

THE DREAM AND REALITY ABOUT INDEPENDENCE IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S THIS TIME OF MORNING

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Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is a writer in Indian English fiction with a refined and modern sensibility, and a profound knowledge of the world around her. Her contribution to the Indo-English fiction is great and unique in her precise and scholarly description of the contemporary Indian political scene. Nayantara Sahgal has written nine novels and eight works of non-fiction. She is the recipient of the Sinclair Prize for Fiction, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Her writing is generally characterized by simplicity and boldness.

The novelist gives a graphics account of the different dimensions of the degeneration that sets in the bureaucracy in the immediate post-independence period in India. Unlike any other Indian-English novel, *This Time of Morning* draws our attention to the anachronisms of administering an independent polity through a colonial frame work.

The writer excels in exposing the atmosphere of greed, inefficiency and irresponsibility that has cropped up in the Indian bureaucracy due to the unholy nexus between the corrupt and sycophant bureaucrats and corrupt and opportunist politicians. In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal launches a frontal attack on harsh and ugly reality of the Indian political system- the baneful influence of communalism.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Corruption, Freedom Struggle, Gandhian Values, National Political Scene, Reality of the Indian Political System.

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Introduction

This Time of Morning is a product of post-independence India. In this novel Nayantara Sahgal deals with politics in the last days of Nehru's Prime Ministership. Through the political aspect, the novelist shows all of politicians and life of diplomatic and political circles. The time of action in the novel is the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, in a gloomy world when ministers and officials go through a crisis of moral values and attitudes.

Jasbir Jain makes a very relevant point while expressing views on the theme of the novel "*Where a post- independence generation has come into being a generation to whom freedom is no longer dream but a reality and this generation lives side by side with an older generation which has struggled to turn it into one.*"¹

The Independent India faced a number of problems. The reality of independent India was beyond the dreams of people. India found itself burdened with an alien system of values and education. There was also the refugee. The official policies were changed. It was the time of beginning of disillusionment, despair and despondency. *This Time of Morning* has been hailed as one of the best novels, addressed to the national political scene in India. "*It provides an authentic account of what goes on in the whirl of Indian politics after independence, when the men at the helm of affairs had to plan the course of actions, programmes and strategies to realize the new goals set for people's security, peace and prosperity. The life that it projects is the life shot through and through with policies and all that goes with it-conferences, committee, public meetings, get-togethers, discussions, seminars, processions, demonstrations, protests, boycotts, parties and social clubs. We are given a daring intimate and explosive expose of the happening in the protected world of politicians and administrators of the south block.*"²

The Main Study

The novel explores two characters- Kailash Vrind (Gandhian idealist) and Kalyan Sinha (a non-Gandhian activist). The principal character Kalyan Sinha, the minister without portfolio, believes that the battle in this country is for self interest. Corrupt and ruthless in his pursuits, he can sacrifice anything for his political success. "*It is a political world where ideologies and politics meet, clash and confront each other. Where individuals influence politicians, and policies influence individuals.*"³ Kalyan feels it is because of Gandhi that the Indians are a backward

people dominated by the past, left behind in the race towards progress. There are others like him who question the validity of non-violence as a political method and reject it as an exercise in futility.

Kalyan Sinha, attacks those who wish to carry Gandhian values in to modern politics. He is a person whose character is like those, who always have snow-white collars but do not always have clean hands. Life is endowed with an extra ordinary intellect and charm, but is absolutely devoid of such a quality as humanity. He does not know what soul and emotions stand for ants to take advantage of all the opportunities. He is totally free from all paraphernalia that binds most people. This is the factor that prevents his identification with India. Kalyan had found it difficult to talk to his colleagues in the cabinet; he could neither understand nor appreciate a tentative approach to problems.

On the other hand, there is Kailas Vrind, who is a follower of Gandhi and influenced by the magic of Mahatma Gandhi's personality, joined him in the service of the motherland. He practiced law and lived with comforts in a well settled home in Allahabad, defying the British government and being arrested again and again. He feels that there are few people for whom ideals and actions had been happily wedded, and the goal achieved. For goodness and welfare of the country, he prefers non-violence and says that it can be valued as a way of life, but not as a political force. He insisted that non-violence is a positive attitude and needed courage and dedication.

For Kailas Vrind, politics was identical with congress and freedom during the pre-independence period. In post-independence India, political leaders remained identical through the point of the government and the party in important respects. Kailas wishes ideals and actions should be harmonized as during the freedom struggle. It is a time, when everyone should realize one's business and duty for nation-building, without blaming the British empire for "*the frame work of justice being used to suppress the reality of justice.*"⁴ Kailas thinks that it is possible to accept the Gandhian view as a philosophy of life and principles for guiding a state. But the changing values system is not an end of all that Gandhi and congress stood for, but a realization of the new challenges which congress accepts.

Kailash and Kalyan differ tremendously on the vital issue of the role and place of the individual in the process of change and progress in society. Kailash's total dedication to the spirit of man in the Gandhian tradition stands out in sharp contrast to Kalyan's contempt for the individual human being. Kailash never liked the word Mahatma for Mahatma Gandhi. *"He had preferred Bapu or Father. Gandhi had been no saint who had stood aloof from the world's struggles. He had been a human being, a man among men who had demonstrated, as men did from time to time, the glory and grandeur of human effort. He had been a pilgrim whose passion for truth had burst the bonds of religion."*⁵ On the other hand Kalyan Sinha, emphasizes on his individual need. He is portrayed as an unrefined, uncultured yet brilliant and charismatic leader. He despises conventional morality and idealism. For him, the only thing in this life is to fulfill own matters. Kalyan feels *"As long as there were starving, ignorant men there could be no relationship between a government and the governed except in term of rapid accomplishment."*⁶

There is an inner contradiction in Kalyan's character which he fails to realize. In order to eradicate suffering and sacrifice, he creates and perpetuates both by ignoring human needs and ethical values. But in sharp contrast Kailash acknowledges the vital human dimension of the issue of change. Kalyan feels that any change involving the erosion of moral values would be self-defeating. He puts his faith in the quality of the people who are involved in the task of nation-building. However to his dismay and to the dismay of his senior colleagues Rakesh Shukla and Abdul Rahman, the people who are actually in power do not realize their sacrifice for and dedication to the country.

K.R.S. Iyengar has given a balanced judgment of the novel as follows - *"This Time of Morning is written with much greater ease and sophistication than its predecessor, and it can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English."*⁷ Nayantara Sahgal devotes this novel to show the development of Gandhian ideology.

After independence, people start murmuring against some Gandhian principles and values. They are disillusioned and express doubts in Gandhian teachings. For them Gandhian ideology does not fit in the present context. The whole value system appears to have collapsed. This is the reality of an independent India. Common people regret that they are unable to do anything in the present-day situation where power lies in the hands of selfish politicians who can sacrifice anything if it does not fit into their scheme of things.

The novelist's views about this post-independence political scenario have, by and large, a complex feeling, confidence that the heart of the people on the whole is in the right place, some degree of satisfaction at the progress made by the country, but also despair and anger that large measure of the gains were appropriated by politicians. The common man felt cheated and frustrated. There was a challenge before post-independent 'politics' of values. As a veteran freedom fighter explains in the novel, "*The frame work we have today is from the British but humanity we learned from the Mahatma*".⁸

Rakesh, a junior official in the ministry of External Affairs, who recently returns from abroad, is soon caught up in the whirl of politics, social life and careerism. He observes, "*In India in every newly independent country where time had stood still too long things must move ahead or slide dangerously backwards*".⁹

Politics is a frame in which the various pictures in different styles are shown by the author in different shades and colours. So, inevitably Nayantara Sahgal's characters have to interact with contemporary politics. The foremost challenge before post-independence politics, as Nayantara Sahgal perceives is "*Institutionalization of Gandhian values in formal political structures*".¹⁰

Social change can be meaningful only when the human being is not bypassed and remains the ultimate concern. After Independence, congressmen exchanged their idealism. The amorphous character of the congress resulting in an ideological ambivalence gets reflected in the longer political milieu of the nation. In the changed ethos, Kailash thinks it is possible to reevaluate Gandhism as a philosophy of life for a sovereign state. Kailash maintains that the party should not abandon its moral character which is its main strength.

Hardly ever bothered about his crucial responsibility, Dhiraj's entire life and actions are geared only to meet his own selfish interests and needs. His bloated ego is hurt as he is posted to a relatively insignificant country as Burma. However, he does manage to get out of it by approaching Kalyan Sinha. In the dark atmosphere of the political and bureaucratic corruption, there is still some hope in the form of conscientious and responsible bureaucrats such as Rakesh.

Kalyan Sinha rejects the implied passivity of the long prison terms. He is unable to submit either to them or the British Raj. He goes into voluntary exile because of his basic disagreement with Gandhian Policies. He feels it is because of Gandhi that the Indians are a backward people

dominated by the past, left behind in the race towards progress. Kalyan feels, Gandhi had emasculated the country. But for him:

“There would have been a revolution like any other- if not with guns, then with sticks and stones, teeth and nails - and there would not have been these anomalies to contend with today, this oil-and-water regime that could command no singleness or unity of purpose.”¹¹

Impatient for progress and intolerant of suffering, Kalyan Sinha fails to realise that there were other values as important as progress - if not more important - personal freedom and sensitivity find no place in Kalyan’s system of values. *“What was Indian psychology? Everyman for himself to the farcical extremes brought about by caste, religious, regional and linguistic differences?”¹²*

Independent India suddenly faced a number of problems arising out of its peculiar background. *“In India and in every newly independent country where time had stood still too long, things must move ahead-or slide dangerously backward”¹³*

In its political aspect this novel shows how the politicians of pre-independence day are power-mongering, career-hunting and opportunists. Leaders’ personal clashes passed off as ideological differences, and thus personal issues turning into national ones. There are political functions at various levels. Kailash Vrind is dedicated and honest; Kalyan Sinha is impatient for results. Han Mohan and Somnath are guided purely by personal interests. For Prakash Shukla and Abdul Rahman it is difficult to accept progress based on humanity and morality. There are young Foreign Service officers, who think that basically independence means ‘foreign’ relations:

“What does independence mean? He asked. Basically it means foreign relations, because to the extent that another country influences your foreign policy or tells you what to do, you are not independent. At least this is how we look at it. What is our interest in world affairs? Our main stake is peace.....”¹⁴

In this way there are two sets of characters; the first is highly materialistic, which does not pay any attention to the values and the Gandhian ways of non-violence and truth, and the others who are Gandhian in principle. All noble hearted people regret that they are unable to do anything in present days where power lies in the hands of crafty politicians, who can do anything that does not fit into their scheme.

Conclusion

The novel, not only exposes the paradoxes and conflicts raging the whirl of the Indian Politics, but also raises several pertinent and basic issues such as the issues of public ethics and its erosion, and the emerging trends and attitudes.

In the novel Nayantara Sahgal presents a picture of the functioning of the bureaucracy in the newly independent India, capturing realistically the limited awareness of values and sycophantic bureaucrat in league with corrupt politicians as well as the few upright and dedicated bureaucrats.

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