

**SURVIVAL TACTICS OF THE PROTAGONISTS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF
NERGIS DALAL**

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Abstract

The Indian novel in English has grown enormously in many directions. The image of the woman and her struggle for an identity of her own also emerges as a dominant theme in the Indian English novel. The problem of adjustment and survival have been the most widely treated problems in the novels written by the Indian women novelists. NergisDalal, who has enriched Parsi writing in English has very well understood her home India which is encircled by jealousy, religious cheating, conflicts and contradictions of family web and the failure of the women who fails to enjoy the freedom much sought by others. NergisDalal is expressive of a profound knowledge of human character and a keen sense of the feminine issues of human life. Her major fiction includes *Minari*, *The sisters*, *The Inner Door* and *The Girls from overseas*. A Diasporant herself one can identify the characters as having been displaced and dislocated. Dalal's writings centre around cultural conflict where her characters attempt to live on their own terms.. It is by temperament, by their womanliness and then by dignity, these women, though displaced, are able to clinch sustenance in life. This paper aims at highlighting the interior journey of the mind of female and male protagonists, the victims of situation and their survival tactics from the beginning to the end of the select novels.

Keywords: dominant, survival, family web, sustenance, tactics,

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NergisDalal, who has enriched Parsi writing in English is mainly a writer of prose and occasional periodical articles. She has contributed to esteemed journals like the Illustrated Weekly and Times of India etc. Besides “*The Nude*” which is a collection of brilliant short stories which explore the innermost recesses of the human soul. Her major fiction includes *Minari*, *The sisters*, *The Inner Door* and *The Girls from overseas*. These four novels have earned a substantial place for her in the history of Indo-Anglican Literature. The writings of NergisDalal has captured the hybridized identity of diaspora and satirical attack to correct the society. A diasporant herself, one can identify the characters as having been displaced and dislocated.

NergisDalal deconstructs the unfair and interiorizing structures of power and that is the reason why the theme of survival becomes significant in her novels, where protagonists have to go through various trials to survive. Her stories portray the quest of the self assertion of her male and female protagonists, who meet threats from the outside world.

The Sisters by NergisDalal brings forth certain survival tactics which keep life going. As Erich Fromm writes:

Life has an inner dynamism of the own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. When this tendency is thwarted, the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposition changes into energies directed towards destruction.

The novel comprises of the complicated thoughts that is hidden behind the female characters which forms the artistic part of the novel. So Dalal writes,

The true heart of darkness has no real physical location and even after all these years I can find myself there....all eyes were on Nina...The only reason that she was more loved was because she was beautiful. I wandered aimlessly in that radiant garden, putting as much distance as was possible between myself and the others.

She gains sustenance by recollecting the books her father has given her. Rita listens to her father reading “stories of Alexander’s conquest in India, and of the first Afghan”. Yet, Rita is particularly attracted to the story of *Attila the Hun and his hordes* who hammered “the aristocracy of Russia to act as slaves to their Mongol master” These events shape Rita to

forge a distinctive personality for her. She is able to manipulate her psychic crisis into a wilfully performative individual.

She draws sustenance from her grandmother and when she ends up a multifaceted personality skilled sociability and domesticity, she owes everything to her grandma. Grandma is very keen on Rita settling well in life. So she tries her best to give her a chance to qualify herself for a career by extending her expression of love and concern. Her perception of Nina is as she says, "The child [Nina] may be pretty but she doesn't seem to have a brain in her head". Grandma starts for Rita an account in the bank when she is only eight years old. As Rita speculates: "This was grandma's doing and I just know she expected me to be strong and to handle whatever difficulties cropped up". The presentation of Rita-Nina conflict moves beyond the thematic intention to render inner experiences, which one might call, expressionistic reality. *The Sisters* brings forth characters that not only flake from reality but also wishing to escape time and history

NergisDalal's *The Inner Door* highlights and strengthens our faith in Indian Philosophy against the background of inner consciousness, theory of karma, moral strength, eternal bliss and ultimate nirvana of the protagonist, who is an alienated, dislocated individual, enmeshed in complicated and determinate human relationships.

The Inner Door also deals with intuitive feeling, a vision and a revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes. It has for its theme the transformation of an apparently ordinary man into an extraordinary self-realized soul. It is the saga of a young man who masquerades as a yogi for sometime but is eventually impelled to throw away the mask and set out in quest of the real and the eternal. The protagonist, Rahul, starts as a spurious swami but ends up as a genuine guru. Thereby forcing him to take the extreme step. Rahul, the young protagonist of *The Inner Door*, is on his way to Rishikesh, along with his widowed mother, to meet his maternal uncle, Swami Jagdish, who runs a yogic ashram there.

Rahul, the protagonist in *The Inner Door* on his way, he meets the American couple, Chris Stuart and Myra, who decide to use him for their own commercial advancement. Rahul and his mother fall for the lure of easy money; and Rahul, after an initial training in yoga and meditation is quiet man, sitting silently on a tree is enough for the gullible masses to throng to him and proclaim him as the 'tree baba'. Rahul, who was earlier consumed with mundane desires, ultimately takes to spiritualism. Though the idea of escape may be puerile and vain to many, yet, the fact remains that the inner being will not necessarily be confined to the measure of some finite doctrine. The soul will articulate a path for deliverance.

He slips into another zone, another time, where nobody has an access to visit; they can merely see the vision, the gleam. But sadly, the lesser mortals fail to discern this unique transition of Rahul. He undergoes a self-transcendence and renounces all material desires; thereby moving to the peace and solitude of the mountains for spiritual attainment

Rahul transcends his earlier mundane existence. He wipes out the facade and mask of a fake fakir and is strangely transformed. An actual saint replaces the guise of a yogi; and yoga becomes a way of life for him. NergisDalal's, Rahul is a man forced to conform to social parameters and is compelled to earn by hook or by crook to support his widowed mother and himself. The American couple he meets, his own mother and his uncle; all seem too ready to corrupt him and none is concerned about the tainting of his pure soul. Rahul cracks under their pressure initially only to seek release later.

He seeks one more good and genuine Guru and from him he learns the higher knowledge. Under his guidance of touches and glances and by his silent lectures and his initiation through eyes elevated him to a higher level. The old Sadhu transfers the divine power. Rahul feels its impact, “the tremendous lightness and ecstasy, as though his body throbbed with powerful vibration, as the Kundalini rushed up through the Royal path to the brain” (131). Rahul becomes a master in his field. This brings immense respect and devotion for him. Rahul says,

“I must go in to the world and teach the true yoga. Not Yoga for profit, not for many disciples, but to develop the divine potentiality in all those who seek it”. (142-43)

Working of miracles has been a significant device to impress other people of one's super sensory powers. The miracles of Rahul do establish him as a Swami even to such non-believers as Chris and Myra. Rahul's guru – the old Sadhu had also shown such miracles, sweating without clothes in bitter cold, his passage of wordless message, while Rahul's mind, like a highly sensitive radio – had picked up the messages. People in large number come to the Ashram for self-realization. The American Carl Holmes explains the impact Rahul has on him to a disbelieving Chris Stuart:

He puts me into a state of trance like relaxation, in which my mind is able to contact the universal subconscious, and from it pluck what it needs, or what is necessary, for me, at that moment.... I have started writing again and I am confident, free, and totally optimistic. (120)

While engaging a variety of approaches for surviving and managing dislocation, the protagonists struggle with queries essential to all diapsora and exile: whether to conserve or

to discard identity with the place or location, to construct a new self, to devastate the old self, to be an asserter, to be an outlaw, to be an assimilator, to rub out or to safeguard the past, to hold or wipe out the self's inability to social accommodation and belonging, to work within or in opposition to the rules of systems and cultures.

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