

SAHGAL'S IMPARTIAL TREATMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL MALE PROTAGONISTS

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ABSTRACT

The warp and woof of human relationships forms one of the fundamental concerns of Nayantara Sahgal's fiction. Her characters behave as normal human beings do. They often succumb to their ego, commit errors, take wrong decisions, exhibit their weaknesses and sometimes they rise above them in triumph. They have various facets of their personalities. For instance, they are professionals, politicians, friends, parents and lovers. Her characters also struggle to define themselves and strive towards establishing relationships. They make all efforts to achieve their identities, which they ultimately discover, but invariably with the help of a friend or a mentor.

KEYWORDS: *Human Relationships, Growth of Inner-Self and Communication*

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INTRODUCTION

Sahgal feels that freedom is the first requisite for the growth of inner-self and communication is the vital element to avoid breaking up of relations. She has achieved success in delineating characters by picking up from life and class around her. When asked by S. Varalakshmi in her interview whether a writer should confine herself to his or her social world alone, she replied,

‘We are all constricted by our experience and environment. There is no question that I belong to a particular class or society but my own feeling has always been that it is not a crime to be of any particular class. It is a crime to be unaware that there is another whole world around. My awareness I hope, extended more out towards into type of characters’.¹

Traditionally, man plays a vital role in the family as well as in the state, the smallest and the biggest institutions of the society where as woman is confined to the smallest one. In Sahgal's fiction, the male protagonist moves from one sphere of activity to another and becomes the connecting link between the two societies from the technical point of view.

A significant feature of Sahgal's fiction is that she introduces her theme of the quest for freedom through the delineation of male protagonists though surprisingly, she makes a scathing attack on the male dominated orthodox society.

Sanad, the Protagonist in *A Time to be Happy* is a young Anglo-Indian who struggles a lot to acclimatize himself to socio-political surroundings. He is caught between two worlds widely apart, one in which he has been raised and educated and while the other that existing outside his office, the British Raj.

Belonging to a wealthy family, he has failed to reach his father's ambition to mould him strictly. Therefore, his elder brother Girish who is a product of the same upbringing and its influence fails to comprehend this unnerving dilemma of Sanad, when the latter is divided against himself, whether to leave his foreign firm or not. The development of Sanad

grows out of his dilemma ultimately leading to his resignation from the British company. After resignation, he wants to be every inch an Indian.

There is no worse situation than when he finds himself reduced to a naught after spending years, money and energy to groom himself in a particular way. Sanad too realizes that his westernized training has become a futile exercise. Unlike him, the other products of British education consider a job in a foreign company a lucrative one. His sensitivity can not overlook the poverty around him. He is a dynamic person who develops from a raw state to a fully self-grown personality by the end of the novel. He questions the validity of western influence on Indian psyche and yearns to be a part of the history of the country of his birth. He doesn't accept the British blindly like his counterparts.

The Calcutta outside the club is reeking with the foul odour while the rooms inside fabulously decorated, delicious food consumed by the aristocratic congregation to which Sanad belongs. The discussions on polo and fishing and unconcerned with the calamitous famine in Bengal, makes Sanad suffer from intense isolation. Two opportunities come in his way to search for his identity. Kusum, the daughter of Madan Sahai, a University professor inspires him to learn Hindi and advise him to walk in Gandhi's ways. She also motivates him to spin Khadi. It is through spinning at the village fair that he comes to terms with himself. His guilt complex makes him sensitive to the traditional and cultural heritage of India. Ultimately, Gandhian principles guide him to put together the fragments of his shattered personality into one.

Rakesh, the central character in *This Time of Morning* resembles Sanad in the first novel. In the words of A.V. Krishna Rao, "If Mrs. Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* is the story of Sanad, *This Time of Morning* can be aptly described as the story of Rakesh."² Of all the men characters, Rakesh is perhaps the chief spokesman for the omniscient author. It is through Rakesh, Sahgal vividly delineates the contemporary life in New Delhi. He Progresses from a state of uncertainty into that of inner certitude which is primarily the expression of freedom. One may call it communication or discussion or self-identity, it is possible only in a congenial atmosphere of freedom. Inevitably, every major character in the novel strives towards the realization of freedom as a basic human value. His clash with Kalyan, the corrupt minister without portfolio, adequately brings out his opinion.

He finally settles down to have a discussion with Kalyan. "*Discussion always serves a purpose.*" (221) Having been emancipated himself from the oppressive bondage of inhibition, Rakesh is very much inclined to have the warmth of a normal family like that of Kailas, the PM's reliable assistant, Mira, his devoted wife and Rashmi, their only daughter. Unfortunately, Rakesh doesn't find the affectionate bondage in his family. But his life takes a new twist when Rashmi's separation from her husband rekindles his personal interest in her. It means the beginning of a new and mature relationship on the emotional plane in the life of Rakesh.

Rakesh identifies himself with the new national political happenings in Delhi and rises above the bickerings between the I.C.S and I.F.S officers. He calls on Kalyan for a discussion to sort-out their differences. Thus, his is the case of pilgrims progress from a state of uncertainty to that of conviction, confidence and inner certitude which, in a way, is symptomatic of the way towards realization of freedom without the use of violence, agitation or demonstration of tensions.

Vishal Dubey, the protagonist in *Storm in Chandigarh* is an idealistic and upright civil servant. He firmly believes that isolation is not inevitable in life and learns that communication and candor can help anyone to establish an amicable relationship even in the worst situations in life. He understands that decent human relationships can be cultivated with care, interest and above all, love and truth to the maximum extent. In his interaction with his former superior officer, Trivedi, he reveals his concept of higher morality which transcends even the belief in conscience.

Very often one finds that suffering becomes the badge of honest people whose disinterested action, combined with an attitude of non-attachment likely to deprive them of intimacy and personal love. Dubey's marriage with Leela leads him to a great deal of mental agony and untold misery. When Leela, the self seeking woman becomes an audacious adulteress rather than an affectionate wife, he establishes affectionate communication with Saroj, a victim of her husband's Jaundice of Jealousy. He feels that his life is fully filled in her company. He expresses his deep concern for the Indian women who suffer silently and become victims of the male tyranny.

The central Home Minister nominates Vishal as the liaison officer of the centre to the newly divided states of Punjab and Haryana to restore normality and peace. He analyzes him carefully when he has discharged his duties successfully as a ration officer preserving human dignity in refugee camps at the time of partition of the country. He always identifies himself with the virtuous, patriotic, truthful and the helpless like Saroj and Harpal Singh, the CM of Haryana. He becomes part of everything that has come into contact with him, a curious ecstasy of involvement with ground he walks on, the problem he is tackling and the people he be friends. He is the kind of a person who cannot get much out of a situation or a relation unless he gives his affection or loyalty to it. He knows the importance of time in life and makes use of every second of it. He believes that everything that lives has a yearning for freedom and no power on earth can prevent it.

He insists that it should become a habit of mind or a way of life. He feels that sometimes solitude is inevitable but he has strong belief in the concept of dialogue and condor. He maintains balance of mind and does not goad a situation to climax. He is inclined to take hasty decisions under duress. He waits as he believes that waiting has a value and that worthwhile solution to a problem is seldom born of violence and high tension. Above all, he waits because it is the civilized instinct not to damage the smallest chance of a genuine change. Dubey advises Harpal Singh, the C.M. of Haryana to make a stand clear against the violent and despotic attitude of Gyan Singh, the C.M of Punjab.

He counsels Saroj, the divorced wife of Inder to leave for Delhi in the interest of her baby. He endorses the conviction of Gandhi that every man or woman, however weak in body, is the guardian of his or her self respect and liberty. He instills confidence in Saroj and provides a new lease of life to her. At the end, he emerges as a champion of truth, non-violence, love and patience.

Raj, the protagonist of *The Day in Shadow*, is also a modern liberal humanist like Rakesh and Vishal, the Protagonists of *This Time of Morning* and *Storm in Chandigarh* respectively. He inherits the belief in the tenets of Christian humanism from his father. He has immense zeal for life and wants to find fulfillment in it. As he acts purely out of conviction, he always sides himself with the innocent victims. With his motto of 'think for yourself', he exhibits intellectual independence in his public life. He combines in himself the two essential qualities, Justice and gentleness. He always does what he says and never deviates himself from his words.

Like Dubey, he is committed and wants to have complete involvement, if there is any involvement at all. He does not agree that fate is the answer to human problems. He wishes that people should be free-willed and creative as the world is on the threshold of immense changes. Committed to the public service, the involvement of Raj in the national affairs is complete and total. Being candid in his views and broad in his outlook, he remains an independent member in the parliament without yielding to the temptations cast on him by the political parties and expresses his aversion to the unity of amoral, opportunistic politicians.

For him, India is almost his personal possession, in turn his delight and his devastation. Having seen politics from close quarters and gained practical experience, he understands that there is a huge difference on ideological terms between

him and his contemporary politicians who strive for selfish aggrandizement like SumerSing, amoral and opportunistic minister of state in the Union cabinet. He understands that they belong to different lines of thinking, though all of them, including himself, support the democratic form of Government.

Like Dubey, Raj also waits patiently and takes the decision at the appropriate time. Infact, he never discusses marriage with Simrit but only encourages her to be assertive and independent and aids her to regain her lost confidence as well as intellect. But at the end of the novel, when the situation demands, he suddenly declares that he is going to marry her. Thus, his character can aptly be described as a Christian by birth, a liberal thinker by temperament and a fearless exponent of his ideas.

Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, in *A Situation in New Delhi*, claims India as his motherland as he is aware of the rich humanistic heritage of the country. He resigns to his post after the students' unrest. He is totally upset when political interference makes inroads into the university. The new aristocracy of ministers sit in a cool capsule cabinet rooms and forget the plurality of the Indian society. Despite the inclination of his wife to leave India, he is not interested to leave, especially at a time when the country is standing at the cross roads. He feels the vital need to move forward carrying everyone together to fight against opportunism and nepotism in politics.

He rightly understands that nothing can be achieved by evading the problems. He inspires the students to face the hardship and instills the spirit of sacrifice to bringin political change. His idea is to establish a government to make people govern themselves in a meaningful way. His individual triumph lies in reaching the innercore of the people. Gandhi emphasizes the role of the individual in bringing about a change and says, "The individual must learn to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress." ³ Usman, along with Devi, the sister of Shiva raj, starts his movement with a mission to build a new future for his country based on mutual faith, comradeship and participation.

Ravi Kachru, an IAS officer in *Rich Like us* was a committed communist when he was a student at oxford. He is unable to sustain his communist ideas when he faces the real world. Sonali, an IAS officer and his classmate at oxford always comes to his rescue in his tough times. He falls into the trap of emergency which is declared only for the sake of family rule. Sonali notes this in a tone of detached despair.

Sonali wonders how canone make a journey from the communist manifesto to the royalist. Ravi becomes one among the numerous sycophants. Ravi steadily climbs up the professional ladder through his unquestioning loyalty to the PM. Being a Kashmiri like Nehru, he has an added claim for proximity with the reigning powers. He takes different sections of the society to congratulate the prime minister and involves actively in vacectomy operations. But it is Sonali who successfully infuses reason into him by constant questioning. Ravi realizes that there is truth in her argument and recognizes that emergency was promulgated only to cover different kinds of atrocities and prolong the family rule. Moreover, he frankly admits that everything has gone beyond him by the time he recognizes the fact.

His love for Sonali saves him from the degeneration, and ultimately she restores him to rationality and reason. By the end of the novel, he falls from political grace but attains maturity to be honest on a personal level.

CONCLUSIONS

All the male protagonists of Sahgal are prepared to sacrifice anything for the cause of freedom. They have tremendous faith in love, mutual trust, sympathy, dialogues, discussion, understanding and humanism. They have the ability to think rationally. Being both theoretical and practical, they are trend setters. They feel that there is stagnation in the tradition and

the individuals of the society have become victims of their own preconceived beliefs. They oppose the tradition bound milieu vehemently and condemn those people who lack courage and individuality. The most significant features of their nature is that they are never cynical but always optimistic of a bright future.

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