

## Unheard Female Voices: A Comparative Study of Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

**Vijay Digambar Songire**

Assistant Professor, SIES

, Graduate School of

Technology, Nerul, Navi

Mumbai, India.

### Abstract

*Nayantara Sahgal, the winner of Sahitya Academy Award is a significant voice in the literary tradition of women in Indian writing in English. She is a woman who wrote not only about the sufferings and humiliation of women in India due to the rigidity of male patriarchy but also depicted the changing images of Indian women in the society in the post-Independence era. Shashi Deshpande, The winner of the Sahitya Academy and Padma Shri award, is one of the dominant female writers in Indian writing in English. She writes about the different aspects in the life of women in general and Indian women in particular. Both Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande write about the marginalization, sufferings and exploitation of Indian women under the yoke of male patriarchy. They show how women in Indian society are considered as subordinate beings and their each attempt to do something to prove their individuality is turned into a disaster on the account of male patriarchy. The present paper investigates into Sahgal's **This Time of Morning** and Shashi Deshpande's **The Dark Hold No Terrors** and shows how both of the writers are similar in their attempt to portray the sufferings and humiliation of women in India.*

**Key Words** : unheard voices, male patriarchy, sufferings, exploitation, quest etc.

Manikamma and Radhika M.K write in the article 'Women Exploitation in Indian Modern Society' : " It is realized that the long run supremacy of male over female in all respect in the patriarchal society in India is highly responsible for arresting the empowerment of women." (01) The Indian women writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandeya speak about the dilemma of Indian women's sufferings and humiliation at the hands of male patriarchy. They depict the power structure in the Indian society which denies any authority to females. Nayantara Sahgal in her *This Time of Morning* throws light upon the sufferings of a woman who is educated. Here Sahgal wants to show

how the education itself is unable to change the mentality of the society. The female character Nita is from a well- to –do family. Nita is the young beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang. Mr.Narang is a queer blend of Eastern and Western cultures. In his Western life style, drinks, dance and bridge are part of his culture. However, he treats his daughter, Nita in the most traditional manner. It indicates the double standard of Indian male dominated society, which exploits women He imposes severe restrictions on the movement of his ambitious daughter. The Narangs never send their daughter unescorted to parties. Mrs. Narang says: “We don’t allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it” (30). The Narangs’s concern for the safety and protection of their daughter illustrates their conformity to traditional values. *In This Time of Morning*, Sahgal explores the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage, in the character of Nita.

M. Selvanayaki writes: “Sahgal seems to expose conventional narrow-minded Indian society through the character of Nita. In Indian society, the parents choose life-partners. The parents arrange for the two young souls to live happily ever after. Sahgal strongly attacks this social convention and names this kind of marriage “just organized rape”. ( qtd : 274)

In *This time of Morning* Nita’s parents would not allow their daughter Nita to smoke, to have drinks or to attend club dances until she gets married. It comes like a shock to her when she learns about her parent’s decision to marry her off to a stranger. In her essay “Women Persons or Possessions” Nayantara Sahgal criticizes the wrong attitude of the patriarchal society towards women, which consider women as commodity. “ When I heard someone remark we never allow our daughter to go out or I can not do that ,my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar ,alien jargon. As if,I thought ,women were property ,not persons.” (68 )

Nita has a thirst for doing something, and does not want bound herself to any conjugal knots as yet. She requests one of her friends Rakesh to influence her parents in the matter: “I don’t want to marry at all just yet. Now you are back, Rakesh, do persuade Mummy and Daddy I should have a job. It’s ghastly doing nothing”. (32) Later her parents allow her to take up a job, but for a very different reason. Kalyan, a Minister, had offered the job and they simply did not have the heart to refuse a Minister’s offer. However, Nita looks for something more than merely a job; she strives for independence and her individual identity. She thinks: “a job was never enough [...] A job led to money and freedom, and freedom demanded a flat of one’s own away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices” (148) of men and women who do not permit women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfillment. Sahgal has tried to give voice to the voiceless in this novel where the silent sufferer Nita sees a new hope in Kalyan. She gets attracted towards him. She finds a strange comfort in his company and visits him frequently. Once she refuses to go home and expresses her love for Kalyan, She tells him: “You gave me the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I’d never have known it but for you”, (219) and she finally admits: ‘I’ve been so happy with you’ (220).

This is her attempt to find solace in the male company. A woman whose existence is denied by the family members tries to find happiness in a man of her choice. There is nothing wrong in her attempt to seek comfort in the company of Kalyan. As Jasbir Jain opines about Nita's sexual involvement with Kalyan, "With Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally to her not because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by convention." ( 42) Here Sahgal tries to convey the idea of sexual freedom for women. Nita , a woman who is burdened with her parents' wishes feels suffocated sees a man of her choice in Kalyan but unfortunately her parents don't agree with her. Apart from Nita there is Rashmi in the novel who too like Nita searches for happiness and freedom .Being married, she finds herself in the narrow confines of societal bonds. Eventually, she is ready to divorce her husband after her encounter with one foreigner, Neil. He is portrayed as a man by Sahgal who makes Rashmi aware about the meaninglessness in marriage. Her mother resents with her after knowing about her decision which shows the attitude of mothers in patriarchal Indian society who don't allow their daughters to live a life of freedom. Thus, the characters of Nita and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* stand for the unheard female voices in the male dominated Indian society. They are the silent sufferers and their attempt to find source of joy and happiness is crushed down under the heavy burden of societal norms and customs. Sahgal attacks on the age old ideology of marriage which kills women's freedom and individuality. As Purnima Bhardwaj writes : " As we find in patriarchal society ,a woman is driven on verge of deprivation and marginalization of her existence; it does greater damage to the emotional life of a married woman who as a victim of wrong marriage continues to be subjected to persistent persecution of male tyranny and ego." ( 39)

Similarly, Shashi Deshpande reveals the ugly reality in the lives of Indian women. She too like Sahgal exposes the hypocrisy of marriage. Kusuma Kumari Writes : " Deshpande's novels are about women in self quest to posit the view that women in these novels have established themselves as autonomous beings, free from restrictions imposed by societal cultures, from their own fears and guilt that women have reached a stage of understanding the fundamental truth, 'You have to find Yourself'". (189)

Sarita, the female protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is similar to Sahgal's Nita and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* who tries to find out her place in the society. She is portrayed as a middle class woman .She is born and brought up in a family where female child is deprived of parental care. Her family is a typical example of Indian male patriarchy, which does not accept the existence of female child. Saru being a girl understands her mother's loving attitude towards her son Dhruv.On the contrary her mother neglects Saru. She says to her mother: You don't want me to have anything; you don't want me to do anything. You don't even want me to live ( 142).Saru has been oppressed by her family members which shows the cruelty of male patriarchy in Indian society. Deshpande has

portrayed the feelings of a girl who is at the stage of puberty. Being a girl child Saru feels neglected and helpless. As she narrates: "I can remember closing my eyes and praying ..... Oh, God, let it not happen to me. Just this once and no more. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn't happen." (62).

Saru's situation becomes more tragic after her brother Dhruv's death who drowned in a river. Her family members consider her responsible for Dhruv's death. Saru finds herself completely helpless. Saru's mother treats her badly after the incidence. The continuous humiliation by her mother makes Saru to develop hatred towards her mother. As Adesh Pal observes: "For Saru the very word "mother" stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a Being... Thus, the strange childhood experiences up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others." (74) Though Saru is humiliated at the hands of traditional norms and customs, she does not give up. She tries to find out an opportunity to do something in her life that stops her sufferings. She wants to pursue medical degree from Mumbai. She is opposed by her mother. Saru's mother does not understand the importance of girl's education who says: "But she's a girl... And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? (144)". Eventually, Saru goes to Bombay to study Medicine with the assistance of her father got a medical degree.

Since Saru does not get warmth of love and care she, being a woman sees her future with the man of her choice namely Manohar. Manohar is a man from lower caste whose relationship with Saru is not accepted by Saru's family.

Saru's mother says to her :

"What caste is he?"

I don't know.

A Brahmin?

Of course not.

Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?" (98) It shows Saru's mother's psyche towards the low caste people. It is an example of age-old prejudice in the mind of high caste about the lower caste people. Saru's attempt of starting a new life with the man of her choice turns into a disaster. She emerged as a successful doctor in the novel but the male chauvinistic attitude of the society affects the conjugal relationship of Saru and Manohar. Saru though is a successful doctor her status makes her husband feels inferior in front of her. Manohar becomes jealous of her wife's prestige in the society. It shows the narrow-minded attitude of Indian males who don't accept their wives' status in the society. As Simone De Beauvoir observes, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445). Saru is a victim of the age old ideology of marriage. Before marriage she is humiliated by her mother which indicates women's subordinate status in Indian society. Anyhow she tries to assert

herself by pursuing a medical degree .Her decision of intercaste marriage creates problem for her. Even she leaves her parents behind in order to start a new life of freedom and peace of which she was deprived of since childhood. However, her dream remains unfulfilled when her husband Manohar does not understand her. It is his male ego that destructs their marriage. He represents age old patriarchy which does not accept women's existence.Saru feels that: "The human personality has an infinite capacity for growth, and so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. However, perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband (42)" There was nothing wrong in Saru's profession as a doctor. When Manohar finds that she is honored in the society he feels inferior and this male ego Shashi Deshpande wants to highlight in the novel. As Dr Saryug Yadav writes: "Shashi Deshpande, meanwhile, shows how emancipation and success for a woman in the patriarchal Indian society can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness." (02) The novels is a superb attempt to condemn the age old patriarchy which kills women's potential. The custom which make the existence of women vulnerable and tragic. As Ms. Indumathi. S writes in the article 'Angst of an Alienated Soul in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*' : "The Dark Holds No Terror, portrays difficult endeavors of Sarita,the protagonist. It visualizes the struggle of a woman's survival and quest of her place in the world which never shows an easy path to walk."(02) The novel shows Saru's attempt to face the tragedy in her life. A woman whose existence is denied by her parents as well as her husband tries to stand at last .The title of the novel is very symbolic which indicates the continuous sufferings of Saru. Saru's life is in darkness and she has got that much courage to face the sufferings in her life. It does not hold any terror in her mind.

Thus, Sahgal's Nita, Rashmi and Deshpande's Saru are the females who are humiliated and exploited at the hands of male patriarchy in the Indian society. Their attempt to live a free and male authority does not accept independent life. They expose marginalization of women and give voice to the unheard female voices which are not heard by the Indian male dominated society. Both Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* and Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* are the masterpieces in Indian writing in English, which expose the reality in Indian society. Their work is significant today in the 21 st century where women are striving hard for their identity formation

## Work Cited:

Adesh Pal, "Ego- Self Crisis in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande," *Changing Faces of Women in Indian Writing in English*, eds M.q. Khan, A.G. Khan (New Delhi. Creative Books, 1995)

Bhardwaj Purnima. " Treatment of Marriage in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal".

- M.Phil Thesis, Dept of English and Modern European and other Foreign Languages  
C.C.S. University, Meerut, 2004.
- Dr. Saryug Yadav. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Study of the Voice in the Voiceless Gender*. View of Space : International Multidisciplinary Journal of Applied Research, Vol-1, Issue 6, September 2013.
- Jain, Jasbir. "The Aesthetics of Morality: Sexual Relations in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal", *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*. 6 No.1 Jan 1978.
- Kulkshreshtha, Indira. *That Long Silence: Women in the novel of Shashi Deshpande- A Study*. Published by Sarup & Sons New Delhi: 2003.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley. 1953, Rpt Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.
- Y. Kusuma .Kumari. "Themes in the Recent Novels of Shashi Deshpande with Reference to Small Remedies ,Moving On and In the Country of Deceit", *The Criterion : An International Journal in English*, Vol 5, Issue -5, October 2015.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Ms. Indumathi. S. "Angst of an Alienated Soul in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*." Vol .I, Issue IV, November 2013.
- M. Selvanayaki The Plight of Women before Marriage in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* ,Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:10 October.
- Manikamma Nagindrappa ,Radhika M.K.. " Women Exploitation in Indian Modern Society." International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2013.
- Sahgal Nayantara." Women : Person or Possessions", *Hindustan Times ( Sunday Magazine)*
- Sahgal Nayantara. *This Time of Morning*. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970.