

## HINDU-MUSLIM RIOT, POLYGAMY AND STATE OF INDIAN PRISON IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S MISTAKEN IDENTITY

**Dr. N. GUNASEKARAN,**  
Research Guide,  
Head, PG & Research Dept. of English,  
Sri VidyaMandir Arts & Science College,  
Katteri, Uthangarai, Krishnagiri Dt.  
E-Mail: ngsekaran1@gmail.com

**R. SANTHI,**  
Ph.D, Research Scholar,  
PG & Research Department of English,  
Sri VidyaMandir Arts & Science College,  
Katteri, Uthangarai, Krishnagiri Dt.  
E-Mail:ramasamysanthi523@gmail.com

### **Abstract:**

*No one can exclude Nayantara Sahgal in the list of most prominent Indian English novelists. She has given different dimension to the socio-political events through her novels. Being a female, she has described the sufferings of women in the society. Her novels reflect India at the time of before and after independence. Because she has the first-hand experience of independence. India and Pakistan are separated by the British people for the benefit of their raj. Before that, Hindus and Muslims have treated themselves as Brothers and Sisters. At the time of British rule, there were lot of Hindu-Muslim riots were taken place. Many people were killed and arrested in the riot. The novelist beautifully described India and its riot, Polygamy and State of Indian prison through this novel Mistaken Identity. This novel not only dealt with the mistaken identity of Bhushan Singh but also the state of India. The novelist has dealt with mostly with the upper-class people. Because she belongs to the great political family of Nehru. In this novel, she depicts upper class hero Bhushan's family and his surroundings. Sahgal's father Ranjit Sitaram Pandit was arrested for participating in the freedom struggle and died in the Jail. This makes her to describe the state of Indian prison and prisoners. It also argues about the Polygamy of Rajas and pity of their wives. They are the symbol of patience. And they remain like a statue in front of the society.*

### **Keywords:**

*Hindu Muslim riot, Polygamy, Indian Prison, Prisoners, Pity of women.*

## Introduction:

Nayantara Sahgal is an ardent supporter of feminism. She has seen the suffering of females in her own life. Her parents belong to the great political family. Sahgal's mother Vijayalakshmi has served as India's ambassador to United Nations. Ranjit Sitaram has been arrested for supporting independence and died in the prison itself. Her political family background helps her write about the Political and social situation of India. In those days, men were allowed to marry several women as per their wish. She depicts the polygamy of males and their suffering through the character of Ranees of Vijayagarh. She describes the Hindu-Muslim riot in vijayagarh because of Bhushan. She was brought up in a family with full freedom. Rachel Bari rightly observes in his *Gender and Politics in Nayantara Sahgal* as,

They were brought up without restrictions physically and mentally. It was as though their world did not have gendered demarcations and there were no concessions for being girls. This was not just the case with members of the household... If Nehru and Pandit had these thoughts, women had it too. (32)

This novel *Mistake Identity* revolves around the hero Bhushan Singh. He belongs to the family of Raja of vijayagarh. So, he has enjoyed his life. "Young men should be active. Old men should be honoured. ...Jail is an honour". (120)

## Hindu-Muslim Riot:

It is a big issue among the people of India. It is a major problem which is dealt in this novel. The hero Bhushan Singh born with silver spoon of the rich family. Because his mother has given birth to him after waiting for nine years. He has first sight love with a Muslim girl Razia. It is a love at first sight. "It was when I first saw the girl, if you call it seeing, outside the winter fair. It was growing dark". (59) Wearing burkas is a strict rule for Muslim women. Many Arab countries are careful to implement this. In vijayagarh, when compared with Muslims the Hindu people dominate there. The lovers introduced themselves but the suffering of lady love is lot in the end. The lady lover is Razia. They have met in many places and enjoyed their life as lovers. But they were caught by few men. He says,

I knew two of the men, Razia's tongwallah, nursing old hatreds by the look of him, and the college night watchman who had been a servant in our house and now spent his days in opium slumber under a guava tree in the college compound. (68)

He has been affected by sunstroke and treated for that. There was riot burst out in that village between Hindus and Muslims. They used stones, knives and bottles. "Someone set fire to one wing and the mob stamped in to loot pots and sewing machines with yells of 'Allahu Akbar' and 'Ram Ram'". (70) Many were killed in the riot. "Fifteen

Hindus, ten Mussalmans and two policemen have killed in the riot". (71) The village people arranged for an enquiry. Bhushan is enquired about his love affair with Razia. He feels ashamed of abducting a Muslim girl. He is the responsible for the riot. However, he is saved by his parents. Because he is the only son of Raja of vijayagarh. "You are being kept at home for your own protection, until the riot fever settles down. Then you may go where you please". (73)

The Muslims are affected and Hindus became like atoms in all directions to attack the Muslim People. This became an endless war between Hindus and Muslims. The later cried, "la ilahailallah". (75) Bhushan's love makes him as a poet and it is mentioned in *Indian Women Writers: A Search for Identity in Mistaken Identity* as,

Bhushan Singh accepts boldly because through Razia, he opens up his innermost self. For this very reason, he feels the need to underline and experience the Hindu-Muslim unity, the sense of oneness. Unlike Nayantara Sahgal's earlier novels, *Mistaken Identity* speaks of Gandhi and his religious philosophy in highly ironic tone. (Sinha 113)

The fault lies on both Bhushan and Razia. But the sufferer of the issue is Razia. She has run out of the village with her whole family. Like this, there is a lot of stories on female suffering is there in vijayagarh. "One must understand it is a stunning shock to be told of a female birth". (78) The Police inspector was a poor man who has killed many female kids at their birth. So the female kids are not permitted in the earth.

The society is ready to accept a man with all his mistakes. But it is not ready to accept its responsibility for female sufferings. They born to suffer. From the period of Rajas, females are affected. If a country wage a war against another country, the winning country would take overproperties, costly things and including the females. Females are treated like things or ornaments. In that period, females did not have freedom to come out of the door.

Here in these lanes a man killed his wife because he had seen her through an open door. I judged this one to be six or seven inches thick, tough with age, on rusted iron hinges with an iron chain and latch. It was not howdah-high for an elephant to pass through, but too high for me to look over into the courtyard, even from the raised bank on the side of the lane. (82)

Even now, wearing purdah is strictly followed by Muslims. Otherwise, they are killed by the religious psychos. In Kashmir, the rule is strictly followed. Hindu-Muslim riot do not come to an end. This is revealed through the relationship between India and Pakistan.

**Polygamy:**

The Raja of Vijaygarh has married several times. It is said that “a man goes from flower to flower”. (36) Raneer was married at the age of thirteen and brought to vijayagarh. She was not allowed to come out of the house. She saw the world through her carriage curtains. She spoke to the walls and walls to her. Before her marriage, “she had run to hide whenever there was talk of marriage”. (33) she has prayed for nine years to give birth to a son. They spent many years of pilgrimage for a child. She was a silent and traditional queen of the village. Bhushan describes about his mother, “Lying moulded against her narrow hollowed back until she turned over to clasp me close, I used to think she would melt goldenly as wax if sunlight ever touched her skin”. (31)

Raneer forgave Raja already at the second marriage in 1908. Now he is prepared for the third marriage. He celebrated this as first marriage. For the third marriage he took thousand people with him to the train to pick-up his bridegroom. The third wedding took place in 1917. It is believed that his new wife brought him luck and favour. Nobody worries about the feelings of Bhushan’s mother. She was betrothed at the age of five, but she has brought to vijayagarh at thirteen. One must understand it is a stunning shock to be told of a female birth. The police inspector was not a rich man. I know another family where the poor unfortunate lady kept giving birth to females. They were forced to dispatch all eight one after another. (78)

Because of his father’s polygamy, Bhushan did not like his father. “Frankly I didn’t trust father”. (78) Raneer did not get any love and affection from her husband. He was free to marry several women. It is clearly stated in *Goodbye to Realism: The “Ending” of Mistaken Identity* as,

The middle-aged “raneer” represents a strong force of change. In her own way, she has always been a rebel (like Razia and Sylla). Her characters have been one of restless questioning. She is a stronger person than her husband and refuses to accept his continued pursuit of pleasure and new ranees. (Jain 163)

She is not an educated woman but she is active and intellectual at everything. She cares for her son, husband and family. She wants a loving and caring personality. She has her own heart to feel for herself. It is noted in *Goodbye to Realism: The Ending of Mistaken Identity* thus, “The mother figure needs to be liberated from the victim’s role, from the role of passive acceptance. Birth or giving birth is not the end of woman’s life... (169 Jain) She needs to share her feelings to someone else. There she finds Yusuf as remedy. Finally, she has united with Yusuf.

**State of Indian Prison:**

Bhushan’s love affair with Razia makes a communal tension. The riot bursts out. Because of the riot, he is safeguarded by his parents. They sent him to America to reduce

the communal tension. On the return to India, he happened to be arrested by the British policemen. In the prison, he happened to meet many prisoners and share about themselves to others. During that time many political events have taken place. Comrade Day one among the fellow prisoners feel disgusting about the prison. He says,

A European criminal is entitled to a ward like a bungalow, with fans and table lamps, a proper bathroom, milk, butter, meat and toast to eat, and suits and ties to wear. Our politicals get shirts with cut-off sleeves and pyjamas with cut-off legs, and food unfit to eat. He's all for the protest but a hunger-strike is worse torture than hanging. (83)

However, they are tortured in the prison by the policemen. To get their rights the prisoners have decided for hunger strike. But they are tortured as, "A tough warder throws you on your cot, sticks a rubber tube into your nostril and pours milk through it". (83) This is great suffering than death. Among the fellow prisoners of Bhushan, two of them were died. Bhaiji knows that there is no use in their fasting. Because it is only known to the jailor. He is a communist. His dream is, "The India of Bhaiji's dreams is a country of Vegetarian capitalists and rural handicrafts". (85) To him, the future will depend totally on machines. At that time, Lahore prisoners are suffered even not getting of fresh air and any outer news. The Government tried to convince the hunger strikers to eat and to take medicine. One among the prisoner is Das who says,

But Das says he wishes to die. Why should you die, asks the mediator. For the sake of my country, replies Das, for the treatment and status of other political convicts. All this in a whisper because he's dying. And then he gets his wish. On the sixty-first day of his strike he dies, only nineteen, the same age as Sen. (86)

They all are in the hunger strike. So, they are not allowed to go to the yard and they stop the newspapers. However, they are confident on their strike. They pass time by playing many games in the cell. And few have told about their past experience. They are all hungry. "Only Sen responds with pleasure". (90) Days have gone. "By the third day of our hunger strike we aren't talking each other all the way to court..." (90) For the welfare of the people, the prisoners have sacrificed their life. They spent all over life in the prison. But now, it becomes a dirty place of having lot of criminal within it. Many freedom fighters have spent their life in prison for freedom. But now the freedom is needed with in the country itself.

Bhushan released from the prison. He wants to avoid another Hindu-Muslim riot because of his love affair. His feelings are revealed in *The Agent in the Margin: Nayantara Sahgal's Gandhian Fiction* as,

Having suffered the social consequences of falling in love with a Muslim girl, consequences that involved communal riot-murder, rape, and arson-Bhushan argues for the physical unity of different communities. (Joseph 131)

History and Politics cannot be separated. If Politics is taken imprisonment is essential to recollect its origin. Because both are interrelated. Bhushan Singh and his inmates of the prison represents like a great national leader Gandhi.

### Conclusion:

Bhushan Singh represents the need of Hindu-Muslim unity. He has a dream that is clearly mentioned in *The Political Imagination: A Personal Response to Life, literature and Politics* as,

I dream in both languages, says Bhushan Singh in his dream, 'My diet, and therefore my digestion, are mostly Muslim. But my blood seems to circulate in Hindu fashion and my heart beats alternately to each'. (Sahgal 10)

So, unity is needed for a multi-religious country like India. Polygamy represents the worst behavior of males. And it should be avoided by both genders. One for one has to be followed. The state of prison makes to recollect the suffering of freedom fighters in the prison. One has to utilize it and not to misuse it. Totally, this novel is a reflection of independence and also innovation of new ideas.

### References:

1. Bari, Rachel. *Gender and Politics in Nayantara Sahgal*. Gurgaon: Patridge India, 2015. pp. 26-58. Print.
2. Jain, Jasbir. "Goodbye to Realism: The "Ending" of Mistaken Identity". *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980's*. Ed. Vinay Kirpal. New Delhi: Allied, 1990. pp.163-170. Print.
3. Joseph, A.B.Clara. *The Agent in the Margin: Nayantara Sahgal's Gandhian Fiction*. Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008. pp. 120-146. Print.
4. Sahgal, Nayantara. *Mistaken Identity*. London: Heinemann, 1988. Print.
5. *The Political Imagination: A Personal Response to Life, Literature and Politics*. Noida: Harper Collins Pub, 2014. pp. 1-12. Print.
6. Sinha, D.K. and Chandra Shekhar Rajhans. "A search for Identity in Nayantara Sahgal's Mistaken Identity". *The Commonwealth Review* 9.2, 1997-1998. pp. 111-120. Print.