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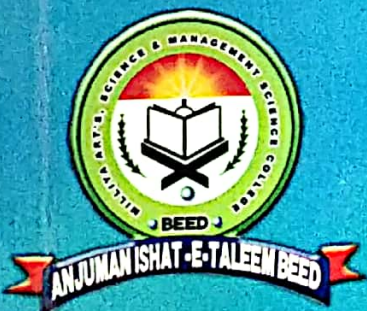
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Social values versus political hypocrisy in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*

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Abstract

This paper deals with a critical study of Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* in which the efforts are made to make an analysis of this novel and to find out how the novelist has exhibited the contrast between the old and new political figures and their respective political ideologies. Attempts are also made to find how the novelist has focused on the contrast between materiality and morality.

Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1965) deals with the politics of the closing days of Nehru's political career. It also juxtaposes the two generations: the post independence young generation dwelling in the free India and the older generation which struggled to make India free from the British tyranny. The major characters are Kailas Vrind, Prime minister's trustworthy and reliable associate; Kalyan Sinha, the minister without Portfolio, Rakesh, Sir Arjun Mitra, the secretary general of the Ministry of External Affairs and Hari Mohan, an ex-minister of Industry in U. P. Other characters are Neil Berensen, a Danish architect; Mira Kailas' wife and Rashmi, their daughter. Nita, the seventeen years old girl, reluctant to marry, subsequently becomes engaged to a young man. She lacks of love and admiration for her husband and eventually establishes an affair with Kalyan. Leela, the student in Boston who is influenced by Kalyan's self-serving philosophy of life becomes pregnant and commits suicide. Uma, the physically attractive and demanding, Mr. Mitra's lawfully wedded wife, whose affairs have cut her off completely from her husband's love and forgiveness. The other characters of the novel are - Abdul Rahman, a moralist and Dhiraj and Somnath the opportunists.

The characters, on the basis of opposite views, values, morals and ideologies they possess can be categorized into two: Kailas Vrind, Abdul Rahman, Rakesh and Mitra possess higher sense, while Kalyan Sinha, Hari Mohan and Somnath are self centered and can go to any extent, fair or foul for the fulfillment of their personal interest. The remaining characters, though subsidiary, have indispensable role which is important for proper understanding of the true spirit of the novel. G. P. Sharma appropriately opines about *This Time of Morning*-

'a very real description of the chaotic period of our national life during the sixties and early seventies when the dedicated politicians of old order were still living, but not very effective.' 1

Throughout the novel, the flashbacks and the multiple focus technique become tedious. Sahgal has spared several pages narrating the story of Gandhi's train journey to South Africa.

The novel begins with Rakesh A young and bachelor I.F.S. Officer returning to India after serving abroad in the Foreign Service. Though he has already been familiar with the major political figures, he seems to be of an outsider as he was abroad for six years.

The novel presents the ideological confrontation between two categories of politicians: old and new. It also holds the conflict between political approaches. Kailas Vrind, an offspring of old breeds, is well grounded in the Gandhian ideology and moral stances. He finds it very difficult to deal with the politicians of the new breed, because the politicians of the new breed are void of any sort of ideology and values. Kailas, renouncing his well-established law practice settled family in Allahabad to challenge the British rule. Having unflinching faith in freedom and allegiance to the motherland, Kailas becomes a close associate of the Prime Minister since the dawn of Independence. He has successfully led the delegation to the United Nations. But his image as a brilliant and honest politician is tarnished by the sudden stepping of Kalyan Sinha into the arena of politics. Kalyan Sinha, the Minister is so ruthless in his manner and unbecoming in his approach that he addresses Gandhi as an emasculator. He knows very well how to emotionally blackmail the innocent people for political benefit. He gets cheap popularity by manipulating the public opinion and winning their favour. He is cunningly capable of handling the political situations and proving himself better than the entire political fraternity. Even Nita, Uma and Rashmi are not spared by his magical manipulation. He also casts his spell on the Prime Minister and succeeds in ousting Kailas from the delegation to the United Nations. The Prime Minister is convinced in such a tricky way that he doesn't pay heed towards Kailas's complaint against Kalyan. He has a very high opinion about Kalyan:

Men of Kalyan type do not always function in the routine, ponderous bureaucratic manner. That is their value. They have the ability to shed all non-essential and go directly to the heart of matter and get things done. It is an irritating quality at times but a useful one. (TOM-P.18)

We also witness an occasional flashback in the narrative which takes us to the city of Allahabad, still "a small town" as when Mathew, the teacher of Rakesh, recalls his association with Rakesh's father:

In Allahabad social life was confined to homes and people knew each other well. (TOM-P.64-65)

A small town where identity is not a problem and a city in the making and still groping towards a personality in the new era provide the geo-cultural background to most of the characters.

Although the point of view shifts from time to time, it never leaves the reader in doubt as to the authorial approval of the view taken. Thus, for example, the central theme of the novel may be stated from the point of view of Rakesh, who knows what is missing in Minister Kalyan:

It was the assurance that every man counts, that life is the sum total of moments, that the human being through the exercise of his reason is the instruments of all progress.... A group was individuals. What was needed was not the burial of the self but its rebirth and celebration, for surely the only hope for people anywhere was that they should recognize and foster each other's humanity as individuals. (TTOM-P.188-189)

On the other hand, Kalyan Sinha, the Minister without Portfolio, swears by the group and emphasizes the need "to protect society from the predatory individual." He believes that the battle in this country is still for survival and victory lies "in close identity of aim and effort and in a merging of interests." The group can accomplish what individuals cannot, and he regrets that there is not enough group effort or even awareness of its necessity. Kalyan's arch-enemy, however, is not Rakesh, but Kailas, a Gandhian type of Freedom-fighter and social worker. Kailas' statement as head of the selection board that would choose candidates for the election just before the partition of India underlines his complete disagreement with Kalyan:

The framework of democracy we have today is from the British but humanity we learned from the Mahatma. But there are those among us who do not understand or respect this humanity. (TTOM-P.256)

Since these are not mere matters of opinion but ingrained convictions, the crisis gradually deepens and initially engulfs Kailas when the Prime Minister tacitly supports Kalyan following Kailas' complaint against the latter's disregard for official code of conduct while at the U. N.:

Kalyan is not an easy man to get along with, I know, the P.M. was saying but he is a remarkable man. (TTOM-P.19)

Kalyan Sinha is the fortunate and confident of the Prime Minister. He is in fact, 'ruthlessly efficient,' which is proved by his work in the India Office Boston during India's struggle for freedom. Besides, he embodies a magnetic personality which hypnotises his fellow-workers, especially the women. Thus Barbara, Celia and Nita all come under his hypnotising spell. Curiously enough, Kalyan can't connect himself meaningfully to any of them and hence, remains unmarried or unrelated because he cannot communicate through personal love. He fights for humanity without the grace of humanity or simply humaneness. Kalyan, being dehumanized owing to the traumatic suffering that he had suffered and by chance survived in his

childhood, pursues his objectives in life with a monomaniacal concentration and pathological obsession. Celia remembers what Kalyan once told about himself:

He did not know his birthplace, his parents, his real name or age. He had grown up without the ordinary marks of identity. And from this terrifying anonymity had emerged the most forceful individual she had ever known. (TTOM-P.100)

The anonymity is all the more terrifying because it is neither that of a mere founding nor that of a bastard but that of a wretched and miserable gutter-blood:

He had been found, he said, in a quiet street in Patna during the summer of 1914. There was no way of knowing whether he had come from a neighboring village or a distant one. There had been widespread famine, desolating a vast area, and peasants had walked miles to the city in search of food... he recalled a dim street light showing inert bodies, some in a gutter with the slow trickle of dirty water under them.... grotesque was the word he associated with it. Near him on that street was a woman, still alive, holding a baby? He remembered urging her to get up. He remembered calling her Ma The woman he called Ma sat stiffly against a lamppost, her legs poked out like rods in front of her. (TTOM-P.98)

Later when the boy tries to feed his Ma: "He broke a bit of bread and put it between her lips. It stayed between the slack parted lips." Thus Kalyan's earliest memory took him "only to the gutter and the lamppost propping the woman he had called Ma, but he clung to it." Kalyan's "right anger" against the world of the past develops in him "a consuming belief in himself," and a fanatical intolerance of even ordinary human values. We find Kalyan to be an unrefined and uncultured but his brilliancy and potential cannot be ignored. His anti-Gandhian pronouncements--he calls Gandhi an "emasculator"--may not become hosannas of Gandhi; but stand repudiated by his own unique personal experience of an intense unsentimental but sublimated communication of love in the end. Kalyan is the product of the unbearable circumstances in which he was, during childhood, destined to sufferer harsh realities of life. Further, Sahgal's creative sensibility achieves an ironic moral vision in this novel when Kalyan loses political power but gains personal redemption. His constant endeavor to escape from personal anonymity into an impersonal humanity is ultimately turned into positive quest for self-identity through the agency of Nita's unselfish love that expresses itself in such simple form as serving coffee to him.

The aroma of coffee filled the room, its bubbling accenting the quit. In that interval the house he had occupied with indifference came to life for Kalyan and became a home to him, a part of the world he could call his own. (TTOM-P.308)

We observe that Kalyan is defeated politically and materialistically; but this defeat is compensated by tranquility. He is mentally and psychologically satisfied.

Kailas discovers, on the other hand, rather early in his association with Kalyan at the U.N. that he would be forced to resist with all his might and main Kalyan's violent intrusions, insufferable obstructions, insolent gestures and pernicious distortions of truth. Kailas's total dedication to the spirit of man in the Gandhian tradition stands out in sharp contrast to Kalyan's contempt and disdain for the individual human being. As Prakash Shukla, the veteran M.P. from Uttar Pradesh, reminds Kailas, his kindred spirit, who alone can retrieve the degenerate political situation in U.P.

The framework of democracy we have today is from the British but humanity we learned from the Mahatma. (TTOM-P.256)

It is this humanity that finally triumphs over the alliance of the conscienceless politicians like Kalyan, Hari Mohan, and Somnath, the ousted Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh when Kailas is invited by the Prime Minister to become the Chief Minister of U.P.: the microcosm of post-Gandhian, that is to say, post-independence India. Thus, the novel reflects social and political aspects.

Similarly, Sir Arjun Mitra, the senior-most bureaucrat, whose reputation to manage both the ministers and other officers has never been unsullied. He is the victim of marital infidelity and the conjugal unhappiness. Uma, his voluptuous wife, fed up with her fruitless married and immensely wants to escape into the fakery of sexual freedom. Arjun Mitra feels ashamed and frustrated but silently shields and suffers his wife. He craves but a wee bit of humanity from his wife on the verge of his retirement from the Indian Civil Service. Shaking off his tortured vanity, he confesses to Mira, the wife of Kailas whom he got arrested during the struggle for India's freedom that Kailas has been an enviable person. He goes on saying that he never envied anything more than his wife. Here, the novelist has focused on the bourgeois domesticity through the portrayal of the married life of Sir Arjun Mitra and Uma. Interestingly, despite the rich resources of third-person omniscient narration, the history of this marriage is presented exclusively from Arjun's perspective. As in the choice of male narrator in the novel, here privileging the male viewpoint foregrounds the patriarchal gender politics implicit in colonialist bourgeois domestic ideology that denies women any individuality. Consequently, though the narrative provides frequent insights into Arjun's subjectivity, Uma is presented only from the outside through short conversations and silent actions.

We observe the complexities of political and social life. Kalyan, the strong willed, self-serving member of the U.N. delegation has acquired a position of power and desires more. Rashmi has returned to her parent's home to decide whether to divorce her husband. Kalyan's political career has had a setback due to his overbearing self-confidence and lack of understanding of the democratic nature of government. After a brief affair with a Danish architect, Rashmi announces her intention to get a divorce and leaves for Lucknow. She indicates to Rakesh that she is finally ready to begin to recognize the love he has already felt growing between them.

A.P. Pandey has quoted his feeling towards the 'political consciousnesses' in Nayantara Sahgal's novels-

I have the feeling of being lost in the crowd. All I can see the brown faces around me, and I keep wandering who they are and what there is common between us.²

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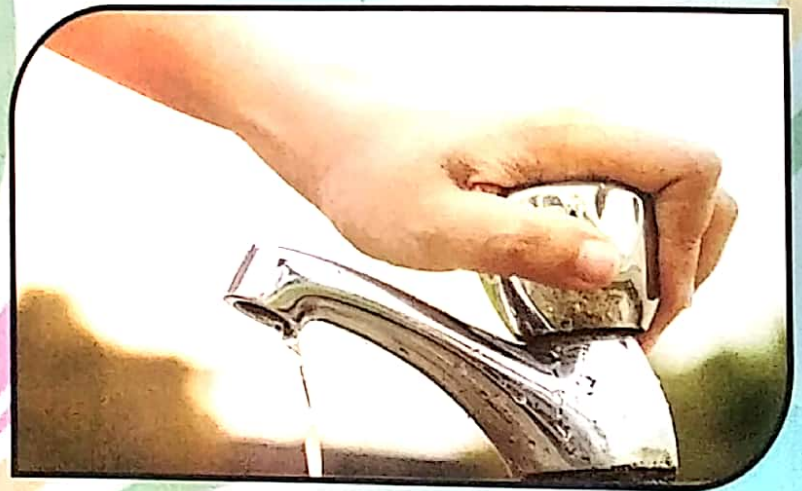
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जल है तो कल है।
आज तो यह हाल है।



पाणी का मोल पहचानीए।

Save Water Save Life