

Post- independence Exuberance and Disillusionment in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*

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ABSTRACT

There have been umpteen English writings on post-independence India among which Nayantara Sahgal's novel *This Time of Morning* stands at a prominent position. The present paper attempts to focus on the political, social, and cultural circumstances in India after independence in the above mentioned novel. Politicians holding power and their method of applying that power in the sphere of politics are presented in chronological way. The novel marks the image of emergence of a new nation in the form of an independent country. It belongs to the period of the birth of nation India. The research paper would be focused on the post-independence exuberance and disillusionment in India through this novel. Political and social turmoil that India has been facing since independence is portrayed in the novel in a clear and precise way. So taking under deep consideration these dimensions would be analyzed. Nayantara Sahgal's novels portray the contemporary incidents and realities saturated with artistic and objectivity. After independence, new movements evolved due to the conflicts between different classes of the nation. Sahgal's eloquent writing of past as a sense of value and history has influenced both her choice of genre and form. In fact, we find that very stuff of her writings finds motivation from her firsthand experience of the issues that she came across in her life and she was closer to the domain of political power, so her novel entitled *This Time of Morning* provides a very substantial scope to cope with this research paper.

1. Introduction

The title of the novel, *This Time of Morning*, evidently suggests the morning after gaining independence, means regulating the events and incidents, when the people had to plan the course of actions, strategies, and programmes to realize the dreams and desires set for the public peace, prosperity and safety. The novel depicts the corrupt socio-political matters after independence. The fictional world of this novel is followed by a new race of politicians of all sorts including, bureaucrats, journalists, parliamentarians, artists and even housewives. The life portrayed in this novel is the life concerned through and through with politics. *This Time of Morning* gives awful details of the socio- political deterioration in India through the disgraceful actions of Indian Cultural delegates send abroad. The letter received by the Government of India explains how they fly around the world with tax payers' money. Some of them take away with themselves towel and soap from hotel they stay in and consumed a huge amount of vodka. Samir Gupta, the manager of the troop orders bed tea and when a Soviet servant takes it to him, he tries to molest her and she returns back screaming down the hall. There is a smooth deterioration in the living standards and behavior among the politicians as well as the civilians. M.V. Sharma has expressed his opinion regarding the novelist that: "There is an undercurrent of humanistic concern in her novels which is also her solution to political confrontation, social evils and individual conflicts" (43). The senior politicians gained experience and wisdom didn't value in the post Gandhian era. The new politicians dreams of replacing the senior politicians, and wait their retirement with annoying patience.

Nayantara Sahgal is a firm believer that normalcy can be obtained merely by peaceful and non- violent means. She is of the opinion that multifold problems of the nation can be solved through Gandhi's moral approach. Like Gandhiji, she also believes that freedom doesn't mean just escape from foreign rule but a spiritual and moral freedom. If a nation is emerged to powerful, it is also obligatory that every individual must be morally diligent and preserving. So the novel deals with the two types of politicians- the Gandhians and non-Gandhians, means one is idealistic and other is materialistic. As Jasbir Jain observes:

In *This Time of Morning* politics function at various levels . . . the young Foreign Service officers who are told by Prime Minister that basically independence means foreign relation. . . It is a political world where ideologies and policies meet, clash and confront each other; where an individual influences politicians, and policies influences individuals. (Jasbir Jain 141)

Kalyan Sinha dominates the people around him with his indifferent nature. It is due to the critical circumstances in his life that give birth to his nature like this. He becomes totally immoral and rejects Gandhi's ideologies because it creates sufferings. For him suffering and poverty are evils and brings no reverence for those who accept them as destiny. The novel indicates the gradual development of his consciousness that at the end understands that "every man counts, that life is the sum total of moments" (*This Time of Morning*142). He begins

his life an anonymous soul born and bred in poverty and saved by a kind man in street in Patna. He was looked after by a couple during his illness, but at the end he turns hostile and thankless towards them in turn.

In the novel, there is also a tale of broken marriage, love and role of culture, hindered the women freedom and conflicts between conservatism. Liberal attitude in Mr. Narang's family and Kailas's family against the setting of the conflict between Gandhian values represented by Kailas and anti- Gandhian tendency set by Kalyan. Three types of women presented in the novel, first is Mira, a traditional bound woman, second, Nita and Rashmi new emerging women and third is Uma Mitra, a rebellious woman.

The controversy and contradiction in the novel begin between Kailas Vrind and Kalyan Sinha, and this conflict is between the two ideologies. On the one hand, there is Kailas, an idealist associated with the generation that had succumbed to the magic of Gandhi. He had been a dependable associate of Prime Minister and had led successful delegations to the United Nations. On the other hand, Kalyan is not like him, he is pragmatist. Before his coming to India and joining the cabinet he had founded the Indian Centre in Paris in 1935 with the objective of exciting public opinion in the favour of Indian freedom. With Kalyan as rude temperamental president the Centre becomes a club with strict, stern and arrogant; he is a "character" with "the irresistible attraction that eccentricity has for the young" (158). In his ruthless pursuits now he can sacrifice anything from his political boss to the woman who loves him. Open to corruption and reasonable deportment, the government ultimately compelled him to resign.

There are some other officers, bureaucrats, and ministers. Rakesh, an Indian Foreign Service man seems to act as the spokesperson for the omniscient author. We observe the changing spheres of socio-political life in New Delhi through him. Growing at a time when young men were ardent nationalists, Rakesh is portrayed as an intellectual who has a, "troubled sense of responsibility towards his country, too young to actively share its travail, too old to be indifferent to it" (37). Then there are other people like Dhirij, Hari Mohan and Somnath who can mortgage the prestige of their country for their personal interests. Apart from this, there are vigilant and loyal politicians like Kailas and Abdul Rehman, able and disciplined bureaucrats like Arjun Mitra, but they are considered to be old and outdated, and therefore, out rightly rejected as "fossils" of that fast disappearing generation which is "saddled with philosophy instead of commonsense"(199).

Nayantara Sahgal depicts some fractured couples in the novel, like Saleem and Saira, Kalyan Sinha and Nita. Nita dreads the shadow of marriage, and has taken a fancy for Kailas. Neil Berensen, the architect of Peace Institute is an unrestrained philosopher with his family away in Norway. He has an affair with Rashmi who finds no loss in having extra-marital relationships. Regarding women Jasbir Jain quotes that Sahgal says:

I try to create the virtuous women the modern Sita, if you like. My women characters 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 women of India. (Jain 57)

The writer of the novel believes that the alignment in man-woman relationship should be abolished to bring about complete human freedom. She gives reference of Jesus that: "Women, where are those accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? . . . Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more" (35). Her women characters suffer due to their overstepping of social norms. They are being curbed, controlled and denied of their individuality, and they rise to realize their own value and identity and question the naturalness of certain social actions. The women characters in the novel belong to the higher, social, economic, professional, and cultural group. In almost all her novels women are frustrated, discontented and find difficulty in adjustment with the surrounding world. Woman, here, does not seem to be enjoying liberty of expression, freedom in choosing her life partner and as well as in sharing her thoughts, feelings and ideas with men without any reserve.

The life and atmosphere described in the novel is surrounded by politics everywhere, and people are engrossed in eating, drinking, dancing, sex, public meetings, get-together, discussions, processions, protests, boycotts, and demonstrations. Rakesh, the Indian Foreign Service man, arrived at Palam Airport in New Delhi and observed that everything was change. But at the same time, he noticed that nation had overtaken the change by the fact that now people could obviously afford to travel by air, judging from the full crowded planes. After coming back to India, he was fascinated by every detail about India. He was genuinely happy to be back to India.

Unity and integrity of the nation are threatened by language problem. Through debates and public meetings, the Prime Minister wielded all his power to plead for toleration, co-ordination and understanding. But all his efforts are proved to be futile and the people were divided into two groups, one is English group and another one is Hindi group. "India is tremendously a vital country," the voice went on, and it has often enough imposed its cultural pattern on other countries" (69). The Secretary General of External Affairs Ministry, Sir Arjun Mitra, has reluctance of a man, who is never scared how he will be received. His whole life is now bounded within the four walls of his office, not due to his loyalty towards duty and overwork. For him, the office is a refuge from home and his family. All his younger colleagues like him because he has genuine sympathy for the problems of youth. People like him possessing power can walk on egg shell without crushing them.

Kailas Vrind, Rashmi's father belongs to the generation that has overwhelmed to the magic of Gandhi. The indomitable will and single-mindedness of the man in loincloth had attracted him, made him a member of the Congress party. "Gandhi was able to evoke a tremendous response because he was rooted in the same soil, nourished on the same simple diet, reared in

the same beliefs" (Fear, 73). He had no wish to cast away tradition or deprive to religion, or to impose alien standards. His emphasis was on god-fearing rather than the purely religious aspects of life. By joining it, he was sent to jail with number of his countrymen. He also lost his law practice he had joined in manhood. Unlike Gandhiji, Kailas didn't think that after independence Congress should cease to exist. He is of the opinion that Congress had responsibility for the future of the India. He was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh transitional Government before independence.

Nayantara Sahgal's novels bring in front of us evidently a sequential account of Indian politics from the last phase of struggle for freedom to the breakdown of democracy in mid-seventies. The novel *This Time of Morning* is set in post-independence India and it sets out to highlight the dilemma of a nation passing through the pangs of birth and evolution. The post-independence is reinforced as we find all canons of decency and decorum overthrown in the unscrupulous hunt for power. "Disorder was just round the corner, always, and no motley crew of parliamentarians would succeed in coping it any more than picket fences would stem a deluge" (106). Power becoming a political reality from merely rabble rousing slogans, men of vision, such as Kailas Vrind, Abdul Rehman and Prakash Shukla, seem to be pushed back to corner while those with a compassionate approach to problems move to the centre of the stage. The winking at or condoning of such end-oriented people with not-so-clean hands right at the peak of the era of Nehruvian idealism is a part of post-independence political history, it is clearly conveyed by Sahgal in *This Time of Morning*.

Kailas in the novel is the representative of Gandhian mean of purposeful action coupled with purposeful means. Neither he sticks down passivity with reflections and withdrawing nor does he throw all norms to the winds in enthusiasm for action. Besides Kailas, other committed to this activity are President in the novel who "had founded a home for handicapped children that had been built on a trickle of small donations" (86). And Prakash Shukla in the same novel is "something of an institution in the Lok Sabha" (86), who can never endure injustice and expose unscrupulous and corruption.

Kalyan's portrait in the novel also has psychological property in its political and personal proportion. He had been orphaned in the hard conditions during the stress and malign of World War I, "had grown up without the marks of identity" (135). There his feelings and emotions of insecurity, his baselessness, "his hunger for identity" (135), for recognition and publicity find abundant representation. The intense poverty and starvation in his early life, which caused the death of his mother, had made him impatient for the consequences irrespective of the means adopted. His marriage with Mira had been based on the condition that "she would have to share him with country, with his toil and share him so much as take what was left of him afterwards" (148). On the other hand Kalyan Sinha's deep rooted anxiety for the settlement and wellbeing of his personal life made him a restless man. He is a man in haste, "believed by a sense of urgency" (135).

Far from the political and human narratives the novel attracts some basic issues of equality and invigorating concerns in both the domains. *This Time of Morning* not only presents freedom on political level but also extends it into the subterranean field of human action. It is of as much importance for politicians—Kailas, Kalyan, Hari Mohan, Prakash Shukla—as it is for the individual human beings like Nita, Rakesh, Mira, Uma, Leela, Celia, and Barbara. The novel brings out the political and human converging in an artistic amalgam, through which the political novel comes to maturity.

The narrative of novel associated with the post-colonial concerns about the use and misuse of power at social and political level. The native assumes that the Indians are lesser and inferior breed that must be ruled and civilized, whereas the British as superior race have created conditions and circumstances to make a collection of significant literature. The two events which have put its effects on post-colonial thinking are dissembling of British Empire and the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said's book challenges the accepted concepts and points out the image of the Orient in western discourse. If such questions have become commonplace, this book yields a refreshing perspective to study the culture of several post-independent states. Sahgal's novel concentrates on the direct effect of colonization and indirect effect of the same after political independence. There is a profound impact on the social and cultural fabric of India due to the certain restrictions and forced dependency.

The disturbance and confrontation of the two cultures that it produced both in the individual and nation, form the thematic focus of novel. In *Plans for Departure* Sahgal mentions that, "The England, one that does not preside over executions on soil where it has no right to be in the first place" (128). The characters in *This Time of Morning* represent the crucial years of Indian history. For the colonizer, the colonized is the "Other" and the otherness does not end because the colonized are distinct and individuals vary from one another. The colonizer did not see much difference and diversity in the culture of the colonized. On the other hand, the colonized adopted certain alien cultural practices of the colonizers and presented them as their own. This duality and hybridity leads to ambivalence, a misshapen perception of the self and certain influence of the powerful. This state of ambivalence destabilizes the rights to absolute authority. The remaining artificial state creates only ductile when the individual communicates with his own culture. This sort of literature of otherness, restraints, imitation and hybrid is seen in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal because of her sufficient local experience.

The novel *This Time of Morning* indicates how the value system is crushed beyond recognition in post-independent India. The west finds that Asia is proper and a suitable soil to exploit, and for Indians West becomes a dream destination. The fascination and admiration for the West is inculcated in the minds of the people and it can be seen in the imitation of dressing sense. Arjun Mitra's grandfather, Sarat Mitra eager to learn English with determination. The teaching of the *Bible* also becomes popular in the subcontinent. Neil realized that:

We have our own viewpoint . . . Civilization that lead through Christian theology to industrialized modernity. But suppose one's beginning had been unimaginably earlier and had led one along quite another voyage of discovery. One might arrive at a different set of conclusions and yet have an equal faith in one's destiny Other might prefer to evolve their own modern equation in their way. (216)

British imparted the English education and encouraged the internalization of the superiority of the English in the Indian minds. Instead of taking pride in the native culture, Indians inclined towards improving their social status by learning English and seem western in all walks of life. This ultimately leads to conflicts among Indians who seek to promote Indianess and those whose mind-set is totally colonized as seen in *This Time of Morning*. Gandhiji states that only escape and emancipation from this foreign culture would mean complete freedom. "Real freedom will come only when free ourselves of the domination of the western education, western culture, western way of living which has been ingrained in us, because this culture has made our living artificial and expensive"(Mukherjee, Rudrangshu 88).

Nayantara Sahgal apart from providing sociological information, also excels in providing a subtly satirical presentation of politicians, bureaucrats, foreign educated Indian youth like Hari Mohan, Somnath, Dhirij, and Kalyan Sinha who have gathered a plenty of fortune by misusing their powers and causing harm to public interests. In this connection Gandhian contribution, Bipin Chandra comments:

The first experiments in Satyagraha brought Gandhi into close touch with the masses, both the peasants in the rural areas and the workers in the urban areas. This was one of the greatest contribution of Gandhiji to the national movement With the coming of Gandhi the masses became all at once active participants in the movement. (Freedom Struggle 123-24)

The novelist exposes the political opportunists who stigmatized the country's dignity and reputation by reverting corrupt, irresponsible, inefficient, and unprincipled practice, and continue to enjoy the public positions. T.K. Thomas in his article *The Hindu Ethos- A Novelist's Perspectives*, discussing *This Time of Morning* writes, "Its theme and not merely its background, is the post-independence political scene in the country" (60). Partition of the country, election campaigns, division of the parties lead to conflicts over their personal interests. The factious tendencies, the mingled state of affairs in the Foreign Ministry, the storm over the language issue, the questioning in the parliament and several other incidents and events have immediate impact, as they are close to the historical facts.

The sense of inferiority is inscribed into the minds of colonized by the unfavorable effect of colonization. Lack of psychological freedom for the colonized is also one of the

issues, as they view freedom as the liberty to do what they desire rather than as responsibility. This sort of politics contaminates the real political freedom. The politicians focused on political privileges and money that they extract from powerful means. They have degraded politics and turned India into poverty. This needs to bring back the country to its proper platform. This is possible only through eradicating the social ill-wills.

The new evolving freedom gave birth to crazy desire for power. The desire for money and live in wealthy way became merely a dream for natives. These long years of colonization put negative effects on the countrymen. The country has borrowed the wealth of democracy from British, but the moral values and lesson of humanity have been found in Gandhian ideology. People like Kalyan Sinha are root cause for sufferings of themselves as well as of others. Among the unscrupulous Gandhi becomes an object of ridicule. In the novel *This Time of Morning*, the situation and circumstances are changed where a post-independence generation has come into being, the generation to whom independence is no longer a dream but a reality and this generation side by side lives with an older generation which has strived to turn it into one.

Both the nationalist and British worlds are rejected by the people like Kalyan Sinha not in passive but in critical way and there are others Somnath and Hari Mohan who cleaved to the Gandhian values only for show not in spirit. Mr. Kailash is of the view regarding erosion of moral values that:

In my all dealings with human beings I discovered that no magic formula for change-not as long as you consider the human mind and its willing co-operation necessary to your task We have made the human being the unit of and measure of progress, so we can never at any stage abandon our concern with him. (35)

This type of juxtaposition is found in her other novels also in which many people reflect the amalgamation and confusion of the contemporary political situation. *This Time of Morning* determines the way power is yielded during independence period. Violence and non-violence both have changed the nation, dividing men into ruthless and compassionate, including the code of conduct. No one is completely good or bad, what matters is their treatment toward human beings. The people who are hostile and determined act efficiently but are stoic to humanity, while those who are generous and straightforward are cautious in the matter of humanity. In the novel, Kailas, Abdul Rehman and Prakash Shukla shave profound concern for freedom while Kalyan Sinha, Somnath and Hari Mohan are same in their ruthless behaviour to the human problems and are not suitable for the public welfare.

There are people like Kailash Vrind who believe that fundamental change lies in the sole involvement of individual of the country. They realize that there cannot be any short-cut in the matter of building a nation. Before independence these people have carefully and cautiously adopted the non-violent path realizing that freedom is to be nurtured in careful and composed way like young trees which, 'grow in their own time,

and if the roots are not strong, they cannot grow at all'. Hungry men, whose hunger is power, become selfish for promoting their personal interests. One has to lose something to gain, so people strive hard for the liberty of the nation.

Human beings are valuable and important for Kailas and he feels that development will take place as soon as the countrymen and women grasp the meaning and value of change. Those in power are men like Somnath and Hari Mohan, greedy selfish and corrupt have done nothing for the upliftment of the nation. Abdul Rehman feels that during Somnath's Chief Ministership things were done, targets were achieved but these achievements were inadequate because common public was kept away from their privilege "like abandon human habitation in the desert"(212).

In novel political issues are shown more clearly and vividly. The events and incidents are integrated and co-related in a sublime way. The post-independence Indian issues are more deeply found than the surface issues of life. Freedom has different meaning for different people: for men like Somnath and Hari Mohan, it is power, for others it may mean having freedom to work, and for some others it is an opportunity to create a new society and progress. For Rashmi, freedom means communication and understanding. So, different people of different ideas and minds have varied meaning of the term freedom.

Indian masses mistakenly assume that freedom has solved all problems and nothing is left to be done except enjoying it. It is a great mistake. Only political freedom cannot do everything if the individual thoughts are not developed. The Indian delegated members to Moscow behave in an abnormal and unsophisticated manner and this description of the behavior and nature of the delegates shows the truth that the novel is a humiliating experience. The atmosphere of greed and irresponsibility is everywhere. Saleem and Rakesh try to analyze the wrong with Indians—it is only a lack of consumer goods or something more basic—a lack in us as human beings' (54).

Nayantara Sahgal not only ridicules the politicians, the leaders and bureaucrats but also the education system, as the overcrowded classes, the stress on mind and imitative modernity. Dhirij Singh's children are the examples of this emptiness. This sort of situation is due to lack of compatible

relationship between reality and education system. Freedom in real sense has become only a fulfillment of the past dreams in the present with different categories of people. People are not in a mood to change themselves and their society.

The novel captivates the political happenings and atmosphere aftermath. Though the structure is broad-based, there are thematic elements which are true representatives of the political world. On one hand, it focuses on the political issues; while on the other hand, it seeks to explore the results and outcomes of these policies in individual human lives. Predominantly Nayantara Sahgal is a novelist of liberal view points, but her origin is concerned with her historical perspectives too. In the novel, the novelist presents a country which has emerged successfully out of the struggle for freedom and which needs much more effort and involvement of the individual to construct a new society for the betterment and welfare of the country.

Politicians who play politics in illegal ways and for their personal gains have degraded and corrupt political system. Dhirij Singh who is an Indian Civil Service officer has held several responsible posts in the government. His eagerness to become an ambassador to Turkey is not a contribution to nationality but to carry on his affair with a lady. He buys land cheaply from refugees when they had to leave Uttar Pradesh for Pakistan.

2. Conclusion

Sahgal successfully portrays the Indian predicament after freedom from foreign rule. Through her first hand experience in the domain of politics and political matters, she describes the incidents minutely. She is fully aware of the nuisance of post-imperial governance; she focuses on the goodness of the people like Kailas Vrind. Morals and manners ultimately win, whereas ruthless nature leads to self-defeat. Her family background, her western education and her parental traditional devotion are the primary factors which contribute a lot in her fictional milieu. This novel is inhabited with all kinds of people. She presents a highly complex picture of the upper class Indians with contrasting thoughts and ideologies. *This Time of Morning* is an paradigm against the backdrop of unscrupulous politics of power, conflicting attitudes of men in power and also the sophisticated society which is incommunicable for all its characters.

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