

Tradition and Transition: Feminine Selfhood in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*

Mrs. D. SriAnnapoorni.¹, Dr. P. Jeyappriya²

¹Research Scholar, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal-624101 & Assistant Professor of English, Thirumurugan Arts and Science College for

Women, Thiruvallur Email ID: sriannapoorni79@gmail.com

² Professor and Head, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal

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ABSTRACT

This Time of Morning (1965) by Nayantara Sahgal showcases detailed storytelling which investigates the reshaped traditional customs while investigating female identity transformation within independent India. The story takes place in Delhi during its developing political climate to depict women's struggles between traditional customs and modern beliefs. Sahgal uses Rashmi and Nita to portray the various reactions between traditional female roles and personal yearnings which represent changing attitudes about women in India's national era. Feminist and postcolonial theory by Simone de Beauvoir and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is used to analyze how the novel examines traditional female roles. The story presents Nita as an example of traditional obedience to family duties yet Rashmi stands as a heroine of independent self-expressiveness through her professional path. The study shows that Sahgal presents women in a complex way without idealization or simplistic portrayals yet she bases her depictions on real psychological elements together with specific contextual factors. Sahgal supports an active reorganization of cultural beliefs that responds to the transformations happening in society. The modern Delhi city serves simultaneously as an environmental environment as well as an emblematic area which rearranges individual and political character traits. Sahgal demonstrates empowerment through sophisticated female characters who use self-examination while creating space for bargaining to achieve their transformative goals. *This Time of Morning* continues to provide important insights into gender relations through its meaningful reinterpretation of cultural tradition which gives women leading roles in transformative processes. Through her compositions Sahgal provides essential knowledge about feminist literature by detailing an original approach to female self-identification and opposition within the Indian context.

Keywords: *Nayantara Sahgal, This Time of Morning, Female Identity, Tradition and Modernity, Postcolonial Feminism, Women's Agency, Patriarchy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal as a leading figure in Indian English literature consistently places women at the forefront of her stories regarding political transformations and individual growth. *This Time of Morning* (1965) forms a deeply meaningful work set in post-independence India which demonstrates how societal changes transform both state beliefs and female experiences in society. Sahgal's ancestry as an aristocratic political figure shapes her writing to highlight the struggles between traditional inheritance and modern emerging personalities. The study analyzes *This Time of Morning*'s transformative approach to societal expectations while evaluating its structure of female identity based in feminist and postcolonial analysis.

The traditional obligations demanding women suffer from in the novel symbolize country-wide challenges faced while defining national identity. The study of Sahgal's character depictions of Rashmi and Nita reveals how women combine the management of cultural rules along with family commitment lines and internal aspirations. This study relies on Simone de Beauvoir and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theoretical work to demonstrate how Sahgal both attacks patriarchy and presents a conceptualization of the strong self-reflective Indian woman. The novel uses Delhi as its geographical focus to demonstrate how societal transitions shape both realities and possibilities in a moving society. India at its stage of independence experienced vast structural reform alongside growing hope for the country. When British colonial domination collapsed India commenced its path to define its new national identity. During the time of political transformation women did not achieve equivalent levels of influence and empowerment. Women who took part in the nationalist movement became marginal after independence when India moved backwards to previous traditional gender norms in the name of cultural preservation.

Nayantara Sahgal witnessed the creation of contemporary India because she was related to both Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Through the influence of her status she obtained exclusive understanding of political strategies as well as first-hand

experience about women's positioning in elite institutions. Sahgal uses the intellectual knowledge she acquired to write characters who remain aware both mentally and socially active. The political elite of Delhi forms the focal point in *This Time of Morning* which demonstrates how both the nation-building process and personal growth parallel one another during the period of colonial governance. Women specifically face identity challenges because they need to meet traditional standards while feeling drawn to contemporary values. Through her literary characters Sahgal offers readers a viewing perspective that helps understanding social political developments with unique focus on gender changes.

The novel demonstrates that tradition exists as more than a historical setting because it restricts women's roles through its organizational framework. The social construct establishes guidelines for behavior which mainly regulate conduct within matrimonial unions and household activities and obedience towards authority figures. The character Nita demonstrates how the social custom works as an authoritarian mechanism throughout the novel. Traditional marriage customs arranged Nita's marriage to Rakesh despite her personal feelings remaining unimportant. According to the traditional standards she performs as an ideal obedient daughter who denies her own wants to satisfy family principles. The marital unhappiness of this character functions as an analysis of the societal structure that promotes duty while forbidding personal satisfaction. Throughout the narrative her character serves as a representation of sexual violence that traditional culture approves.

Nayanthara Sahgal demonstrates that tradition stands as a fluid entity which needs evaluations instead of evil. She presents Rashmi as contrasting Nita because both ladies face social rules yet Rashmi takes a divergence from typical societal expectations. Through this dual character presentation readers can understand all possible female experiences that take place within traditional structures. Marriage proves to be an intense power struggle. Social institutions expect marriage as both a tradition and utilize it to exercise oversight over their members. The novel sheds light on how many marriages revolve around exchange deals which eventually creates distress for women. She depicts different characters to challenge the idealistic marriage fantasy which conventional stories present. Sahgal portrays Rashmi as her most forward-thinking character who represents today's independent Indian woman who understands her rights and confronts society's norms. In contrast to Nita Rashmi breaks societal traditions through her intellectual pursuits since she chooses knowledge over male companionship and desires separate identity from her marital connections.

Her battle exists on two levels from outside pressure as well as from within her own thoughts and beliefs. Sahgal profoundly explores this internal conflict to show what it means to be deviant because of your identity. In a social setting where women typically stay dependent Rashmi made groundbreaking choices to work in broadcasting and to live alone. Through its pages the text functions as an artistic space that serves to redefine feminine identity. The path Rashmi follows represents a developing outlook within Indian women who now understand their independence from male family connections. The narrative shows how her identity declaration requires sophisticated handling through doubts and opposition rather than simple victories. Sahgal shows great caution in her avoidance of romanticization when she depicts her characters. Rashmi shows faults while also facing difficulties because of her decisions. Through realistic elements Sahgal develops a more captivating portrayal of her feminist perspective which becomes more impactful in its execution. The story grants women intellectual agency through challenging roles that require complicated decision-making and life maintenance thus standing against patriarchal cultural narratives.

The city of Delhi exists beyond its geographical boundaries since its mapping closely matches the psychological transformation of its people. The city functions as a place where opposing ideas disconnect from ambitions and various cultures arrive to meet multiple conflicts. Through Delhi the author creates a national metaphor which showcases its societal struggle to unite different parts while sustaining time-tested fundamentals against emerging modern trends. The city exists as an arena which gives women prospects complementary to limitations they experience. People in this setting can build new identities while fighting to break free from previous constraints which still control their lives. Rashmi pursues her career independently in her urban environment yet she experiences discrimination because of the urban environment's constant observation. Urban life embodies an essential contradiction that mirrors various conflicts which exist within the national story.

Sahgal's women alongside India undergo identity reconstruction during the period when their nation refreshes its political and economic foundations. These transformations occur within a city environment which features both energetic metronomes and multiple social groups. Through this environment the characters face a test which requires them to reinvent themselves within both their individual lives and their role in national history. The analytical models stemming from Western feminist theory together with postcolonial studies enable effective interpretation of Sahgal's narrative. The "Other" characterization of women by Simone de Beauvoir makes a specific connection in this analysis. Women within the novel experience marginalization because their value depends solely on their relationship with men. The two women experience othering despite following unique methods of resistance against it.

The characters of Sahgal's traditional storytelling remain silent just as Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" explores this phenomenon. Rashmi starts to express herself through desires yet many women in the patriarchal system lack any form of vocalization. Sahgal uses narrative to function as a bridge which activates voice for subaltern characters in her stories. The author adopts Western feminism without accepting its total framework. Her feminist perspective emerges from Indian

cultural realities by respecting how gender dynamics function inside Indian society. She prevents the mistake of making Western modernity appear as the sole pathway to freedom. She promotes an identity that combines cultural foundation with adaptive acceptance of transformation.

Sahgal positions herself between feminist theories that recognize global perspectives together with postcolonial attitudes which retain local cultural sensibility. One major benefit of *This Time of Morning* relies on its recommendation to combine traditionalism with progressive thinking. Through her writing Sahgal encourages people to reinterpret cultural norms instead of requiring them to abandon tradition. The main characters work to adapt modern values to their Indian heritage rather than pursuing Western ways. Throughout the narrative Rashmi demonstrates how she incorporates career development into personal life connections in addition to Nita's final-stage realization of passive position. The author reveals that transformation through an introspective approach may happen in small steps without causing major disturbances.

According to Sahgal traditional values are not rigidly fixed. The entity exists as a dynamic construct because it needs to honor principles of justice and equality in its current state. Sahgal creates a feminist approach through storytelling by granting her characters the capability to apply thoughtful analysis to traditional practices thus establishing an inclusive model that grows through dialogue. *This Time of Morning* by Nayantara Sahgal presents a landmark text which successfully explores female identity during the transition period of Indian society. Sahgal presents the different womanly approaches to both tradition and modernity through the developed characters of Rashmi and Nita. The narrative poses an obstacle to traditional male rules while keeping its roots firmly connected to Indian social and cultural context.

This study uses feminist and postcolonial theories to explore how Sahgal redefines tradition into a terrain which women can shape through negotiation. Her characters restructure traditional expectations instead of simply dismissing them so that they open the path toward an inclusive society based on equality. Sahgal's work stands out as highly significant at present because women continue to face struggles for control and acknowledgment. Beyond being about specific characters *This Time of Morning* presents a national view that showcases Indian women's journey toward self-discovery after colonial rule and in the present-day masculine-dominated society. Sahgal reveals powerful female empowerment by showing women through complex compassionate descriptions in a way that links self-reflection with bravery combined with transformation.

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