



## Impact of Socio-Cultural Conditions on the View-Point of the Novelist

### KEYWORDS

Indian culture, society, social belief, family

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**ABSTRACT** *Though a person may have an attitude of his own but he cannot separate himself from the society in which he dwells. Society is directly or indirectly influenced by the culture of the country. Being a product of Indian culture Nayantara's writings is also woven on the fabric of Indian culture and society. She sees the world with the eyes of an Indian and portrays it and reveals her thoughts to us through her autobiographical works and a series of novels.*

*Being a constant watcher and a sensible intellectual Nayantara couldn't avoid the social evil practices of Indian culture. She boldly presents them in her writings with a feminist attitude imbued in Indian culture.*

*A deep insight into the novels of Nayantara can help us to trace out the socio-cultural conditions that have affected the life style and view-point of her being as a novelist.*

"It is widely accepted in women's studies that culture is responsible for enunciating and perpetuating certain beliefs, ascribing roles, dehumanizing women and atrophying them" (Rashmi Talwar 77)

Therefore it is necessary to find out the background of the culture to which Nayantara belongs. Nayantara Sahgal belongs to India. India is a land of Gods and Deities, temples and mosques, the Ramayan, the Mahabharata, the Bhagwat Gita, the Upanisads, the Bible, the Quran, festivals and feasts. India has a very colourful cultural heritage. "The cultural heritage of India lies in its recognition of sustaining an inner landscape of man which is the centre and the recognition that it expresses itself in an outer landscape of man comprising myriad petals of a lotus flower". (Kapila 35) At the same time India has manifested a peculiar genius to assimilate and absorb foreign element so well as to leave hardly any trace of the original influence. This pronounced trait in the Indian character exerted a profound influence in shaping the social order, culture and art of India.

In India people practice a definite form of greeting and respecting their elders -touching the feet of an elder denotes respect and reverence. In some parts of India, children touch their parents' feet on meeting after an absence, on parting, and on all auspicious occasions to receive the blessing of their elders. Customs and traditions followed by Indians make the culture of India a peculiar one. In her autobiography Nayantara recalls her mother's practice of persuading her guests to have more food. "For Indian hospitality demands that while it is unseemly for the guest to accept a second helping the first time it is offered to him, the host must continue to tempt him, and eventually persuade him to have more. This gracious ritual requires time, attentiveness, and extreme courtesy" (Prison 140).

In Indian culture there is a great attachment to the family. Family is an important social unit. Children get their first lesson of behaviour from family is a set of members closely related with blood relations, dwelling under the same roof to achieve their social aims. In India two types of family

systems are prevalent: (i) Joint family system (ii) Solitary family system. Joint family system is the oldest family system. The basis of Joint family is the realization of duties towards each other. They receive gain from the common property but it is not equally divided among the family members. Normally the members of the joint family dwell under the same roof. The members of the joint family believe in the same religion. They join in the family festivals, marriages and different family ceremonies. The joint family system works as a productive unit. There is economic stability in the Joint family. All the members work together for the family and collect a common fund for their welfare. There is a cultural continuity in the Joint family system. They receive the cultural beliefs as their inheritance from the previous generation. Each joint family has a definite cultural model of its own, whether its form is limited it lays stress on the members of the joint family from their childhood. As a result each member receives the cultural elements related to their family i.e. behaviours, beliefs, traditions, religion. There are two kinds of joint families in India:

I. Matrilineal or Matriarchal Joint Family-Mother is the chief in such families. She has right on the property of the family. Such types of families are found in Malabar. This is an exceptional type of family system rarely to be found anywhere.

II. Patrilineal or patriarchal Joint Family: Father is the chief of the family

Due to modernization, Industrial revolution, urbanization joint family system is broken. Instead of joint families we find solitary families. After urbanization and job oriented attitude of men and women both began to give their priority to their job. This became the root cause of the degeneration of the joint family system. Solitary families came into existence in which only mother, father and their children lived. They tried to maintain their cultural continuity even after their busy routine and hustle-bustle of the City life. Though they adopted cut-short ways for their worship of God and entertainment of festivals, culture was still there.

Regarding the integrity of life with the arts and culture, K. Bharata Iyer says in his article "The Ideals of Indian Art":

The beautiful rangoli designs, drawn by Hindu women every

morning on the thresholds of their homes, the variegated patterns of

the pots, of the brass and copper vessels and lamps, the beautiful

garlands with which the household deity is adorned, the gold and

silver ornaments; the colours and designs of the sarees and other

articles of daily use, invest the Hindu homes with beauty. The

temples of imposing architecture adorned with sculpture and

painting; the festivals and the drama and dances associated with

religious rites: the wandering story-teller versed in legend, poetry

and the teachings of religion; all these brought culture and the arts very near to the daily life of the people. (4)

Family is a bond that joins the different members of the family with a strong relationship. Nayantara realizes the importance of home in her autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. She says, "Home is where one's parents are, and wherever we lived became home to us. But in the deepest sense of the word, home was Anand Bhawan" (83)

Religion plays an important role in the life of a person. Religion is like a light house in the stormy ocean of troubles. As Nayantara is a product of Indian cultural milieu she has full-faith in religion. In her novel *Rich Like Us* Nayantara has shown the roots of Mona's faith lying deep in the religious background.

India is a land where woman follows the Pativrata Dharma. India is the land of Sita, Savitri and Sati. These are the ideal women in Indian myths and legends. Indian women regard them as their guide models and walk on the foot-steps traced by them. Nayantara describes the devotional attitude of Indian women in her novel *Rich Like Us*. Ram marries with an English woman, Rose. Even though he is married to Mona. When he comes back to India and enters his Home with Rose, he is strongly opposed by his father, "He glanced up, eyes Bleak in his gaunt face, said without raising his voice", "Take that woman out of my sight and went back to his figures." This type of attitude

towards his son shows that polygamy is unacceptable in the Indian moral codes. But Nayantara portrays in her novel the woman at the height of endurance. Mona is Ram's first wife. When Ram begins to live with Rose in the same house she does not quarrel with Ram. Instead of opposing him actively she begins to oblige to God with lots of thanks. "The first one Rose remembered was the elaborate prayer chanted in thanksgiving by Mona's priest for Ram's safe return." The feminist attitude of Nayantara in the character of Mona is entirely passive, Mona is shown as a passive sufferer. "The week had another day when the mistress fasted for her husband's long life and prosperity. And apart from Mona's fasts and prayers, there were Mona's loud insistent tears." (Rich 45)

In Indian culture there is an established belief that a person has to suffer in his life according to the deeds performed by him in his previous life. This means that the theory of re-birth is widely accepted in India. In the novel *Rich Like Us* when Mona suffers a lot because of her husband she does not consider her husband guilty. "Mona's protest was far from silent. Calling upon Almighty to spell out what she had done in this or past lives to deserve such outrageous treatment, she had wept with vigour. Rose who had not set eyes on her, only heard her loud, unnerving lamentations. Some nights she got so carried away that Ram, tossing and grumbling in his bed, would finally get up and go down and Mona would reclaim her husband for a few minutes, an hour or a night" (62). The endurance, which Mona follows, is the code of Hindu religion for Indian woman. Thus Pativrata Dharma is a faith and a distinctive feature of Indian culture and tradition.

Nayantara further stresses on the irony of woman's fate in *Rich Like Us*. She says, "She was a good wife, I used to think. But now I believe all wives are good because they have little choice.... The Hindu wife is a Hindu wife and can be nothing else (160) This gives us an insight into the fettering faiths in which Indian woman is bound. She is taught from her birth the social and moral codes for a woman should follow according to the culture of her country. In Indian culture. It is accepted that all the beauty and adornment of a woman is for her husband and after the death of her husband her adornment is useless for it will tempt other men and thus become a danger for her chastity.

The treatment of the social themes by the novelist is entirely influenced by the socio-cultural impressions on Nayantara Sahgal. Her prominence on the faith of religion is identical of a typical Indian society because religion has all along been a domineering force in traditional Indian Society. The instances of the Indian Social beliefs given by her in the novel theory of rebirth, moksha, belief in a religion and fate are the results of that she belongs to the Indian culture.

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