



## Woman Exploitation in the Nayantara Sahgal's Novel: A Time to Be Happy and Githa Hariharan's Novel: The Thousand Faces of Night

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**Abstract:** *Nayantara Sahgal and Githa Hariharan is a mirror to the society that they inhabit, recognizing it with all its flaws and also its potential for emancipation. Their stories though seem to be the lives of the ordinary; they convey strong messages to its readers. Both all out to be rid of a patriarchal society, both cry for gender equality; both recognize the good and bad in men and women, both realize the importance of survival; and both emerge victorious. In this paper we have taken one novel of each above said novelists, as these both novels displays women exploitations in the hands of their educated men and how the feminine characters has always been considered to be a commodity and a baby- producing machine.*

**Keywords:** *Gender equality, Exploitation, orthodox and traditional households, myths, patriarchal families.*

**Introduction:** Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* and Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* are set in India. Though set in different timelines, the characterization is relevant even today. The former is rural India, while the latter in an urban setting; the former is 1947 India, which has just achieved independence, and the latter is contemporary India, which yet needs to seek independence to overcome its limitations; the former has a nationalist temperament while the latter is more individualist in nature.

Nayantara Sahgal vividly displays woman exploitation in the hands of their educated men. She shows how this aspect is common to both orthodox and traditional households. The character Maya in *A Time to Be Happy* is unhappy in her marital life. Having experienced freedom and independence prior to marriage, she is unable to

come to terms in a family that is extremely traditional in its set up and considers women to be subservient to men. Moreover, her husband's attitude too does nothing to make her feel welcome. Maya is a strong person of Gandhian values, whereas her husband gives prime importance to money. Maya experiences loneliness and frustration and turns her attention to social work seeking relief. Maya is not a very ambitious woman, she only wants to be heard at times, but is denied even the very basic response. Maya is portrayed as a silent victim of a marriage in which the individuals have no emotional compatibility.

This silent suffering of women is central to the dogma of a patriarchal society. Ammaji, however, is able to survive as she has no regrets in supporting her husband in all his views. Though Maya and Ammaji belong to the same generation, their perspectives to the roles of women are poles apart. Therefore, it is not only men who promote patriarchy in society.

Lakshmi and Govind Narayan Shivpal are shown to be the ideal couple as both considers each other as equals. Savitri is shown to be a devout Hindu woman whose life revolves around her family. Her daughter, Kusum, represents the modern Indian woman who is in search of her own space in society.

Sahgal depicts how Hindu orthodoxy could be cruel to women and how regardless of generation, women have always wanted independence from the male-dominated society.

Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* mainly deals with exploitation of women and how she has always been considered to be a commodity and a baby-producing machine. A woman who defies motherhood is never accepted in a patriarchal society, and this is exactly what Devi does in order to assert her rebellion. She shows how marriage may be used as an instrument of female exploitation and oppression. Devi is surrounded by chauvinistic men. In her patriarchal surroundings, she finds no man to support her cause. Her husband though educated considers that women should be satisfied with their domestic life, and that it is the man that needs to have a social life. He is displeased with Devi for asserting her independence and choosing not to bear his child. Devi's father-in-law too displays the same ideas and keeps criticizing Devi for not being accommodative of her husband's needs. He refers to mythological stories to teach Devi the role of women. Devi seeks solace in her lover but he too turns out to be no different than her husband.

Hariharan strongly objects to the institution of marriage if it were to sacrifice individual growth and does not foster communication between partners. Devi is instilled with the traditional virtues of a female. However,

with the passage of time she starts questioning these very rules set down for women, wherein men seem to have no role.

Daughters are always brought up to fit into a patriarchal family. Traditional myths and legendary stories encourage the submissiveness of women and highlight domestic life to be the highest goal for a woman. However, with changing times, society needs to rewrite its own fables to cater to the large segment of independent women.

**Conclusion:** These challenges happen in the lives of women around us many times. Sahgal depicts how Hindu orthodoxy could be cruel to women and how regardless of generation, women have always wanted independence from the male-dominated society. Hariharan strongly objects to the institution of marriage if it were to sacrifice individual growth and does not foster communication between partners. Devi is instilled with the traditional virtues of a female. However, with the passage of time she starts questioning these very rules set down for women, wherein men seem to have no role.

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