



## A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-DISCOVERY IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S *A TIME TO BE HAPPY*

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Indian Writing in English has gained enormous reputation and recognition in the last two decades of the 20th century. Nayantara Sahgal the major Indo-Anglican novelist is an outstanding writer and also a journalistic writer who had panache for enthralling contemporary ideas. Nayantara Sahgal the celebrated Indian English women novelist was born on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1927 in Allahabad. Her mother Vijayalakshmi Pandit was India's first ambassador to the United Nations. Her father was a successful barrister. Sahgal's women characters evolve along with the creator's understanding of women. Her writing is clearly a part of Indian literature and emerges from her rootedness in middle class Indian society. She uses simple language to describe simple life especially of the Indian women.

Sahgal is a prolific writer, she has been active on the literary scene for almost four decades, and has published nine novels, and two autobiographies to her credit and has published a number of articles and two other books, two political commentaries and a large number of articles, contributions to various newspapers and magazines. One can observe that even Sahgal's "strongest women have been formed almost entirely by men and it is largely men they continue to relate to" (*Liu 52*).

*A Time to be Happy* has the reference to Congress activities and the events of 1942. The novel portrays the search for identity of a Westernized Indian youth sanad, against the backdrop of India's struggle for liberation. It is the story of Sanad, a nearly English Youngman brought to be a success, puzzled and uncertain about his future. The central theme is the wakening of Sanad's scruples and his attempt at success in self discovery and identity. The novel is set in the immediate pre and post independent period, and throws broad hint that deals with themes which are taken up by Sahgal in her later novels also.

The throws broad hints about the novelist's advocacy of woman's individual freedom, which becomes central motif in the later novels. Maya is Sahgal's first women who struggle to free herself from marital bondage as her "traditional upbringing makes her marriage to the anglicized harish, a sterile, if exotic bloom.' she is the first of sahgal's trapped women seeking escape into extra marital arms"(ATH 48).Sanad's quest for identity can be interpreted as a longing for an independent way of life. He makes his choice clear when he determines to marry Kusum Sahai, a girl from a nationalist family. Even as early as her first novel, *A Time to Be Happy* (1957), Sahgal articulated her views through Sanad: "It is a strange feeling to be midway between two worlds, not completely belonging to either," he confesses; "I don't belong entirely to India. I can't. My education, my upbringing and my sense of values have all combined to make me un-Indian"(ATH 151).

Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom and De Beavoir emphasises that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone because the kind of self-contentment, tranquility and security that marriage offers woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness. "She shuts behind her the doors of her new home, when she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland: the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space...." (*Second Sex 502*). Tong observes: "A woman may say that she diets, exercises and dresses for herself, but in reality she is probably shaping and adorning her flesh for men. A woman little or no say about when, where how or by whom her body will be used "(Tong 187).

Maya Shivpal is one of the protagonist of the story. She is the first character of Sahgal who start the journey towards self-discovery. Maya has enjoyed a rich and happy background with her parents before marriage. The narrator says:

Maya had just passed her sixteenth birthday. This, I think, was Maya's misfortune from the day forward. Harish's very presence was flamboyant, while hers was subdued. She had the cool purity of the eucalyptus, as compared with his extravagant gulmohar. She was the mirror-smooth lake to his rushing waterfall (TTH 39).

Maya appears to be like a slab of marble incapable of emotion and this is the result of her emotional isolation in marriage. She does not cherish-silk sarees, parties or costly ornaments and material happiness. Thus, Sahgal delineates the helplessness of Indian women and indifference of society to their plight in marriage. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* points out : "The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated matrilineal identity"(Judith 81).It is only Maya who is confined by her marriage. She does not revolt. She does not think about building another world. She remains a traditional wife. Her marriage remains a half way between the two worlds of orthodoxy and freedom.



Maya strikes the reader with her singularity. She is not antagonistic but she is detached from her surroundings. The family members are shocked when she refused to join them for their trip to the hill station during a summer.

'I shall stay here'. Maya said unexpectedly, 'don't be ridiculous', said Harish. 'There's no point in your staying in the grueling heat. No one does who can get away'. 'I don't mind the heat', said Maya.'... What nonsense' retorted Harish, honking his horn furiously to clear a path through a lock of sheep and goats (TTH 30).

The reason for her refusal to join them is her disliking towards the company of Harish and his life-style. Choubey makes it evident that "Govind Narayan's mother and Maya are the only women who dare to live a life of their own...It's only Maya, who faces problems yet dares to stand alone as an individual"(99). Sahgal's women characters portray their struggle against subversive force and continue their journey towards self discovery. This search for identity begins from this novel. Maya is not comfortable in her relation with her husband. Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships and the loneliness of living. Maya experiences isolation, aggravation and complains of marriage. Maya and her husband are unable to understand each other, which result into lack of communication. Her husband never thinks the female psyche and the emotional need of Maya. Instead he demands Maya should be the traditional woman as timid, compliant and the mere shadow of her man. Lack of communication between Maya and her husband lead her in emotional isolation in marriage life. Maya is not much ambitious and not she desired much in their relation. What she wants is just some kind of response, recognition of her existence in her own house. Maya tries to immerse her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in social work and religion.

#### Works Cited

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