

## Psychological Marginalization in Nergis Dalal's *Skin Deep*

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### Abstract

The image of the modern woman can be seen in her struggle for establishing her own identity which emerges as a dominant theme in the Indian English literature. At the outset, Indian women writers relished the idea of making an extensive exploration of Indian myths and legends but ongoing steps of Nergis Dalal and so many other writers have delved deep into the layers of the human mind and have given sufficient evidence of their prosodic skill in portraying the relationships in psychological manner. The twin sisters Naaz and Yasmin are reared differently in the same family milieu where Yasmin is dear to her mother, Sophie and Naaz finds care and support from her grandmother only. Yasmin's fair complexion brings everything for her easily and she enjoys her life easy going though later she faces adverse conditions. Naaz's bitter experiences of her childhood puzzle her even after her marriage with Ramesh and finally the most fatal consequence, she faces that's the death of her husband by the entry of Yasmin in their life. The present research paper is trying to explore psycho-analytical problems of feminine sensibility and sisterhood knot in the novel by bringing its wake to the concept and dimensions of the introspection.

**Keywords:** Psycho-analysis, Feminine Sensibility, Introspection, Patriarchal Society

The literary term 'marginalization' has been made of the adjective 'marginal' which means the 'state of being marginal'. The term is defined in many ways from a situated condition of border, edge or fringe. The verbal form of the term, 'marginalize' is meant "to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society". ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)). The term, 'marginalization' is the noun form of marginalize which has been suggested as "an act of placing a person or thing in a position of lesser impotence, influence or power or the state of

being placed in such a position" ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). Thus the term can be generalized in the meaning of powerful discourse for those people who are living under the status of powerless conditions those are misapplied by the society for their misfortune.

If one studies in detail, one can find that marginalization is the social process of human beings to be relegated to the fringe of society. Under such process of marginalization, a lot of people are found suffering from the social phenomenon of excluding a group of people into minority, subgroup or undesirable beings by ignoring their needs, desires, and expectations. Discrimination against such group of people is common which can be recognized in the matter of women also, including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices, remaining the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The literary artists in their works, truly, concern the present predicaments of women for the awakening of the human conscience which seems to affect dormancy towards the pitiful condition of women. In this connection, one can see the emergence of women novelists in India who have considerably influenced the change in the attitude of the patriarchal society with their effective portrayal of the agonized female psyche, her problems, her salutations, her sufferings and then finally her emancipation.

There are various types of marginalization in the history of sociology. Social, political, economical or ethnological marginalization can be studied and examined with pros and cons for its better understanding. Psychological marginalization is the concept of bringing the risk of some more psychological or ideological threats of society for some people which affects their personal identities. The first of these is the definition of one's identity, given by others while another ideological definition of one's marginalized identity is given to them in the interest of the dominant groups in society. Most of the social movements, representing oppressed and marginalized groups, have pointed out many critiques of the phenomenon so that it can be understood well by the well beings.

The present paper deals with the psychological marginalization of Naaz towards her twin sister, Yasmin in the novel, *Skin Deep* written and published by Nergis Dalal in 2005. The novel is looking much more influenced with the psychoanalytic theory of Indian English literature which has the concept of introspection into the feminine sensibility of relationship which is consisting the ideas of the: "objects that are hidden and reveal themselves to the avid look that establishes meanings by composing experiences in polythetic act, that is knowing a being or a thing, loving something, yearning for something, all things considered in the plural" (<http://www.highbeam.com/doc>). The close reading of the novel indicates that Naaz is reminding the incidents occurring in the past when somehow, life became conflicted for her because of the intense emotions that she experienced due to her sisterhood in her childhood in the household with the lack of physical beauty to attract people towards herself and such conflicted mind is presented by Leon very appropriately: "In the mind past and present merge: we suddenly call up a memory of childhood that is chronologically of the distant past; but in it memory becomes instantly vivid and is relived for the moment that it is recalled." (Leon, 41)

The present novel of Nergis Dalal opens with the description of the cold weather and bright sunshine in the month of February on the hilly side mountains of Dehradun where Naaz is seen waiting for Yasmin in the beautiful house, built for her by Ramesh, without knowing the reason why she is coming after all this time. She introduces to the readers: “Yasmin, my sister, my twin, my enemy” (SD, 1) but why, because “they don’t look at all alike” (SD, 1) and also Naaz tells about her English mother, Sophie who “would look at me with a long suffering expression on her face, as though my dark skin, plumpness and rough curly hair were specifically designed to slight her” (SD, 1-2) while “Yasmin, so effortlessly graceful and beautiful.” (SD, 2)) This partial attitude of her mother Sophie leads her to have a life long antipathy for her. The novel is talking about the Parsi community of India which is also on the marginality of caste and community in the social, political, geographical and economical background of human beings. These Parsi people are responsible for their marginality in the ironical term of the novelist: “Parsi Zoroastrians in India refused to accept converts to their religion, their numbers were steadily diminishing” (SD, 5) and it was so because it was a strongly Patriarchal system as children of mixed marriages were only accepted into the religion if their fathers were Parsees which resulted in more young people were marrying outside the community. In India, they were married to Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Muslims, and from abroad they brought back English, American, German, French, Brazilian and a liberal sprinkling of Middle Eastern spouses. It has been evidenced with her English mother, Sophie who “had fallen hopelessly in love with father when he was on one of his visits to London to inspect the family’s furniture-design department in Knightsbridge.” (SD, 5)

Her father’s name was Jehangir Jamshed Jussawala, shortly called as “JJ”. The main issue of her attraction was that her father was tall and handsome enough to attract the lady like her mother who was “intrigued by the fact that his skin was fairer than her own” (SD, 5). Naaz tells her readers that her “Father was a staunchly pro-British. He believed firmly that the British has been good for India... Her grandma too was pro-British but that did not mean that she wanted an English daughter-in-law, when there were dozens of pretty little Parsi cousins who have been more than happy to marry her son” (SD, 6). After all the expectations of her grandma, her father married Sophie who was “garlanded, kumkum applied to her forehead and then the silver tray was circled six times around her head” (SD, 7). In this way their marriage was celebrated in the grand manner and culture which reminds the Persian heritage: “A large, flat silver tray was filled with symbols of good luck and prosperity...” (SD, 5-6).

At the age of six, Naaz and Yasmin saw that there was a great deal of fuss on their birthdays as Sophie used to “order all our party frocks from Harrods... and the dresses were identical – Yasmin’s was pink, mine blue” (SD, 11). Naaz has many complaints against her dress and look. It gets her irritated but what can be done for as Sophie says: “Honestly, if you don’t look pretty in this, I don’t know how you ever can?” (SD, 12) At this, the mental conflict of Naaz begets much serious by seeing Yasmin preen and giggle and tossing her head

so that her hair may glitter in the sun. On the other hand no one notices her and she is fully ignored on her birthday. She comforts and compromises with the philosophical ideas in blank “the true heart of darkness has no real physical location, and after all these years I can find myself there” (SD, 13). Naaz wondered that how she stepped down to the garden while all the eyes were on Yasmin, whom she hated at that moment with a deep consuming hatred for her and the only reason that she was more loved because she was beautiful. Suffering with such mental conflicts, Naaz thinks: “This memory was to remain one of my most vivid recollections of an unhappy childhood... I felt aggrieved and resentful” (SD, 15). Naaz remembers this incident of her childhood so frequently that her disliking for her sister Yasmin, intensifies more and more. By this incident of childhood she gets herself so much hurt that she is content without parental love, specially of her mother. She thinks herself fortunate enough to have the company of her Grandma who saved her from the feeling of emptiness or of being unloved and gave her “the precious gift of love that never alters” (SD, 15).

The people say the past is a different country while for Naaz: “my past and my memories seemed to me like the remains of the ancient city in which every stage of development had been present in the careful layers...” (SD, 20). In this tough and tensed life, the entry of Grandma makes Naaz relaxed at some extent, especially when Grandma talked her seriously. Grandma becomes a substitute of a mother to her and her real mother, Sophie tried to make her feel ugly and ridiculous or unimportant and thus, for some reasons Naaz says “we never called Sophie ‘mother’” (SD, 23). The ignorance of the parenthood makes Naaz upset and self loving that here creates the sense and sensibilities of hatred in the relationship of their sisterhood. The emotional and psychological oppression is going on through all her life. The third chapter of the novel in which Naaz recalled the time when both of them wore saris and no one cast eyes on her and if anybody looks at her, it was sari not the sari wearing girl. It was enough to define the marginalization of a girl in the society and family. The physical beauty of the girl is the first sign of attraction which can be seen when Bobby Mehta, every young girl’s dream was invited to their house and he met both of the girls “but he never even saw me (Naaz)” (SD, 34) and it was the first time that Naaz was completely ignored while “Yasmin had married her romantic prince within a year, on her eighteenth birthday” (SD, 34).

Further, the readers know that after some time of her marriage, Yasmin was destroyed totally due to bankruptcy and death of her husband as she had nothing to do with, so anyhow she managed to get a temporary job as a receptionist at the Taj Hotel in Bombay and it was informed through the letter to Naaz and Ramesh was willing to invite Yasmin to stay with them but for Naaz: “I had a very little desire to see her again and after all that had happened, I certainly did not want her staying with us” (SD, 36). The past grievances and biases are so deeply rooted in the mind and heart of Naaz that she did not wish to see Yasmin even in her critical situation but reflecting a little over her achievements, Naaz thinks to compete with Yasmin: “The past years of my life had been happy and fulfilling... I was happily married,

with a wonderful husband and two incredible sons: surely all this was sufficient armour against Yasmin.” (SD, 36) No doubt, at this time Naaz had won the competition of not only having her royal and loyal husband, Ramesh but also having the two treasures for her next generation.

Thus, the new journey of Naaz and Yasmin started with Ramesh and his two sons who were fascinated with Yasmin and she treated them as she treated all males with a mixture of flattery and flirtatious charm to which they responded with giggles. The playing of the boys has been the great source of joy for them but the remarks of Ramesh: “They look just like Yasmin” SD, 37) and “They could be her children” (SD, 37) made Naaz’s heart beat skipped and that scene still brings a stab of pain to her heart . Which resulted in: “Ramesh, Yasmin and the boys form a small intimate group together; only I (Naaz) remains outside and in Yasmin’s eyes this is not only a triumph, but also a threat of what might happen in the future. A few days after, the next proposal of Ramesh to find some better chances for Yasmin in his own office made Naaz irritated but can’t be expressed openly: “I wanted to scream and leap at him and tear his hair but I recalled Grandma and her soft voice” (SD, 38) and responded him that it would not suit Yasmin at all but when Naaz heard the sentence of Yasmin: “Ramesh has invited me to stay as long as I want” (SD, 39), there was no delay to understand the spell of her beauty over her something mischievous actions: “Yasmin and Ramesh had three days together but that was enough” (SD, 45) to define the occurring incidents in this chapter of the novel. After that, there starts another civil war of beauty (Yasmin) and brain (Naaz) in which both of them were competing with each other without knowing the consequences of their internal and external affairs. The novelist has also tried to complicate the story in the exploration of psychological complexities between their marital relationship and of sisterhood.

One more example of women exploitation and feminine Sensibility is seen in the case of Ramesh's sister Sunita who is not mentally fit for marriage. But an unmarried girl is the centre of attraction in this man made society, either she is ill or wounded and such type of mean mentality of the people can be seen even at the religious places: “Sunita was so delighted – she laughed and clapped and several people turned to her with indulgent smiles” (SD, 206) All are worried about Sunita’s marriage but when Naaz wants to suggest them, his mother said, “You don’t understand these things...You are like a foreigner among us.” (SD, 207) The members of Ramesh’s family want to get Sunita married anyhow. So a lot of dowry was given to Sunita' in-laws by Ramesh and Naaz as fixed earlier but it was not enough to prevent the domination and exploitation of a girl like Sunita. Being tortured to utmost limits, Sunita lost her patience and her life also. Losing everything in the matter of Sunita, Naaz remembers the prayers of Zoroastrians who believe that “both good and evil exist together in this world, and often evil powers or the powers of darkness can prevail over good and influence not only individual lives but all of humanity. Keep me away from evil, that I may not harm anyone” (SD, 216). When they carried the dead body of Sunita to Haridwar for the final rites, Mrs. Kapoor has blamed her in another way: “She has disgraced our house and



brought dishonour to our family. If she wished to kill herself, she should have done it somewhere else. Not inside the house which has taken her in and given her shelter.” (SD, 218) The ashes of Sunita had not been cold while Mrs. Kapoor was planning for her next move, “the search for another victim, for more dowry” (SD, 218). In this way, everything was surprising to Naaz, how the people are destroying the essence of feminine sensibility and the novelist in the role of Naaz has to get satisfied in the philosophy of Dalai Lama “only the essence is incarnated” (SD, 220).

Going to the last phase of the novel, the readers know that it was the tricky plan of Yasmin to destroy the loving relationship between Ramesh and Naaz, “He may not have been passionately in love with me, or I with him but for all that we had a very good and solid relationship based on something far more enduring than romantic love... he would never have done anything to endanger that” (SD, 295). It shocked Naaz too much and made her suspicious whether Ramesh died of heart attack or not but it was clear that he demanded divorce from Naaz to marry Yasmin, and after knowing it Naaz grieved, “when your marriage with Bobby ended so disastrously, you envied and resented my happiness and the stability of my marriage” (SD, 296-97). The reason behind it was the conditions of his divorce for which “first losing the boys, and then the knowledge of Yasmin’s multiple lovers” (SD, 298) while “the boys meant so much to him, and he valued the stability of our relationship” (SD, 298). The mystery of Ramesh’s death has not been disclosed by Naaz and finally, “there was a storm at night, thunder crashing in deafening bursts and lightening flashing and streaking across the sky. Yasmin did not come down from her room for supper and I sent up soup and sandwiches with Rosie” (SD, 300). Thus, the novel ends with unanswerable question of Ramesh’s death and destroying Naaz’s property as well as family while Yasmin wishes: “It is a question, I prefer not to answer” (SD, 301).

Thus, a considerable part of the novel is based upon the psyche and inner conflicts of Naaz from her childhood to a well settled married life. The concept of self identity and social existence are deep rooted in women’s psychology that also led to an intrinsic exploration of the intricacies of life’s conflicts. Love is the bond between sisters but in this bond Naaz only finds deep rooted hatred and repentance. So through the character of Naaz, Nergis Dalal moved away from the traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women to the conflicted female characters searching for her identity and own way of living independently.

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