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PORTRAYAL OF EMERGING NEW INDIAN WOMAN IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S
THIS TIME OF MORNING

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ABSTRACT

The title of the novel itself suggests the end of the dark forces and the beginning of new morning with enlightenment, where tradition and modernity coalesce to form an organic whole of humanity. 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. Sahgal's protagonists raise their voice against orthodoxy, conventionality and tradition. Her woman characters strive for emancipation and sometimes they fight for that and sometimes they surrender before the male dominated society. In the novel *This Time of Morning* Sahgal has tried to present not only the women's emotional and psychological sufferings but also their awareness to fight for their emotional and psychological needs. The novel is set in the post independent India, when the new woman of the new country decided not to yield before the patriarchal forces and was ready to revolt against the constraints and oppression, that she experienced at various places in the society. Sahgal's various women characters in this novel like Neeta, Rashmi, Lila, and Uma are not ready to surrender against the traditions and move a step forward towards modernity. They pave the way for other women also to take their own decisions for their self-growth and happiness. This paper is an attempt to study women characters in this novel as pioneers of change in the position of woman.

Key-words: Nayantara Sahgal, *This Time of Morning*, traditions and customs, emerging, fight, emancipation, new woman

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Nayantara Sahgal is a great writer of feminist concern. She fights as a real crusader for women's rights and her novel *This Time of Morning* reflects this missionary zeal. Sahgal's 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 exposes the subordinate position of woman in the cultural, political and religious matrix of Indian society. Through the voice of her protagonists and other female characters, she wants to make woman aware of her rights and identities. *This Time of morning* by Nayatara Sahgal describes the tension between tradition and modernity, the birth pangs of new social orders reflecting the death of old orders. The

title of the novel itself suggests the end of the dark forces and the beginning of new morning with enlightenment, where tradition and modernity coalesce to form an organic whole of humanity. 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. Sahgal's protagonists raise their voice against orthodoxy, conventionality and tradition. Her woman characters strive for emancipation and sometimes they fight for that and sometimes they surrender before the male dominated society. In the novel *This Time of Morning* Sahgal has tried to present not only the women's emotional and psychological sufferings but also their awareness to fight for their emotional and psychological needs.

The novel is set in the post independent India, when the new woman of the new country decided not to yield before the patriarchal forces and was ready to revolt against the constraints and oppression, that she experienced at various places in the society. The female characters in this novel present a deep relationship between the problems, faced by woman of that period and the present day woman. Her female characters work as source of inspiration for modern woman.

Through the character of Nita in *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal underlines the fact that the psychology of a girl child is shaped right from her childhood. Various restrictions are imposed on her while boys are allowed to indulge in every activity whether moral or immoral. 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 is modest and obedient girl before her parents but away from their eyes, she indulges in all sorts of enjoyment. Nita 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. (32)

Nita strives to get a place of human dignity and individuality. When she is offered a job by an influential minister, she accepts the proposal. Even her parents could not decline the offer of the job and allowed their daughter to work. "But when minister was kind enough to offer her the job, we didn't have the heart to refuse....." (147)

But Nita wants something more than merely a job. She craves for freedom for her own identity. She thinks, "A job led to money and freedom and freedom demanded a flat of one's own, away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices of the parade of men and women." (148)

Nita struggles to create a new world for herself. She pines for 'a little latitude, 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' (149) but emotional security, her inner desire of self-fulfillment.

Unable to raise her voice against her parent's wish to settle in marriage, Nita just like a traditional girl accepted the choice of Vijay as her groom. She thinks:

This was the man, she would spend her life, whose name and children she would wear...She would in just a few months time be alone in a room with him, entire life times she would have to spend with him. (150)

Nita and Vijay though dance at party, but Neeta does not seem to enjoy Vijay's company. Nita feels upset and easy and to find fulfillment and to satiate her physical needs, she gets emotionally attached to an elderly person Kalyan Sinha. She finds enormous comfort, sensuous pleasure and freedom to express herself in the companionship of Kalyan. "You gave me freedom to be myself, I had never had that before, I'd never have known it but for you" (219)

Through the character of Nita, Sahgal tries to explore the search of modern woman for her identity and self-recognition. Though Nita is educated, independent and has a modern life style, she is not daring

enough to revolt against her parents' wishes and accepts Vijay as her husband. But to fulfill her desires and seek independence, she moves towards Kalyan. Betty Friedan writes:

For women as for men, the need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. (Friedan 1971:9)

There is another female character Rashmi, who reflects Nayantara's views vehemently. When her marriage with Dalip becomes stifling and suffocating, she moves out the cocoon of marriage. Rashmi is the daughter of Mira and Kailash and married to Dalip, an IAS Officer. Being a young woman of post independent India, Rashmi is aware of her needs and desires. Unlike her mother Mira, who held marriage sacred bond, Rashmi returns to her father's home when her marriage with Dalip becomes a traumatic experience. "a deadening trauma out of which...no feeling could ever emerge"(13) since her childhood, Rashmi had enjoyed life to the fullest. She had savored every minute of it. "She was the one, who watched the plump green buds burst into summer blossoms on the trees."(39) She had known the names of all birds and stars; she had enjoyed and cherished every bit of life. This is clear when she tells Rakesh, 'Its just being alive, I am sure, I would rather live in pain and misery than not at all'. Though being full of life, lively and spirited, a wrong marriage changed her course of life.

Dissatisfied with her wrong marriage, Rashmi is in a state of utter confusion, whether to discuss her problem with her parents or seek a divorce. The thought of divorce makes her feel guilty and she wonders whether she has been able to fulfill her role as wife excellently or not. 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'(13)

With a strong desire to put an end to her mental suffering and agony, Rashmi steps outside sacrosanct orbit of marriage and returns home. But she could not gather enough courage to disclose her separation from Dalip to her parents. She comes in contact with Neil Berenson, a European architect of the Peace Institute, It is in his company, she could shake off all her inhibitions and opens her separation from her husband. Neil's company transformed Neil's personality altogether and she becomes alive after a long period of numbness. "She realized completely free for the first time in years both from her daily household routine and pressure of living with Dalip.' (141)

However her relationship with Neil Berenson did not come to fruition as Neil had westernized ideology was misfit in Indian culture. Embittered and dissatisfied with Neil's company Rashmi finds her true soul mate in Rakesh, her childhood friend. Thus her search for her true self is fulfilled through Rakesh. Through the character of Rashmi, Nayantara Sahgal tries to show:

...the birth pangs of new civilization. Already there was change at every level, political, domestic and social and it conveyed a sense of perpetual crisis. Some even interpreted as threat to old established values, a kind of impending doom. But doom signified an end of this, in essence was a beginning. It was a torrential release from ancient grooves and bonds, ancient pain and suppression. The attainment of independence had been its starting point, but the human beings' struggle for freedom and recognition in every facet of their life went on. Rashmi would not face her struggle alone for she would be one of many. (214)

Unlike Neeta and Rashmi, there is a character, Lila, who belongs to an orthodox Banaras Hindu family. She enjoyed complete freedom, when sent abroad for higher education. Leela's uncontrolled freedom landed her in disaster. She became pregnant and being an orthodox Hindu girl, she committed suicide out of shame. "Only she had been a girl and sheltered one and Banaras was no preparation for America.(77).Her search for identity takes her to foreign land but the unrestricted freedom, new environment, modern values, outlook and alien culture had landed her in pregnancy. To avoid shame and dishonour, she committed suicide.

Nayantara Sahgal has portrayed the character of Uma Mitra, a girl of nineteen, who married a top official of thirty three years of age, Arjun Mitra. Much older than her, Arjun Mitra is 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 chores. He acts as a dictator, who

wants Uma to continue to follow the pattern of subordination and domination. Uma is very vibrant, beautiful and full of life. She wants to express herself and her desires

To voice her dissatisfaction, bitterness and frustration, Uma moves out of the relationship in search of greener pastures. By creating the character of Uma, Sahgal has challenged the society that the new woman is not subdued and submissive, who willingly accepts everything.. She is no more a sacrificial goat. She is bold, assertive and full of confidence.

A keen study of various women characters, portrayed by Sahgal throws light upon the place of woman in Indian society. Since childhood women are told to possess the feminine qualities of politeness, submissiveness and obedience. Their work is also confined to household chores. Subordination of women is the theme of Sahgal's novel. Her women characters show the signs of awakening by challenging the established conventions. She 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. (Jasbir Jain, *Nayantara Sahgal*;145)

In Sahgal's novels, there are two types of women characters. The first type of woman is self reliant, courageous and bold, though they too were meek and submissive in the beginning. But they gradually develop the will and spirit to fight against male tyranny. Rashmi and Nita belong to the first type of women. The other type of women is projected as subdued, submissive, conventional and orthodox, who accept everything as their luck. Mira, Lila and Barbara fall under this category, Rashmi's mother Mira is a shadow of her husband Kailash. She echoes:

I'm the result of loving you and living with you and without you these many years, If I had married another man, I might have been faithless and fickle, a different sort of woman altogether.(201)

Mira acknowledges the role of Kailash in molding her personality. She is conventional, orthodox yet full of self respect and dignity. Being conventional Hindu woman, she disapproves Rashmi's decision of divorce from Dalip and criticizes her daughter. But later at the reception of the delegates to the Afro-Asian Education Conference, she is exposed to the new horizon and realizes that:

The moral order did not generate, nor was it enshrined forever in unchangeable pattern of behavior. It had to be refashioned and protected in every age and every generation found its own way to do this. (161)

It has been found that most of the couples in the novel suffer due to the lack of emotional response in marriage. They lack love, mutual understanding and companionship. Despite this many woman remain confined to the institution of marriage bearing all pains and problems. They believe in enduring any indignity, no matter at what cost. It is only when their patience is taxed too long, they dare to challenge the system and move out of the confinement. In the beginning, Rashmi was not a daring woman. She takes long time to decide about divorcing Dalip. But she evolves gradually and musters her courage and leaves Dalip forever. She realizes her real worth and emerges as free woman to act on her own will.

Thus Sahgal is mainly the writer, who highlights women's causes. She shows her deep concern for women's problems. She characterizes her woman with great articulation as mother, wife and daughter and a working woman. If Maya, Rashmi and Uma Mitra are the victims of wrong marriage, There are Neeta and Lila, who are oppressed by their parents and cultural upbringing. Over protection of parents at times results in subdued personality of woman. But a gradual change is visible in their outlook. They are not ready to succumb before the irrational demands of man. Through her characters, Nayantara portrays an emerging new woman, who is aware of her rights and responsibilities in patriarchal society. According to her:

Through the rewriting women do, new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did, and how their lone, remote struggles can help our search for identity and emancipation. (Sahgal 1997:33)

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