

Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* depicts Emergence of New Indian Woman

Dr. Manmeet Kour
Lecturer in English,
GDC Samba.

Nayantara Sahgal is a great writer of feminist concern who fights for women's rights. Her fictional works aim at creating awareness among the masses about the various forces that worked on the psychology of Indian woman and made her passive. Sahgal underlines the fact that the psychology of a girl child is shaped right from her childhood. Boys are allowed to indulge in every activity whether moral or immoral while various restrictions are imposed on the girls. But now with the change in thought process and rising awareness among the masses, woman has become an independent minded person, she searches for her 'self' and her own space in the society. She defies convention. The title of the novel itself suggests the end of the dark forces and the beginning of new morning and enlightenment, where tradition and modernity coalesce to form an organic whole of humanity. Sahgal's protagonists raise their voice against tradition and conventionality. Her characters strive for emancipation. In the present novel, Sahgal tries to present not only the woman's psychological suffering but also her awareness to fight for her psychological and emotional needs. The novel presents before us a modern state of woman who does not yield before the patriarchal forces and is ready to revolt against the oppression and constraints. In *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal presents women characters who are not ready to surrender against the traditions and move forward towards modernity. They pave way for other women also to take their own decisions for happiness and self growth. The present paper is an attempt to study various women characters who search for their true self and emerge as pioneers of change.

This Time of Morning reflects the missionary zeal of Sahgal who exposes the subordinate position of woman in the cultural, political and religious matrix of Indian society. Through the voice of her protagonists, she wants to make woman aware of her rights and identities. The novel describes the tension between tradition and modernity, the birth pangs of new social order reflecting the death of old orders. Sahgal's fictional woman characters as portrayed by her are tied to the bond of tradition and convention. They are so imbued with age old customs that they dare not cast aside the old values and norms and thus show their reluctance and hesitation to act against the established pattern of society. Her protagonists raise their voice against orthodox, conventionality and tradition. Her women characters strive for emancipation and sometimes they fight for that. The present novel depicts before us the new woman of the new country who decides not to yield before the patriarchal forces and becomes ready to revolt against the constraints and oppression that she experiences at the various places in the society. Her female characters work as source of inspiration for modern woman.

In this novel, Nita, a product of western education and modern upbringing revolts against the values and norms thrust upon her by her parents. Being an independent minded person, she searches for her own space in the society. She defies convention while seemingly adhering to it. She has a strong desire to do something she does not want to marry yet. She wants to be independent and therefore asks Rakesh to persuade her parents to allow her to do a job. “I don’t want to marry at all just yet. Now you are back, Rakesh do persuade mummy daddy. I should have a job. It’s ghastly doing nothing” (TTM 32). Nita strives to get a place of human dignity and individuality. She is offered a job by an influential minister but she wants something more than merely a job. She craves for freedom, for her own identity. Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* writes, “Instead of thinking Identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead of identity as a production which is never complete, always in process” (222).

Nita struggles to create a new world for herself. She longs for some breathing space. She resents the idea of getting married to a man who is chosen by her parents. She is looking for a soul mate, with whom she can converse, share her views and emotions. It is this search for freedom that takes her towards the irresistible personality of Kalyan Sinha. She seeks not the material concerns of stocks and shares, money and clothes, but emotional security, her inner desire of self fulfillment. She enjoys the company of Kalyan Sinha as he gives her the opportunity for discovering her own self, “the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I’d never had known it but for you” (TTM 307). Through the character of Nita, Sahgal tries to explore the search of modern woman for her ‘self’ recognition, thus unravels her mind. Dr Kanupriya in her article *Feminist Consciousness in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal* states:

In the character of Nita in *This Time of Morning* Sahgal explores the place of women in Indian society before marriage and the kind of freedom young women desire outside marriage. Sahgal refers to the rigid codes in a traditional society when a young girl reaches puberty, her movements are restricted, whereas marriage seems to be a license to do the things hitherto prohibited. Nita resents the idea of an arranged marriage. To her this kind of marriage does not offer any prospect of fulfillment. (5)

There is another female character Rashmi, whose marriage with Dalip becomes suffocating and she moves out of the cocoon of marriage. Being a young woman of post independent India, she is aware of her needs and desires. Unlike her mother Mira, who held marriage as sacred bond, Rashmi returns to her father’s home when her marriage with Dalip becomes a traumatic experience. Though being full of life and spirited, a wrong marriage changed her course of life. Dissatisfied with her marriage, Rashmi is in a state of utter confusion. Entrapped in the institution of society and haunted by cultural conditioning that Hindu marriage ties are sacrosanct, the compulsion is “to endure, reconcile and preserve, no matter at what cost” (TTM 13). But with a strong desire to put an end to her mental suffering and agony, Rashmi steps out of the sacrosanct orbit of marriage and returns home.

Another female character portrayed by Sahgal is Uma Mitra, a girl of nineteen who marries a top official of thirty three years of age. Much older than her, he remains absorbed in his official work. With the result, most of the time, he remains oblivious of the physical and mental needs of his wife, he expects Uma to pass her time by reading

books and doing other household works. He wants Uma to follow the pattern of domination and subordination. Uma is vibrant and full of life. She wants to express her desires. To voice her dissatisfaction and frustration, Uma moves out of the relationship in search of green pastures. By creating such characters in the novel, Sahgal has depicted that the new woman is not subdued who willingly accepts everything. She is bold, assertive and full of confidence.

New Indian woman rejects the relational identity, i.e. to be known as her husband's wife, father's daughter and children's mother. She is well educated, economically independent and is now capable to understand the artificiality of this relational identity. She has changed and does not want to restrain herself to the confines of her household. She wants to have an equal place with man and a respectable status in society. No doubt, every woman is a daughter, sister, wife and mother but she wants an individual identity. She has become conscious of herself as a being and she is no more a puppet. A keen study of various characters portrayed by Sahgal shows that woman is showing the signs of awakening by challenging the established norms of the society. Sahgal attempts to create a modern woman, who is revolutionary against male possession and can develop her own self. She says, "I try to create the virtuous woman, the modern Sita. My women are strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart, and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity I think there is this quality in the Indian woman" (Jain 145).

Works Cited and Consulted;

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Penguin, 1963.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

Jain, Jasbir. *Nayantara Sahgal*. Printwell, 1994.

Kanupriya. *Feminist Consciousness in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal: New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English*. Ed. Amar Nath Prasad. Sarup and Sons, 2004.

Sahgal, Nayantara. *This Time of Morning*. Gollancz, 1965.