her euphoric admiration of Raj, Men like him were born to lead and educate. She does not even realize that she, who believed herself to be a woman who had never accepted a world where men did things and women waited for them has in fact once again become the one who will take orders. Only this time, the one to give orders may not be very directly opposed to tastes and values as her first husband was. She in fact just passes on from one man's world into another man's. The resolution just affirms the status-quo and the heroine's grateful acceptance of her lot makes an artificial power structure look like a natural one. Apart from the fact of divorce, Simrit herself remains a stereotype submitting to the idea of male superiority and male dominance. Though the novel has data good enough to make a feminist novel, which should centrally concern itself with the issue of power, yet, in the absence of irony at any level, it remains a novel



by a woman, about a woman, where contrary to woman's cause the status-quo is uncritically accepted as some inevitable law.

In this novel Sahgal reveals the predicament of a woman after divorce, she purposely chooses an intelligent, sensitive and aware woman, who is a writer and a free lance journalist, but who is very shrewdly trapped in a brutal divorce settlement, to show that a woman can be easily used by a man for his convenience. Through Simrit's divorce, Sahgal thus makes a strong plea for a change and revitalization of the Indian society.

### **Financial Pressures**

In Indian society, woman often finds herself in trouble due to financial pressures - but man's condition improves substantially after divorce; he becomes richer with practically no burden and responsibility weighing upon him. Overburdened with the responsibility of children and home, without any independent income of her own in most cases, a woman has to depend on the little alimony which the court of law grants in her favour as part of the divorce settlement. The law also works in the interest of men as the judges and the lawmakers are men. The woman, who has to bring up children, usually gets no help from the father of the children. In the case of a working woman, usually alimony is not granted on the grounds that she is earning on her own. But a woman's job is one that pays less than a man's, because in the interest of the family she cannot pursue a career and often takes up a part-time job, or a less demanding ones, hence less payment. As a result even though they are working after divorce, women find their financial position not very sound.

No doubt, women do "two-thirds of the world's work, provide forty five percent of its food, ten percent of its income, and one percent of its property" (Marilyn French). A woman, thus, even in purely economic terms suffers greatly in the world of male supremacy. And sometimes the fear of economic hardship alone may hold women back in unhappy marriages.

Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* writes only occasional articles in newspapers; hence she has no regular income of her own. Besides, she has to pay income tax on the shares, which her husband has kept in her name to save his own income tax. Simrit, with her son Brij and an

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unspecified number of daughters, struggles hard to maintain a rented flat, which is too expensive for her. There are no basic amenities like regular supply of milk or a phone connection. However, she tries to overcome her problems with her characteristic toughness of undivided integrity.

### **Divorce on the Emotional Level**

Even on the emotional level, divorce does not bring easy happiness or freedom to women. It turns out to be a traumatic experience, a shock and often disintegrates a poised and amiable woman's personality and disturbs her psyche. In fact, to free oneself from the past, and to soothe the wounds of a broken marriage, one needs moral strength and time that ultimately prove to be the healing factors. The social responses also add to the sense of trauma. A divorced woman is seen as a culprit or as a pitiable creature. As a result, the sense of deprivation, loneliness and insecurity increases.

Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* feels tormented after divorce as though she were suppressed under the emotional debris of the shattered relationship. Sometimes she is filled with unreasoning-dread, as if an assassin waited there in the dark for her. When she comes out of the party, Raj asks her if she enjoyed it. Simrit remarks: "How can I enjoy something? I can't even begin to think straight till things are settled at the flat". She had moved in so recently, it was not yet come, "I feel so disorganized". (14)

### **Unjust Divorce Settlement Terms**

Divorce settlement terms deliberately aimed at leaving Som's funds intact for his son, at the cost of making Simrit a financial wreck, shocks her. Her friendship with Raj provides her the anchor, helps her come out of the shock and establish a life of her own. The mutual admiration between Simrit and Raj blooms into love and they decide to marry. Simrit, despite her passive acceptance of Sam's domination, retains an individuality of her own. Freedom from marriage is not the end of her suffering. It is, in fact, the beginning of a battle, with the consent terms of divorce heavily weighing her down. Sahgal confesses that in the novel *Day in Shadow* she has tried to figure out something that has happened to her, the shattering experience of divorce. She wanted to show how even in a free country like India, where women are almost

equal citizens (since it is a patriarchal tradition that still controls Indian society), a helpless woman is exploited without creating a ripple.

### **New Friendship**

Struggling to build a new life for herself and her children, she encounters a brilliant rising member of parliament. Her friendship with Raj provides her the anchor and helps her to come out of the shock and establish a life of her own. Her struggle towards emancipation leads to the kind of resistance she is able to develop, in order to face her predicament. It was her first move towards freedom. Simrit's hesitant journey towards identity, too, is partly the product of her sensitivity which has made her a writer. Yet this sensitivity keeps her aloof from people; her spiritual nourishment comes not from her fellow man but from untouched un-spoiled non-human things. This shrinking from everyday life makes her so non-assertive, that she complies in Som's taking over her life.

Simrit discovers herself very late, but she does not sulk. The struggle for individual freedom begins the moment, the characters in Sahgal's novels realize, that they are not leading life in tune with their wishes. Her women protagonists do not emancipate as weeping dolls, but fight bravely and establish themselves. Som is insensitive to Simrit's feelings. When he divorces her, he uses money to convey his displeasure.

It is her courage which frees Simrit from the bonds of marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Out of this struggle for existence, is born a new Simrit, a person who makes choices, takes decisions and becomes aware of herself as an individual. First the mind, then the body opens up to new responses and life affirms itself in a sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj. The relationship which she builds with Raj is thus an entirely different one - it is born out of a real need, not a habit and it begins with the mind, not the body.

### **A New Order with Changed Standards**

Sahgal's women seek to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves, where there is no need for hypocrisy and where character is judged by the purity of heart and not chastity of body. When they fail to build up a relationship based on

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companionship, communication and equality, they come out of their conventions and walk with confidence over the past to build a new life with a man after their own heart.

Raj's entry into her life changes Simrit's course, turning it towards self-realization. His belief that living is an acquaintance with things in the raw and with human beings at all levels gradually penetrates into her and propels her towards taking action before it is too late. She leaves Som and moves elsewhere with her children, learning to cope with things on her own. Her divorce, then, is her first step towards self-discovery, for she has managed to break out of the enclosure; her next is learning to cope with things on her own through reaching out to Raj and fulfilling her own sexuality.

Raj loves Simrit, not as he did as a youth only to be a disappointed, but as a mature middle-aged bachelor; for he discovers in Simrit the kind of person who would soothe and sustain his restless spirit. His quest for tranquility and fulfillment thus culminates in his discovery of attachment to Simrit, the uprooted mother of several children, but a woman of culture. First the mind, then the body open up to new responses and life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj which is on equal terms. Her decision to re-marry is a sign-out of continuing subjugation, into social and sexual emancipation that leads to autonomy and selfhood.

### **Remarriage**

Remarriage is actually Raj's idea. Simrit herself is not interested; she knows she does not need marriage. That is why Raj feels impelled to make that controversial one-sided announcement about their forthcoming marriage, without consulting her beforehand, so that he can forestall her objection and evasions. Simrit characteristically, makes no commitment, but his promise of enduring comradeship makes her believe that with him beside her, but not necessarily with him as husband she has at last achieved autonomy.

Struggling to build a new life for herself as a writer and for her children, Simrit finds that the past continues to impinge on the present. She feels that a part of her would always be married to Som in the memories of shared years and the lives of children.

Simrit is a lady earning an income and can easily stand on her feet. Pixie in this novel also moves towards self-awareness but she is quite different from Sahgal's other women characters. She is a working girl who does not have the security of an affluent background. When she decides to break her relationship with Sumer Singh, she has to weigh it against her need for a job and a roof over her head. But still she decides to break, which shows her courage to seek self – realization. Similarly, after a lot of struggle, Simrit also turns out to be a woman who can make choices, take decisions and make up her mind to start life anew with Raj from whom she can get what she longs for and expects from her husband - love, warmth, affection and understanding.

Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* is unhappy because she can find no solace in being involved either to Som, her husband, or her growing children. In the back drop of political corruption and social hypocrisy, Simrit stands out alone and separated. Her marriage to a business man against the will of her Brahmin parents has fallen on rocks. Som wants Simrit to act as a traditional wife and to be his ideal of subdued womanhood, which Simrit finds to be a suffocating experience. Simrit's life with Som lacks continuity and warmth. She feels isolated. She feels uprooted in a husband -centered world. Simrit is finally estranged not by Som's domineering methods, but by his growing obsession with power and possessions. Som lives in a male-centered world, and his pride of procreation is concentrated, not on his children, but only on his son. Som does not view women as persons. He has no qualms about changing jobs and discarding friendships on his way to the top.

It is not Som's possessive attitude, but rather his growing avarice, his craze for affluence and power that Simrit finds appalling. Her disgust reaches a climax when Som and Vetter finalize a new deal to manufacture armaments and this implies in her view, the erosion of Som's humanity. Simrit is shocked by the idea that worldly goods could be exchanged for Som's bomb.

Simrit finds her life disrupted and herself in the midst of a peculiar financial problem. The heavy tax payments are an attempt to enslave her in every way, and divorce instead of being

a new beginning is a confrontation with the age old orthodox views regarding the status of women. All her attempts to make other see her as a person seeking freedom and fulfillment have failed. The divorce settlement is a continuation of their marriage, it pins her down to the role of victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free in a positive way. The first step she has to take is to face the situation and it takes courage to make a choice, take decisions and become aware of herself as a person. Raj combines in himself the two essential qualities that Simrit has been so desperately striving to find, justice and gentleness.

In her fight against injustice, Simrit is bound to receive help and co-operation from right-thinking and enlightened individuals. The revolutionary forces in society enable her to achieve her liberation from the exploiting male and his society. Since Simrit had given her consent to the document, the only way to fight the injustice perpetrated against her, was to create public opinion against it. As a freelance journalist, she could make it an issue in the papers and, meanwhile, regard herself as free from any binding obligation to honour the document's terms. Clearly, the change had to be brought about by democratic means. The feminist cause is thus upheld because it meant a fight against social wrong.

### **Fight against Anti-social**

Ram Krishnan's is a unique character in the novel for he takes up the fight against everything anti-social or anti-national. The novel demonstrates through his view of things, the application of the feminist principles emerging in the west to the situation of Hindu women in particular,

The novel makes a dig at the functioning of the courts in the country which directly or indirectly contribute to the suppression of justice to women. The worst thing that has happened to this woman is that without a proper understanding of the 'Consent Terms' in the divorce document, she has been obliged to put her signature on it and the document has been confirmed by the court. Ram Krishnan must come at last to teach her to fight against the injustice. In a cinematographic flashback, he recalls how he had stood for women's liberty in the past when he persuaded his deceased wife Vinita to reject the traditionally laid down pattern of life for a wife. He asked her to stop the twenty-four hours housekeeping and service to her husband demanded

by society and transformed her from a housekeeper and a cook into a warm friend and companion.

Sahgal emerged as one of the most significant voices in the realm of Indian English fiction. Suffering and loneliness have mellowed Sahgal and she has been able to transform these into understanding and compassion. She has gone deep into the female psyche. *The Day in Shadow* primarily deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful and daring Indian woman trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she experiences in the hands of the cruel and unjust male dominated society of India.

### **Marriage - Neither a System of Slavery Nor an Escape Route**

In *The Day in Shadow* Sahgal seems to be deeply concerned with the need of freedom for women. Simrit and Pixie in the novel want to stand on their own feet and enjoy individuality, self-expression and self dependence. It is Simrit's longing for freedom and individuality that urges her to take divorce from her husband. According to Sahgal freedom is not a gift, it is an achievement and every generation has to do its job well in order to continue and preserve the tradition of freedom.

Sahgal adopts an interesting method of creating her characters in the novel in order to promote her theme of women's suppression and revolt in the socio-political set up in modern India. The characters are functional. They are not so much individuals as types pointing to contrasting themes. She creates such contrasting pairs as Som and Raj, Sardar Sahib and Sumer Singh, N.N. Shah and Ram Krishnan. These pairs obviously represent such thematic contrasts as capitalism versus socialism, patriotism versus feudalism, vested interests versus patriotism. Even Ram Krishna and Raj Edwin Garg openly debate their respective Hindu and Christian views of life. There is also a good deal of discussion on the merits of Gandhism and Communism, and on the rampant corruption in private and public life.

Simrit's divorce in *The Day in Shadow* does not imply that marriage has failed as a social institution or that it has outlived its utility. On the other hand, it clearly demonstrates the need for reciprocal relationship in marriage. Sahgal's viewpoint appears to be a desire to place



marriage in the proper, social and emotional perspective. Man-woman relationships whether within or outside marriage need to be liberated from the conventional approaches to it, in order to become a satisfying and fulfilling one.

Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even a contract, for it is wrong to approach it in that spirit. It is a partnership based on mutual respect and consideration and requiring involvement from both. The relationship has been subjected to an unusual strain in a number of ways. Partly the break-up of the joint family system itself is responsible for the increase in friction between husband and wife. Partly, social and religious conventions have not kept pace with the changing social expectations. What concerns Sahgal most is the need for a mature approach to marriage, the need to nurture it with love and care. She wants communication, not perfection, for men and women have their own limitations, though she is fully aware that men can be as unhappy as women when the relationship is not a satisfactory one. She stresses the point that ordinarily it is woman who suffers more and is denied the right to self-expression and emancipation.

### **Gradual Move towards Awareness**

In almost every novel, Sahgal has a central woman character that gradually moves towards on awareness of her emotional needs. She is concerned with a wide range of issues but in essence they all reveal her concerns for growth and development of the individual whether the individual be a man or a woman. She firmly believes that no human problems will be solved unless human beings regard one another as equals. This is also applicable to the relationship between man and woman. Women are also individuals and marriage is a partnership and not an institution. Categorically she feels that the day women are accepted and treated as equal partners in human relationship, a new age could begin.

The underlying message in *The Day in Shadow* is Sahgal's examination of interpersonal relationship. All men in the novel who form a part of the male dominated world have similar attitudes to men-women relationships. Both Som and Sumer Singh's harshness and Raj and Ram Krisnan's paternalistic rich warm concern is part of the same social conditioning. Most marriages fail because there is no interpersonal accommodation between the partners. Simrit and

Som are not able to build a satisfying relationship. The final phase of their marriage is marked by their inability to communicate and then by the closing of their communication channels.

### **Symbolic Cross-section**

Sahgal's novels present a symbolic cross-section of the Indian nationality. Raj, the Indian Christian intellectual and an influential member of parliament; Simrit, the free-lance journalist and Som's divorced wife; Ram Krishnan, the veteran journalist and a doyen among the editors of free India; Sumer Singh, a committed Minister of State in the Union Cabinet, responsible for the Ministry of Petroleum; Som, the newly rich business baron and Simrit's divorced husband; Shah, the flexible industrialist, Lalli and Vetter the business partners of Sam for sometime; Brij, the sixteen year old son of Som are the notable characters. Sahgal brings into sharp focus the diversity of these human characters and enacts the variety of their motives in the drama of life in New Delhi.

Her emancipated women emit new vision and hope in life. Sahgal is not against tradition; on the other hand, she sees Indian tradition as a promise for survival. Sahgal emphasis the freedom of the individual self in her novels. Simrit tries to convince Som that money is no substitute for affection and interest. She is unhappy when Som rewards the children with money and not with love. But to Som and Vetter, it is Simrit who is abnormal. They are unable to fathom the cause for her unhappiness. 'Didn't she realize she was the luckiest woman in the world? Vetter asks her: Why are you not happy?' Simrit tries to analyse her own feelings and realizes that she wants a world where there is love, understanding and sublime feelings. She is shocked to notice violence and greed all around.

Simrit is not angry with the male gender. She has no quarrel with men or even with the apparent domination of men. She only rejects a certain kind of man, who embodies certain kind of values. Raj is a wonderful person so different from the other shallow and oppressive men in her life. The feminist should have iron soul, like that of men. Having understood the message, Simrit feels freed at last to undertake the struggle, no matter what amount of suffering it may involve. Simrit throws away the shackles of slavery thrust upon her by man, her husband, and while carrying on with her struggle, she has gladly retained the link with her children.

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Sahgal's women depend on some help to escape oppression and exploitation. A man provides it to them. A friend or a father often helps them to come out of the miserable relationship. He gives them moral strength to smash the taboos and assert their identity to live a meaningful life. In India still the number of free women financially independent and willing to take a drastic decision is quite limited and often in novels of early 70's women look towards men for emancipation and help. Raj in *The Day in Shadow* and Rakesh in *This Time of Morning* are instrumental in giving new directions to Simrit and Rashmi respectively, showing them the way to live life meaningfully. Apart from being down-to-earth, practical and understanding human beings, they have the extraordinary capacity to counsel patience.

In this male world where men pass orders and women carry them out, where men create situations and women live them, the only hope for a woman is another woman. Their experiences being identical, women alone can understand each other. We find in Sahgal's world, which is essentially the urban-class, sisterhood is surely one way to cope with male aggression. Sisterhood is more pronounced in Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, where Sonali, the spinster and I.A.S officer, extends all help to Ram's second wife Rose against the oppression of her stepson Dev who intends to usurp her assets and wealth by forging cheques. Sonali consults a top lawyer to help the poor and unwanted English lady. She even seeks the help of a bureaucrat, her colleague Ravi Kachru, in the matter. Sonali often takes Rose out for lunch and to cinema to lessen her loneliness. Despite her concern and help, Rose, however, is murdered by Dev's men in the end. Mona in the extreme of despair gets welded to Rose and they become "sisters". She has a desire to know more about Rose, about her parents, and to share her childhood memories.

In India an unmarried or divorced or separated woman is exposed to dangers. She is often used as convenience, and is sexually harassed, physically exploited and morally demoralized. Sahgal gives a glimpse of this through Pixie and Summer Singh's affair in *The Day in Shadow*. Summer Singh, a sex-hungry minister, misuses an independent girl Pixie for the few kind things he has done for her, like giving her a place to live in and a job. But when she refuses to please him, he threatens her with dire consequences and tells her: "You're nothing but a cheap stray". (193) Sonali in *Rich Like Us* is more free and independent than her earlier women. However,

she too is intimidated. Sonali is pressurized to work in accordance with the wishes of senior officers and ministers. She, however, retains her assertiveness and dignity and refuses to be their puppet and resigns the job instead. This is the price she has to pay for maintaining her freedom. While a married life cannot be blended with, or remains incompatible with freedom or career for the women, a free woman is also unfulfilled and is considered merely as an easy catch.

## **Conclusion**

In India remarriage is not very popular. Despite this fact, Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* remarries so that she can resume her life afresh with Raj. Sahgal, the iconoclast, shows that even after achieving freedom in all spheres, women are not truly free and happy as they realize they have to pay a heavy price for their independence. A free woman feels loneliness and unprotected in a sexist society, which is ready to crush her identity and individuality at every opportunity. The realization thus dawns on her that while divorce provides one kind of freedom, freedom from oppression and exploitation by the husband, it creates new forms of suffering and problems as well. Most of Sahgal's women remarry, not because they are anti-feminists, nor are they willing to return to oppression within marriage.

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