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**Social and Political Consciousness in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning***

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**Abstract**

The present paper deals with the socio-political issues encountered after independent India represented in Nayantara Sahgal's novel, *This Time of Morning*. On the one hand, the study explores the conflict of ideas between power hungry and crafty politicians and ideal and national conscious politicians. It explicates disillusionment about the functioning of democratic institutions, the calibre of the new leaders. The erosion of moral values in politics found their articulation in her fiction. On the other hand, the novel reveals the perception of marriage of both traditional woman and new woman. In a nutshell, it deals with the theme of the conflict between idealism and materialism in post independent India's political world and tradition and modernism in the lives of man woman relationship in the society.

**Keyword-** *Power Hungry, Crafty Politician, Ideal, National Consciousness, Idealism, Materialism*

**Introduction**

Nayantara Sahgal is the most remarkable and distinguished Indo-Anglian novelist of the younger generation. Since she was born in one of India's most prominent political families, it is not surprising that politics and history inspire and underlie in much of her writing. She has been profoundly influenced by Gandhian philosophy, which is her social consciousness of the period. She has

mellowed into an experienced and seasoned writer of autobiographical fiction after having tried her hand successfully at writing realistic, natural, honest and candid, but emotionally surcharged autobiographies. These autobiographical works facilitate the readers' peep into the innermost recesses of her experimental creative mind and then one comes to know what has educated, shaped and formulated, her way of rational thinking. We learn that the saga of the influence of Gandhian philosophy on her. She has been rightly called "the child of Gandhi", as, in her own words: Our growing up was India's growing up into political maturity – a different kind of maturity from any the world had seen before, based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace. (PCK 15). These beautiful ideal of Gandhian moral code of conduct and values she has long cherished and they form the basis of her approach to all personal as well as political problems.

Sahgal's first book, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), is an autobiography, dealing with her childhood experiences. Here she describes the frequent separation from her parents, who were engrossed all the time either with party work or were in prison. These periods of separation were supposed to instil and inculcate in the children the lesson of learning on their own resources of courage and strength which in turn import proper ground for nurturing the seeds of non-violence. The book also delineates the active part of the author in the political and moral ideas being studied and formulated around her. She discloses that while her political stance was influenced by Nehru's absolute idealism, her meritorious moral stance was formulated by her own father's courage and gentleness and identically both of them had been greatly influenced by Gandhi.

In *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal describes the Post-Independence generation to whom freedom is no longer a dream, but a reality, living simultaneously with older generation which has aspired and strived to achieve freedom. There are people like Kalyan Sinha, the central minister without portfolio, who are perilous for the nationalist as well as the British world. There are also others like Hari Mohan and Somnath who stick to the Gandhian principles and values only in name. In *This Time of Morning*, Govind Narayan stays out of movement because participation in it would distort and disrupt normal life, but Kalyan Sinha evades because he does not approve the life of inactivity in the prison. Moreover, he dissents with Gandhian ideologies which believe in the power of suffering. Kalyan contemplates suffering to be an evil which must not be endured or sanctified, and should be rooted out completely from the very roots, brutally, if need be, at the same time he cannot submit to the British rule. He proceeds into voluntary exile because of his basic dissent with Gandhian principles and he is critical of Gandhian values even when the country is free. He feels that India has remained an underdeveloped country only because of Gandhi's insistence on the past. He feels that but for Gandhi,

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There would have been a revolution like any other – if not with guns, then with sticks and stones, teeth and nails – there would not have been anomalies to contend with today, this oil- and – water regime that could command no singleness or unity of purpose. (*This Time of Morning*, 133)

He does not attach any significance to personal freedom and sensitivity and questions the validity and effectiveness of non-violence as a political method. In the beginning, Kailash Vrind is thorough and honest Gandhian who had surrendered to the magic of Gandhi's personality long ago and joined him the service of the motherland. He had even relinquished his law practices and the comforts and amenity of well settled home in Allahabad, flouting the British Government and courting arrest again and again. But what he had lost in his law practice, he has gained in manhood. He feels that theirs was a remarkably fortunate generation for whom ideals and actions had been contentedly wedded, and the goal achieved. Still, he is compelled to reconsider his viewpoints on non-violence and says that it can be well grounded and valid as a way of life, but not as a political force. Mahatma Gandhi himself had admitted the requisite of using force as a defensive measure, but this does not overlook the moral content of the philosophy. He propounded that non-violence was a positive attitude and needed courage and dedication. Force if used aimlessly and indiscriminately was capable of ruining the beauty and wisdom of life.

Independent India has an unexpected and peculiar problem because the country is still being directed and governed through a colonial framework and is oppressed by alien system of values and education. Refuge problem provokes many to insist that non-violence should be abandoned. Somnath is of the view that administering a government is an entirely different affair from leading a freedom struggle. But Kailash feels that the ethical aspect of Gandhian philosophy and principles should not be abandoned as any change involving in the deterioration of moral values would be self-defeating. Besides, social change can be significant only if it aims at the good of humanity. Mahatma Gandhi and his followers did not contemplate the struggle for freedom to be a class war or a religious crusade or a road to the attainment of personal ambition as in the case of Hari Mohan. Gandhi has proved that politics need not to be a dirty game unencumbered by moral values. Kailash echoes this belief when he says, "Any game was a dirty game when dirty people played it" (TTM 185)

Kailash is a genuine and honest supporter of Gandhian principles as he considers politics to be synonymous with service. Rakesh finds that the programme of Rashmi's father does not sound very political. "It was more concerned with teaching people the laws of hygiene and encouraging the art of spinning during the months when the fields lay fallow." (TTM 37) Boycott of foreign cloth, goods, and liquor shops is propagated and promulgated only because it affects the economic prosperity of an economically backward country. The general dynamism and fervour of younger

generation of those days for Gandhian values is reflected in the statement of Mira's mother when she advise her daughter to think twice before marrying Kailash because, like many other young men, he is full of enthusiasm and appetite for what he thinks Gandhi will do for this country. When Kailash's mother reminds him of his duty as a son, he remembers what Gandhi has said: "A disciple is more than a son. Discipleship is a second birth. It is a voluntary surrender." (TTM 182) Later Mira thinks that in the true Gandhian spirit: Kailash puts his faith, his maddening, imperturbable faith in one thing, and the people."(TTM45)

Since Mahatma Gandhi did not believe in preserving and perpetuating any 'sect' or 'ism' Kailash prefers to call him father or Babu and not Mahatma because he believed that Gandhi was not a saint who had stood aloof from the world's struggle: "He was only a man among men who had demonstrated, as men did from time to time, the glory and grandeur of human effort." (TTM82)

Mahatma Gandhi comprehended that people rally to an idea and he used the idea of 'Khadi' and 'Salt' using himself as a symbol. Jeevan, the journalist, well-known for independent views regrets that all we have now is the speeches. He considers this sort of situation as major and dominant impediment in the popularity of the Gandhian ideologies in the Post-Independent India. Even Hira Lal, the work inspector, at the site of the Peace Mission which is being "built to propagate Gandhian ideology tells Neil, the American architect, that present day pasts are undertaken only with a selfish motive whereas Mahatmaji fasted for self-purification, as a preparation of face ordeals." (TTM153)

Sahgal consecrates the whole of chapter 15 of this novel and discovers the development of the Gandhian principles. She refers the situation in Africa when the first time in history, men and women, inclined and inspired by Gandhian ideology of non-violence, peacefully refused the law and went to prison. She proceeds to elaborate how in 1915 even in India the British Empire was about to be confronted by soft-spoken man of forty-six who was persuaded that no Empire, no army, no circumstance of injustice or suppression could vanquish human beings passionately decided to be free. Swami, another exponent of Gandhian principles, propagates fearlessness to the people. It is a spirited and soul-stirring message not only of the Gita, but also of the Mahatma. He urges them to cast off fear and unite under God to serve this land. Even when there is a 'Lathi' charge, he advises the people not to move from their places and not to get afraid as the police are only the brothers. But unfortunately, he is killed by a Muslim in the communal hysteria, incited by the anti-social elements. Prakash, an important and active member of the party in the Post-Independent India and previously an Inspector of schools and active participant in the struggle of freedom, refers to Gandhi's charismatic personality which brought about a radical change in the outlook of the common people. He reminisces, "It was so easy to cow them into submission and to exact obedience for they were ready to be cowed. (TTM183)

He goes on to elaborate how the system, organization and constitution of democracy we have to-day is based, on the British system only, whereas the humanity or whatever is left of it is from the Mahatma. He tells Kailash that even to talk of standards when power-hungry and selfish men like Hari are in power is absolute hypocrisy. He deplores that they have made Gandhi cap, once the symbol of marriage, a target of ridicule and derision. But Kailash feels that many of Gandhi's ideologies are out of tune with the times. He considers prohibition, sexual abstinence and cow protection to be the hallmarks of a monkly detachment. He even finds blemish with Gandhi's having made a religion of non-violence and also with his not having been interested in science or industrialization and being insensitive to beauty. But he is pragmatically in love with his main interest which is the good of humanity as it has been common goal of the great men of all the times. All noble-hearted people regret that they are unable to do anything in the present-day set-up where the power and authority lies in the hands of cunning and power hungry politicians who can sacrifice anything if it does not fit into their scheme of things. As a result, Kailash Virnd is an eyesore to men like Hari Mohan and Kalyan Sinha and they try their best not to associate him with anything. It is distinguished that Kailash is ousted from the U.P Ministry and U.N delegation because of his unfair and filthy politics. He returns to the same by the end of the novel is not a reward for virtue, but the continuation of struggle.

In spite of a great deal of disagreement and controversy about what composes 'politics' and "the political novel," critics seem to swerve round Irving Howe's comprehensive definition: "By a political novel I mean a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu the dominant setting." (19) Townsend Ludington makes this definition more accurate by saying that political novel "may treat political history, or it may be a work in which 'politics' form backdrop against which human life plays itself out" (26) when considered against critical and comprehensive definitions, Stendhal's oft-quoted remark comparing and contrasting the entry of politics into a work of literature to a pistol-shot in a concert seems to be like a pistol-shot itself. It is impossible and impractical to segregate and discriminate literature from the all-enveloping "infection" of politics. The interaction between political philosophy, individual and the management of the affairs of the state takes on innumerable and sundry form.

The reality of political enslavement and economic exploitation by the British government or its agents, the mill owners, the zamindars and princes etc, was normally a main and major theme in pre-independence Indian novel. After the accomplishment of independence, however, the political subjects are numerous. The bifurcation and the disenchantment about the functioning of democratic institutions, the calibre of the new leaders and erosion of moral values in politics discovered their articulation in fiction. Besides for the three or four small wars fought by the country, the most

significant and remarkable event on the post-independence Indian political scene was the declaration of the state of Emergency which lasted from June 1975 to March 1977. We find contemporary politics and how the suffocating political milieu bears down upon the lives of a few sensitive people.

Literature cannot remain uninfluenced and unaffected by the political and the social, for political consciousness forms an integral part of the artists' consciousness as a human being. But the artists' communication with the political and the social must be subsumed within the artistic and creative process which transcends the horizon of society only when incorporating the paradise and hell of human life into the symbol of the whole life. The primary of the imaginative experience is distinguished by immediacy and closeness.

Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* is set against the background of a just liberated and seeks to catch the quandary of a country just passing through the birth pangs of a new era. The novel discourses the state of mind, mental process, emotional and mental state of the Indians for who power has suddenly become a potential reality. Here we notice all canons of decency and decorum, etiquette and protocol destabilized, in the hunt for power. Power here becomes a political reality, to be used or misused. Sahgal employs satire forcefully and effectively in this novel to inspect the political betrayal and manipulation that goes on behind the scenes in the Indian political ground. The public and private are intermingled to concentrate on reality- the incompatibility and the imitation world of the Narang family serve as a comparison to the muddle in the ministry of External Affairs. This novel emerges unquestionably a political one, concerning itself with both the idealism and corruption of the political world. The humanitarian and the liberal spirit is the core of Sahgal's ideology and thinking and this ideal encompasses her concerns, social, political and ideological. In *This Time of Morning*, The post independence issues of freedom and development is the given individual colour. For men like Somnath and Hari Mohan it is power, for others it is the chance to create a new society through society. On the one hand this novel disseminates an insight into the working 83 of politics; on the other hand it seeks to explore the upshot and consequence of these as the work in the life of individuals. Rakesh observes the political upheaval and turmoil in his country and notes also the sign of progress. He discerns that the time has come to find an identity of their own as Indians of the era-an identity based on judicious and sagacious mixture of modern ideas and ancient values. The seeking of identity that Indian craved for in these early years of independence an identity based on a commixture of the best aspects of the west without breaking off of their own heritage is paralleled by Nita, Rashmi and Rakesh themselves seeking to express their own individuality and establishing their own identity. Aspects of society in transition are expressed in the life and attitudes of women like Rashmi and Nita. Rashmi's broken marriage is the result of infelicitous and disastrous relationships and changed perceptions from orthodox and earlier conventional ones of women's chastity, self-sacrifice and

submission. Rashmi want depth in affinity, to her marriage should be based on love and belonging and humanistic values. Rather than deteriorate and suffer in silence; aghast at growing indifference and nonentity to relationships, she walks out of her marriage, which has turned, into an absurdity, Nita is a new woman who desires to live her own life, with a job, earning her livelihood and leading a deserving life. She regrets an arranged marriage, which is overshadowed by material concerns where even emotional and sexual acts are merely traditional facades. Mira Rashmi's mother on the other hand is an orthodox and conventional woman whom marriage and traditional relationships and images are unalterable and immutable for they keep life and society together. Her daughter's decision of divorce, upsets her, but she realises change is inexorable and life has become complex.

Conclusion:

Nayantara Sahgal's novel, *This Time of Morning*, presents a fairly representative as well authentic example of transmutation of political consciousness into art through the medium of the imagination which integrates social as well as political psychology and reflects its working in both personal and public action. The historical reality projected by Nayantara Sahgal takes her to social consciousness. Her social and political consciousness makes her treat social and political issues in her fiction.

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