



Martand and The Dual Marginalisation of Nayantara Sahgal

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ABSTRACT

Nyantara Sahgal uses the voice of fiction to bring to the fore a story of the socio-personal entanglement. However, the manner in which the lattice of her narration treats a variety of themes including the life of the present day sophisticated woman speaks much more than that. The struggle of the woman protagonist of her tale is synonymous to the position Sehgal is in, in her professional life, burdened by the weight of her status. The portrayal of imperfect truth that she is often blamed as, comes with the baggage of her being a woman. Being a woman, that too from the higher strata of the society has its own limitations. Hence, a double marginalisation of the author who in her own stylised grace attempts to make the unsavoury truths of life appear a little more delectable when served in her platter of well garbed fiction.

KEYWORDS

Subaltern, feminism, marginalisation, gender, sexual politics.

The issue of women's writing in English is an unsolved problem that brings with itself a multitude of other issues that almost overshadow the eminence of certain aspects of women's writings as against the rest. Nayantara Sahgal, often claimed to be a bourgeois author is considered incapable of delivering an apt description of the downtrodden of the society. This view of the world that considers the emancipated as unable to portray the gullible is but half justified, for sympathy and empathy are varied in their natures. It would be however wrong to question the ability of writers to be faithful in their portrayal of such inexperienced episodes of human civilization especially at a point when the global humanitarianism is an acclaimed fact and humanism can always be considered as the predominant creed in published authors. It is however, an important aspect to be noted when it comes to Nayantara Sahgal; apart from the allegation imposed upon her as the unfaithful portrayer of human sorrow her ability to represent the repression of the other in terms of gender escapes the significance in all scrutiny. The significant novels by the author such as "Rich Like Us", "Plans for departure", "This time of Morning", "The day in Shadow" seem to be canopied by the singular most striking criticism attributed to her by dint of her social standing. As say the Dalits against the claim that their writings are essentially propagandist in nature:

Dalit writers turn the tables on mainstream literary values by charging that the literature of the dominant group is not "good" literature because it has ignored the suffering and exploitation of Dalits. Stating that high-caste Marathi literature is artificial and false, like a paper flower, M. N. Wankhade adds that "a Marathi writer's understanding of life is restricted. . . . He has never seen that outside there is a vast world—a suffering, distressed, struggling, howling world, burning with anger from within like a prairie fire. (34 Valmiki)

Infact they go to the extent of saying that "Dalit literature can only be written by Dalits - dragging and cutting animal. How will non-Dalits write about this experience of Dalits from the power of imagination?" (34 Valmiki)

But the other significant works by the same author might possess characteristics which can claim for themselves no such biased criticism. In this context the short story "Martand" seems to be a silver lining in the cloud of the everlasting biasness that is the biggest bane to a writer, which here in specific is attributed to Sahgal.

In this particular story Sahgal brings forth the issue of migration at the backdrop of a so called emancipated household. The woman in the story seems to be the apparently emancipated, educated kinds who can voice opinions and take part

in discussions related to the state of the nation. A woman who can be thought to be independent and outspoken, living a life of absolute bliss in a nuclear family which does not involve any in-laws seems to be the indication of an absolutely paradisiacal living for the modern woman, who abhors the possibility of suffering any torment from the members of her extended family. As says Spivak:

Against the indigenous elite we may set what Guha calls the 'politics of people' both from the outside (that was considered an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor its existence depended on the latter) and inside (its existence continued to operate vigorously inspite of colonialism). (79 Spivak)

Furthermore, as the story proceeds one finds out the detestation the husband has towards the constant migration and cramming of the city they dwell in and plans to take transfer abroad. This in totality forms the background of an extremely progressive household and when the useful doctor Martand comes into the scene and gives the readers a glimpse of eternal love triangle that was soon to be formed or almost formed, it gives to the reader a feeling of apathy towards the woman protagonist. The feelings of the readers might almost correspond with that of the husband 'Suresh' in saying:

"millions why beat about the bush. It's going to be desperate just wait and see, unless the refugees ease off."

It is the deliberate structuring of the narrative that drives the reader to and fro the ladder of conscience in judging the main characters. So much so that the evident spiritual link that the wife shares with Martand might even be termed an effective camouflage for her carnal desires.

However the end of the story drives an almost sado-masochistic stance to qualify the wife who is left stranded in emotional void with no hope for any fulfilment in the duration of her existence. The death of Martand by the tyranny of his own makes an end to all humanism, shattering the hearts of both the wife and Martand. The fateful occurrence of such a doleful incident at a time when truth was to be told to Suresh opens immense scope of pondering on the entire situation. It is at this instant that the sombre reaction of the woman and the delineation of her microcosmic emotions in striking words by the author causes the reader to think twice about their already formed judgement. This unnatural end of the narrative in a tragic manner seems to be the impact of fate brought forward by the cumulative judgement of most readers making them culprits for such banishment of feelings from a singular human soul.

Martand had actually been the true other self for the wife of Suresh, with whom the spiritual intimacy was seemingly ever existing, only that the person had to be brought out of oblivion. During the course of the story the woman claims herself to be childless and says that once Suresh and she had visited the temple of the Sun God, Martand in Kashmir, as she says:

"Kashmir is unique. I did not want the rationed beauty of other places, a glimpse of hill and cloud. I wanted a pageant of it, the immense incomparable valley, unravelling as we drove through it." (212 Kumar)

One can understand the purity amidst which the temple was situated. The reference to the warmth that she had felt on touching its stones is the spiritual warmth of fulfilment that has been absent from her life only to be substituted by the crude physical love between herself and her husband. The reference to this and then the mention of Martand correspond to show the spiritual affinity that both possess for each other, as if in accordance with the laws of nature. The relationship is thus not a clandestine affair but is magnified into a destined culmination, celestial and pre ordained in nature much like the location of Martand in the purity encased landscape without which procreation is not possible this provides for the metaphor of the absent child.

It is only then that one can stop deprecating the extreme freedom imparted to womenfolk and think of the actual evils being committed. The condition of the immigrants that have abandoned their history of repression to find settlement in the land of hopes are in the present witnessing much of the same, while the residents of the land of the so called emancipation resound Suresh's thoughts, that which are filled with detestation for more of human race who came to take a share in their happiness. Thus here at once Rabindranath Tagore's words come to mind that speak the truth of the isolation of the subaltern, with no one willing enough to even understand the burden on the supposed beast:

I saw in the villages that no other caste would plough the land, owned by the namahshudras, no one would harvest their crops; no one would build their houses. In other words, the namahshudras are not considered even fit to receive even the minimum co-operation that is needed for living in a human society. For n fault of theirs we have made their lives difficult at every step. From birth to death they are made to serve a sentence of punishment.(4118 Byapari and Mukherjee)

The wife of Suresh is a similar migrant in the societal construct where she has supposedly emancipated herself by educating herself and voicing herself in a predominantly men's world. The story then situates itself not in the circumference of the audacity of emancipated woman but on the forces of repression and its mode of action brought forward in a symbolic way. It is almost the practical performance of Gramsci's point of "common sense" as put forward by Patnaik claiming:

Thus the original cognitive maps of the subaltern groups are in reality made subordinate to the organisation's discourse. The organisation's Marxism seems more and more difficult, impregnable and pedantic for the workers to grasp and internalise. Marxism paradoxically enforces a wide spread prejudice that philosophical exercises are incomprehensible to laymen. A Marxism that is meant to educate the subaltern groups but which does not evolve out of the workers perceptions, original or appropriated, cannot but remain an external force imposed on the working class as a whole.(5 Patnaik)

Similar is the case of the educated wife and the emancipated status provided to her by the society that claims itself to be the endower of emancipation to the woman, in which case the so-called emancipation turns out to be anything but emancipation.

The societal suppression in the act of the murder of Martand, obscure though it may seem, functions like the all powerful

fate in Hardy. The voice of the nouveau woman is squashed before it can make itself heard; imposing upon her a lifetime of emotional barrenness. This is clearly an instance of the mute nature of the subaltern, who without the necessities of survival being provided can hardly live life to tell its tale.

Under this light the condition of a woman who has ultimately to play her part as an element of social suppression becomes synonymous with the condition of those classes of society upon whom suppression works, in the form of the stomping of the forever emancipated. The allowing of the westernized modes of living to the woman is merely a safety valve mechanism much like Mikhail Bakhtin's 'theory of the carnivalesque':

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular

significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was

expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling... and to take the place

corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all

were considered equal during carnival.(10 patnaik)

Under the light of these Nayantara Sahgal seems to be writing a symbolist manifesto for the union of the repressed, each of whom can empathize with the other, irrespective of the type of repression each is under. Thus positioning herself as an author of the repressed and refuting any other element to her identity, that might attempt to overshadow her impactful writing calling it inexperienced.

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