

## Reflection of crises in marital relationships in Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*

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India's incredibility lies in multiculturalism and democracy. Human beings are gender conscious. Male and female are the two objects of this gender bias. In this democratic country male representatives are free to roam and the female representatives are restricted in the name of culture and religion. In Indian culture 'Marriage' is supposed to be a intimate relationship base on the principles of equality and love. On the other side it is also a bond which is every time misused by men. Since childhood men are taught about their rights and women about their duties. Hence the opposite feeling towards each other leads to a gap between the spouses resulting in a gradual separation.

In patriarchal society men is not expected to share their views with their wives as they are taught 'Listen to the counsel of your wife, but act against it'. Sahgal's novels present a study of alienation experienced by women in their relationship with men. Her women are lively, avid extroverts before marriage but marriage changes their destiny drastically. Their longings for sharing remain unfulfilled and they keep yearning for companionship all through their lives. In such situation her women do not hesitate in breaking their marriage bond though they believe in its sanctity. Sushila Singh quotes Simon de Beauvoir in this regard:

The situation of is that she-a free and autonomous being like all creatures- nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of other.

This research paper deals with the subject of 'Reflection of Crises in Marital Relationship in This Time of Morning'. In this novel Rashmi is the first woman character that breaks free her marriage bond, when she feels it to be suffocating. She finds herself to be uncomfortable with Dalip. In fact, the major cause of the failure in their marriage is lack of reciprocity. As far as Dalip's character is concerned he is neither a womanizer nor an oppressor but his problem is that he is needn't feel to share himself with Rashmi. The

absolute communication gap leads to various misunderstandings which in turn, makes spouses hostile towards each other. What she missed in her marriage is the 'we-ness', as her reflection shows:

I do not hate him, she had told herself wearily during the blank intervals between quarrels, I do not wish him harm, but he and I ---- she could not even think "we" any longer cannot, go on longer together.

On meeting Rakesh after a long time, she feels relieved, as she could share everything with him. Rashmi's search for involvement takes her to Neil Berenson. At the beginning we feel that her search is completed and she has been succeeded in gaining her wishes but later she discovers that her soul is in satiated. Niel and Rashmi share only physical proximity but spiritually, they are still strangers. Rashmi is starving for soul and not a body. Rashmi's relationship with Neil, however, does not appear to be subject to such patriarchal encoding. Though Rashmi, like Uma, is estranged from her husband, the former's involvement in an extra-marital affair is not prompted by a desire for escape and oblivion. Instead, the development of Rashmi's relationship with Neil signals her gradual emergence from the emotional limbo into which she had been plunged during the years of her marriage. Her relationship with Neil participates in this process of rebuilding her life - it gives her the courage to admit openly. The failure of her marriage by announcing her decision to get a divorce and, at the same time, helps her to recognize that she still has the capacity to love. Her sexual relationship with Neil is clearly the first step in her re-discovery of her own subjectivity; in the narrative this is evident in her purchase of a figurine of Ganesh - the god of auspicious beginnings as a gift for Neil.

Rashmi's choice of Rakesh over Neil however, also needs to be seen in the context of the ideological implication of her divorce. The decision to end her marriage violates the dharma of self-sacrifice that is not only the cornerstone of the pre colonial construction of 'ideal womanhood but was also appropriated by Gandhian nationalism in its re-formulation of the role of women. Therefore, by refusing to "endure, reconcile, and preserve" Rashmi is not only going against Indian tradition, but is also betraying the ideals of Gandhian nationalism.

After a short tryst with Neil, Rashmi realizes that he was not she was looking for. The woman in her remains as thirsty as ever. She is found to be bitter and disillusioned with her World. Thus experiencing frustration in her relation, she turns to Rakesh again. The irony is experienced not only by Rashmi but by another strong character Uma Mitra. She is the young and

beautiful wife of not-so-young Arjun Mitra who being a bureaucrat was fully devoted to his work. He is so busy in his bureaucratic work that he tends to forget the emotional as well as physical needs of Uma as the novelist reflects;

Uma in whom marriage has released torrent of hungry sensuousness that brought to startling focus to her exotic feline beauty.

In one of the scenes as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that nineteenth-century Bengali modernity was based upon the representation of women as “Grihalakshmi,” which combined civic virtues with the spirit of self-sacrifice as defined by notions of dharma” (“The Difference – Deferral of a Colonial Modernity”). This model of the “Grihalakshmi” was constantly threatened by the specter of “Alakshmi,” the westernized memsahib whose claims of personal freedom jeopardized the progress towards a glorious new age of Indian civilization. In his analysis of the public articulations on this subject Chakrabarty emphasizes women’s own participation in the construction of this new modernity. However, though he does point out certain slippages in women’s texts where careful self-inscription as the new woman is undermined by a self-indulgent pursuit of the newly acquired liberation through literacy, he does not explore the shape or scope of such resistance to the prescribed role of the new woman. Through her portrayal of Uma as an embodiment of the “Alakshmi” figure, Sahgal indicates another possible oppositional strategy that challenges the colonialist bourgeois life-script through deliberate inversion. Questioned by Arjun about the “disquieting stories” circulating about her that he saw as jeopardizing their marriage, Uma’s withering response is a simple, “Marriage? What marriage?”- a response that forces Arjun out of his self-absorption and “suddenly become aware of her as an individual”. Uma’s chosen form of resistance is therefore effective insofar as it helps to reveal the insubstantiality of a marriage ideal that defines companionship exclusively in terms of a wife sharing her husband’s interests, and forces at least a momentary recognition of herself as an autonomous individual. Furthermore, Uma’s control over her own body can also be seen as an appropriation, at the most personal level, of a space that allows her room for self-expression. Her body, with its frank sensuality, becomes her voice which, in any gathering, is heard by “one at any rate who looked at her and came so far to meet her across the waste of her own detachment, it did not seem to matter that she had not stirred herself.”

A useful parallel to Uma’s self-assertion as a sexual being may be found in Isak Dinesen’s “The Blank Page” ‘where the silent spectacle of a single frame containing an unspotted piece of linen becomes an ambiguous marker of a certain break in the otherwise seamless narrative of patriarchal

power. While the blank page is usually read as the sign of a woman's successful subversion of male control of female sexuality, it does not provide any indication of the outcome of such a rebellion. The woman's voice of resistance, paradoxically, speaks through silence, which problematizes the notions of female agency and self-expression.' Any reading of Uma's extra-marital sexual experiences as a form of opposition is similarly complicated by her apparent sense of passivity in these encounters. Though Arjun sees Uma as a woman on the prowl, and even Neil's perception of her is dominated by a sense of her sexual aggressiveness (he paints her in his mind "with three breasts perhaps, one restless eye and an imperious mouth", the only two incidents in the novel where the narrative actually describes Uma's encounters with other men belie such fantasies of dangerous female sexuality. For Uma these encounters represent a form of escape, a means of withdrawing from the world into a private space where she can be "soothed by the darkness." In both cases Uma is actually running away from a party and literally stumbles into these encounters without any decisive action on her part. Her ineffectiveness as a femme fatale becomes obvious when we contrast her with Lalitha in *A Time to be Happy*. Presented as a witch-like creature whose bold sensuality leaves Sanad feeling trapped and helpless, Lalitha embodies rampant female sexuality. Similarly, Sanad's British lover, Marion, revels in her sexual power and collects lovers like trophies. In *This Time of Morning*, however, such sexual aggrandizement is evident only in the male characters – it is characteristic of Kalyan's encounters with Celia where he appears to be "a messenger of Death out to destroy her" and of Hari's impersonal "use" of his wife with as little regard for her feelings as if she was a "block of wood".

Through her portrayal of female sexuality Sahgal not only highlights the difference in this respect between social reality and its ideological construction, but also reveals the similarity in the sexual power politics of seemingly distinct life-scripts for women. While Gandhian and colonialist bourgeois ideologies offer very different resolutions to the private/public conflict, both are grounded in the same patriarchal formulations with respect to female sexuality.

Though Uma's sexual encounters are not presented as acts of individual declaration, Sexual liberation as a form of female autonomy does appear to be an important motif in the novel. All women belonging to the post-independence generation in the text have sexual relationships outside the bounds of marriage. While in the case of Leela sexual experimentation is a result of her exposure to the alien and liberating atmosphere of the U.S., Rashmi and Nita choose to cultivate a relationship with Neil and Kalyan

respectively as a form of exploring and asserting their own independence. Such appropriation of control over their own bodies by the female characters has led one critic of the novel to characterize them as "sex-starved" while others, more sympathetic to the writer, see this as a sign of Sahgal's attempts to create modern women who embody the ideal of freedom in every aspect of their lives.

At the domestic level, the social and ideological changes are represented by the differences between Mira, Kailas's wife, and their daughter, Rashmi. Mira's life clearly follows the Gandhian nationalist script of fulfillment through self-sacrifice. Mira's commitment to Kailas symbolizes her service to the nation, a commitment that is made freely (Mira chooses to marry Kailas even though she is unofficially engaged to another man) and naturally, with no sense of inner conflict. This psycho biographical narrative confines women, even in their public role as participants in the nationalist struggle, exclusively within the structure of domestic relationships. Rashmi's life does not follow this script since her broken marriage immediately places her outside the domestic space. However, unlike Uma who cannot escape her ideological inscription, Rashmi moves towards a new identity by deciding to end her marriage through divorce and thus emerges as an independent individual. Rashmi's decision in the novel is historically validated by the existence of the Special Marriage Act 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, both of which give women the right to divorce. Rashmi's rejection of the domestic script is thus made possible by her inscription as a constitutional citizen of the new nation. This legal construction of her as a subject in her own right allows her to function as a private individual outside the confines of domesticity. While women like Mira and Uma are defined by certain mytho-religious constructs that underlie both Gandhian nationalist and colonialist bourgeois ideologies, Rashmi enters the Nehruvian secular-historical world as a civil subject.

By embracing this alternative life-script, Sahgal envisages a role for women outside the patriarchal structure of domestic relationships which define women only as daughter, sister, wife, and mother. But the Nehruvian psychobiography creates a distinct division between the public and the private, and does not have a concrete role for women in the public political sphere. Though Rashmi hopes to get a job in the future and live independently in Delhi, the novel does not explore the possibilities or implications of this proposed entry into the public sphere.

The narrative of the novel does not provide a neat sense of closure at the end of the text. Instead its open-endedness signifies the dawn, of a new

beginning. 'A long vista stretched before his mind's eye of upheaval in the fabric of Indian life. For Kailas it represented the birth pangs of a new civilization. Already there was change at every level, political, domestic and social... The attainment of independence had been its starting point, but the human being's struggle for freedom and recognition in every facet of his life and environment went on.'

From this perspective the novel appears to function at two distinct levels. While the narrative traces women's inscription into a new role in post-independence India, the text simultaneously provides a critique of this alternative life-script and provides subtle indications of a more liberating space for women's construction of their own sociopolitical identity. Sahgal has dedicated this novel to her two sisters rather than a parental mentor figure (her earlier literary works have been dedicated to her parents and her uncle). On the one hand, this dedication clearly indicates a shedding of the burden of the past — a self-conscious decision to free herself from the ideological constraints of anti-colonial nationalism and assert faith in her own generation. At the same time, by expressing her allegiance to her sisters in this novel of post-independence India, Sahgal also points towards the importance of a sense of sisterhood for any successful appropriation of a space for female agency in the new nation. Thus while the narrative remains caught within the logic of male sponsorship of women's liberation movements, the dedication questions the validity of this logic by stressing the power of a female community to provide a stable sense of identity to a woman.

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