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This Time of Morning: A Saga of Women's Liberation

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ABSTRACT

The end of last century witnessed increase of a new consciousness about the women's marginalized position resulting into the birth of women's liberation movement. Literature as it mirrors society could not remain unchanged by the women's marginalization in society especially patriarchal society. The post independence period, has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. One of the leading fiction writers of feminist stream Nayantara Sahgal makes gender issues central to her writings. Despite the fact that, politics is her specialty however, above and beyond politics her novels enclose several things in common. Man-woman relationship, autobiographical bearings, the quest for identity and advocacy for change are some of the common properties of her novels. The work presented in the paper emphasis on awakening leading to woman liberation.

Keywords :

Feminism, Marriage, Gender issues, Liberation

In this novel, the portrayal of women characters are shown in a bold way. They eagerly take non-conventional path; they even dare to walk-out from their marriages if they feel not comfortable in their marital life. In her novel *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal has portrayed modern women who can envision life on a broader canvas unlike the traditional women depicted in *A Time to be Happy* who cannot think beyond marriage. M.L. Malhotra in *Bridges of Literature* precisely observes "If Nayantara Sahgal's women characters have any passion; it is longing to be free, freedom from all restraints in word and deed, being their monomania."⁽¹⁾

Two different shades of women characters have been portrayed by Sahgal in this novel; one is flag bearer of older generation while another is from younger generation. Mira who represents first shade, has shown complete devotion for her husband Kailas, while same is not reflected back by Kailas towards her. However, she has been able to enjoy marital harmony and bliss as she has, right from the beginning of her marriage, agreed to identify herself not only with Kailas but also with his cause for his country and the effort to be put in for the same. This mindset enabled her to set unison with her husband's cause and to come on terms with her identity.

In contrast, her daughter Rashmi shocked Mira when she bluntly apprised about her willingness for getting divorce. It was difficult for Mira to comprehend the mental state of Rashmi and alike cases, when they are undergoing dilemma as it is very difficult for them to comprise with selfhood.

Rashmi fully believes in living the life to the fullest and to cherish it, but her failed marriage saps her energy and enthusiasm for life and made her feel suffocating like 'moth trapped in cement' (TTM 44).

Though, she suffered a lot due to incompatibility with Dalip right from the beginning, but initially she was not very much clear about the next course of action. This state of indecision was due to her upbringing in the conventional environment of households, where girls are educated to be non-assertive and silent followers. This deep rooted training from child hood kept herself glued to marriage life and made her to remain faithful towards it even when she is not happy with it.

This led to weakening in her conviction to be self reliant and independent. She was inclined towards her parents for solace; being in the state of indecision and confusion. But she got the much needed solace from a stranger Neil Berenson who hailed from peace institute of Europe. His company provided her relief for the time being, from all tensions and miseries Rashmi realizes that Neil belongs to the present age

...of impermanence, of brief meetings and partings. It was not the setting for completeness of any sort. One's self was burden enough. Who would take on another total commitment, another portion of weakness and strength, good and bad, courage and fear? (TTM 219-220).

Her search for selfhood led her to various places and persons and finally she was able to find her the destination (resort) in form of Rakesh. Rashmi definitely does not come under the category of modern women as she lacked firmness depicted by Simirt in *The Day in Shadow* and Anna in *Mistaken Identity*. S.K. Yadav in the article "Feminism in India and NayantaraSahgal exile and sharpened sensibility" rightly remarks:

Rashmi who wants to be and finally comes out of marriage vow, indulges in extramarital affairs with a Danish man Neil Berensen, a divorcee himself, and also wants to have a permanent or long term relationship after being denied by Neil, she rediscover herself but without being injured and having any guilt for her sexual encounter with him. It is her own conscious desire -a relationship based on equality. No one is a victim here rather they share and share alike. No rape and no treachery. And when she discovers that a long term relationship, as she desires to have, is not possible, she stops the journey there. Perhaps Sahgal wants to convey the message through Rashmi Neil- relationship that all sorts of relationship between man and woman are justified except rape and treachery.⁽²⁾

Rashmi has strong liking towards love as she believed in self discovery with love as means for its attainment. She found that sharing and love based on the principles of equality may help in her journey for self realization. This awakening made her to visualize Rakesh as her true companion in this journey. Thus, she was able to come out from the state of confusion at the end.

Another character, Nita symbolizes the character who is more pronounced in her search for selfhood than Rashmi. Nita attempted to find her place in society even before marriage while Rashmi tried in this direction after failure in her marriage. She has her own set of values, different from those imposed by her parents. Having independent attitude with disliking for all establishments; she intends to live life on her terms. She is basically a fun loving girl who enjoys smoking and going to clubs but pretends before her parents. She was normally not kept under constraints; but as and when she gets chance to move alone she used to make most of it as per her own likings, Sahgal in an article *Women: Persons or Possessions?* aptly writes that women are treated as property: "When I heard someone remark, we never allow daughters to go out," or "I can't do what my husband would not like it", it sounded a very peculiar alien jargon. As if, I thought women were property not persons."⁽³⁾

Nita in her quest to express herself needs freedom and independence; while her parents were very much averse of such ideas. Although they allowed her to take up a job but that decision was under pressure as job was offered by powerful minister KalyanSinha, and her mother could not refuse. However, Nita was not fully convinced and happy with the job as it did not allow the independence and individual identity she cherished for. Society regards "identity crisis" as man's predicament only. Betty Freidan in the book *The Feminist Mystique* points the finger at such type of society:

The crisis of growing up of choosing his identity, the decision as to what one is and is going to be, are considered only male prerogatives, and women are told that, truly feminine women do not want career, higher education, political rights, independence and opportunities.”⁽⁴⁾

Nita is a character that shows defiance for conventions but at the same time, appears to be adhering to it. Nita is also very choosy and clear about her choice of husband and marriage. She was very much opposed of idea of being ‘parcel bride’ and intended to marry only if she finds soul mate of her choice, not imposed by family or society. Her parents chose Vijay for her, but she wanted man who has compatibility with her at mental level; with whom she can converse and share ideas easily. ” and wonders, “what about her body and its desiresthe body that pulsated for something with an urgency she had never known?”(TTM 207) but she finally gets ready to accept Vijay as groom according to her parents’ wishes. In fact, she is fully aware that she will be treated like an object by Vijay after marriage and there are very remote chances of success of this marriage. She gets dreadful at some times, even with the thoughts of being physically intimate with Vijay “She could bear all the rest forever afterwards as long as there were no first time.” Her parent’s decision was in confrontation with her desire for self realization, In the deep inside, Nita is having the burning desire to live life on her own terms without unnecessarily carrying the burden imposed by previous generation values and ethos. She dares to take drastic step as per the criteria of traditional society, by going along with the man of her choice, Kalyan. When inquired about her initiative from Kalyan, she replies,

I’ve thought about that so often...every time I came I wondered why. I used to think about it getting into the taxi and every minute the taxi took to come here, and all the while I was here. I didn’t know why I came. I only knew I would die if I didn’t....because I wanted to and it’s the only thing I’ve ever really wanted to do.(TTM 307)

Due to strong urge to express herself, she got inclined towards KalyanSinha with whom she can share her views very easily and can have space for herself. She even desired satisfaction from the fact that this has been entirely her decision that has been frutified, and gave means to release her anguish over his parents and Vijay. Nita relished the company of Kalyan, as he has given her the hitherto unachieved opportunity for discovering her own/be herself. “the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I’d never had known it but for you.’(TTM 307) Regardless of the risky freedom to be herself which Nita deviously enjoys, she still believes in the institution of arranged marriage while Kalyan sees marriage as an “act of barbarism” AlthoughKalyan was not his dream man, yet her deep desire for self realization drove her towards Kalyan. Dr. Kanupriya in her article Feminist Consciousness in the Novels of NayantaraSahgalrightly remarks:

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⁾

Leela represents similar case just like Nita who hails from similar tradition background with not much acquaintance with freedom. These women don’t know how to deal with much freedom if they suddenly come across with. In absence of clarity of thoughts, this may lead to doom as they get easily misguided. It may be inferred that such false impression of freedom is equally dangerous/harmful just as the shackles of orthodox conventions.

Case of Uma Mitra also falls under this category who got victimized by such false notions of liberty. Her husband Arjun is too much involved in his official assignments and gets very less time for taking care of her emotional and physical needs. Being deprived of satisfaction from her husband, she turned towards other persons for physical and mental satisfaction. Her husband still remained in different towards Uma, which provoked her towards any male that comes her way. This is gory detail of a social system with no room for individual freedom and gratification. Sahgal herself says that through Uma, she wants to show that:

A woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thinking. She has to be good and good means virtuous in the sense of chaste. Uma was a woman with appetites that her husband could not satisfy, so she indulged them elsewhere. Men do it and there is no comment. ⁽⁶⁾

Uma Mitra is person who is victimized by the existing social system which is virtually not in favour of individual freedom. Uma, who is younger to him by fourteen years is amazed to know that:

What is taken for granted in man is horrifying in woman. Even in this day and age. Imagine it's a man's privilege to get drunk, for instance and no one thinks him any worse for it, or to be a liberate or other thing. Important or frigid or whatever they call it. It never matters everyone thinks it's all right.(TTM 226)

Young and vivacious Uma when can not finds any means of self expression in her marriage, with older ArjunMitra, she gives liberated sovereignty to her sensuousness though flaunting traditional values. This creates a 'labyrinth of tortured vanity' a sort of 'abysmal gulf' in their relationship. Uma lacks self-expression in her marriage to ArjunMitra and turns towards Neil because in his company she has the feeling of freedom and the sense of release and joy in the activity of painting. Just like Rashmi, Uma also feels very comfortable and at ease in the company of Neil. Neil helps her in developing/involving into an integrated person,

“Go back to it...So often one can't get to particular person or a situation but one can to art and music and the writing of a poem The years don't matter, except in the sense they have enriched and added something, so one goes back with an advantage.” (TTM 229)

Dr. Kanupriya in her article Violence and Loneliness in NayantaraSahgal's Major Novels remarks:

Instead of love, self-gratification becomes the basis of marriage for man and he usually deprives woman of togetherness and warmth. The denial of love can deviate from the social norm sometimes. Sahgal deals with anomie in human situation in This Time of Morning. ArjunMitra...The brilliant successful officer however, remains absorbed in his officialdom.....Uma longs for his love and company, but Arjun “condemned himself to an isolation where she could never reach or touch him again” “Uma was dead” for him ...His indifferent behaviour makes her so desperate emotionally and sexually that she takes to drinking and moving alone with men, deviating from the social norms.⁽⁷⁾

Thus, Shagal highlights the women of new generation who look beyond marriage in her novel This Time of Morning with a contrast with older and younger generation. We have the couple Kailas and Mira representing older generation. Through Rashmi, Nita and Uma, Sahgal has portrayed the new generation women who require total involvement without self effacement in marriage.

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