CHAPTER - II

CHANGING ERA AND THE CLASH OF VALUES IN
THIS TIME OF MORNING

In her second novel, *This Time of Morning*, Mayantara Sahgal deals with the conflicting attitudes of idealism and materialism in the political world in the post-Independent India. Kailas Vrind and Kalyan Sinha symbolise idealism and pragmatism respectively. People like Somnath may discredit idealism as merely utopian and hence impracticable in the present-day politics. But the novel shows that the seeking of materialism without an ethical and humanistic orientation leads to exploitation as exemplified by the alliance, rather misalliance, between Kalyan Sinha and Hari Mohan. Such an alliance jeopardises individual freedom and is seen to be detrimental to the growth of the nation.

In its presentation of the power structures of the Secretariat and Parliament, *This Time of Morning* bears a close resemblance to C.P. Snow's, *Corridors of Power*. The high drama of political intrigue contained in this novel is placed before us in terms of a series of juxtaposed values, attitudes and orientations. The idealism of
Prakash Shukla, Abdul Rahman and Kailas Vrind is juxtaposed to the corrupt political practices of Kalyan Sinha, Hari Mohan and Somnath. The dedication and efficiency of Arjun Mitra in public life and his failure in personal life are contrasted with the corrupt practices, egoism and the amoral life of Dhiraj Singh. Arjun Mitra's wife and his scourge, Uma, who indulges in extramarital affairs out of a sense of boredom and revulsion against the dual moral codes adopted in judging men and women, is juxtaposed to Mira, the devoted wife of Kailas. If Leela, during her stay in America, takes to freedom like an uncaged bird and ultimately ruins herself, Rashmi tries to acquire the freedom of self-expression.

Though her interlude of sex with Neil Berensen, the architect of Gandhi Peace Institute, proves abortive, she is hopeful of rebuilding a meaningful relationship with Rakesh. Certainly the freedom that she has acquired will rejuvenate her life.

Thus the novel is peopled with politicians of every description, highly placed and influential bureaucrats, artists, journalists, parliamentarians and gossiping, liberated and libidinous society women as well as traditionally educated housewives. Nayantara Sahgal's canvas is so large as to include the whole of the sophisticated urban cultural world
of modern Delhi. Critics like Lois Hartley and Kai Nicholson treat this novel as "a sociological study of urban characters in contemporary India, rather than a work of literature." In fact, in this novel Nayantara Sahgal deals with the problems of communication among the sequestered elite of Delhi in terms of an artistic construct. The central theme of the novel is stated from the point of view of Rakesh who is himself uncertain, hesitant and anxious at the beginning. In terms of the experience placed before us in the novel, it is suggested that cessation of tension and the gaining of self-confidence and identity are possible only in an atmosphere of freedom. Freedom is seen to be a necessary pre-requisite for human achievement. Every major character in the novel strives towards the realization of freedom as a basic human value. Rather than passing judgment on these characters, Sahgal portrays them with sympathy and understanding. As A.V.Krishna Rao observes, "The growth and development of the individual consciousness of Rakesh, as well as that of Kalyan, is the measure of the artistic

Naysanta Sahgal is less concerned with the political system than with the people behind it. She writes that the political "analysts prefer to talk about what is wrong with systems as if systems were made of nuts and bolts instead of people." It is this temperament that helps her in accomplishing the rare feat of reconciling politics with novel writing. Though her political writings are important, as Jasbir Jain observes, "it is as a novelist that she is able to project a comprehensive view of life. Her novels express both her involvement with politics and the men and women behind political ideas and actions."

Her first novel, *A Time to be Happy*, deals with a society enchanted with Gandhian values. Gandhi's non-violence is more than a political weapon. It demands a complete change of outlook. Those who imbibe it become fully conscious of the grandeur of human life and effort.

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Further, Gandhian outlook shifts the political spotlight from town to village, jolting the town-dweller into an awareness of the peasant's existence and plight. The main accent in the novel is on sacrifice and renunciation.

If *A Time to be Happy* celebrates freedom wafting through life in all spheres, *This Time of Morning* shows Sahgal's growing disillusionment. It deals with the post-independence generation for whom freedom is no longer a dream, but a reality circumscribed by partition and bloodshed, the refugee problem and the assassination of the Mahatma. Besides this blood-dimmed tide, there is the threat of the erosion of the democratic framework caused by the conflict of values which the novelist depicts with an unwavering concern for a humane engendering. The administrative system still functions through the colonial framework and India finds herself burdened with an alien system of values and education.

The significance of the Gandhian approach is seen in Kailas, Prakash Shukla and Abdul Rahman - people of the older generation. But they are a generation on the wane and are being rejected as 'old fossils' of that fast dis-
appearing generation which is "saddled with philosophy instead of common sense." The post-independence approach is represented by people like Hari Mohan and Somnath. They adhere to Gandhian values in the name only, because the magic of Gandhi's name still gets them votes. Money and power are their objectives. Service and sacrifice are an anathema to them. This view finds farcical expression in Vishnu, the son of the corrupt civil servant, Dhiraj Singh. As a student at Oxford Vishnu spent more time on entertainment than on intellectual pursuits. He has "an avowed allergy to work" (p.99), and he develops a parasitical tendency. He believes that the world owes him a living. Kalyan represents a third approach. He is a class by himself. He is enigmatic. Like Somnath he has a disdain for Gandhian values. But he differs from that group, at least, in his dedication. He is not a career-hunter like Hari and Somnath. If he is offered the chance to lead the delegation to the U.N., it is a just reward for his service. He never sought it.

5Nayantara Sahgal, This Time of Morning (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1970), p. 89. All the subsequent citations are to this edition.
The artistic skill of Sahgal reveals itself in her tracing of the sources of Kalyan's callousness to the neglect he suffered and squalor he experienced in his childhood. He grew up "without the ordinary marks of identity" (p. 74) and suffering from a sense of "terrifying anonymity." He remembers nothing about his past. He was found in a quiet street in Patna during the famine of 1914. He recalls with agonizing clarity the emaciated, grotesque figure whom he called Ma and his pathetic effort to secure food for her. The man who opened the door was surprised to find a single thread of life in the street of corpses. Kalyan watched his benefactor with "queerly glowing eyes of an animal at bay, one who would spring on a crust if it were thrown but would still keep his distance from his benefactor" (p. 73). His foster parents considered him a gift of the benevolent gods. Their sentiment only provoked his contempt for them. They were too meek to assert themselves and mould him. He had little regard for them because they lived and died without any fight. "They stagnated in the turgid waters of their lives and gradually they rotted away" (p. 75). This traumatic experience of the childhood has dehumanized Kalyan.
Kalyan has a disdain for convention. Faith and compassion are hollow words for him. This temperament results in his utter disregard for Gandhian values. He disagrees with Gandhi on fundamentals. As a man who has survived "all sorts of famine - a famine of food and one of feeling" (p.66), he thinks strategies of survival involve cultivating the art of collectivization and developing a coalition of intelligent group interests. The group can accomplish what the individual cannot. Hence Kalyan's accent is on the group to the neglect of the individual. He goes to the extent of saying that the society needs to be protected from the predatory individual. The individual is only a tool and not the goal. Rakesh correctly analyses what is missing in Kalyan:

It was the assurance that every man counts, that life is the sum total of moments, that the human being through the exercise of his reason is the instrument of all progress... A group was individuals. What was needed was not the burial of the self but its rebirth and celebration, for surely the only hope for people anywhere was that they should recognise and foster each other's humanity as individuals. (p.136)
Kalyan is ready to use men and discard them as he would discard his tools, without any uneasiness of conscience. He raises the question, "Whose ego is so sacred that it must flourish at the expense of the community?" (p.63). In his contempt and disdain for the individual, Kalyan forgets that the group is a collection of individuals. For him individualism is 'rugged' and 'barbaric.' He swears by the group and regrets that there is not enough group effort or even awareness of its necessity in the society.

If Kalyan's 'bright anger' against the world of the past brings about his dehumanization, his 'terrifying anonymity' consummates in his ruthless efficiency. Dehumanized as he is, work is the only outlet for him for expressing his identity. He is guided by his overweening desire to leave his mark on the work he chooses for himself.

There were two great motivating forces, it was said, love and hate. But he knew a third, the hunger for identity, and in his search for it he had never been able to tolerate one that challenged his own. (p.132)

Hence he pursues his objectives in life, with a monomaniacal concentration and pathological obsession.
His mind is preoccupied with the suffering of the disinherited masses. It is his strong conviction that "In India and in every newly independent country where time had stood still too long, things must move ahead or slide dangerously backward" (p.63). This backward sliding can be prevented only when there is a sweeping, united movement.

Like Gyan Singh in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Kalyan is a materialist. To the infatuated mind of Barbara he is "living in a remote spiritual cavern of his own creation" (p.60). But certainly in his delineation of things, the spirit finds no place. Celia believes thus:

> Whether you were used for good or evil, pleasure or pain, did not matter, as long as you were used, and every fibre of your being kept pulse-tingly alive and aware. (pp 71-2)

She thinks Kalyan is the only crusader. Coming from the mouth of a woman who bears a grudge against unheroic life, this euphoria only reveals her own depravity.

Kalyan, the ruthlessly efficient pragmatist, calls the Gandhian belief of suffering bringing about a catharsis of the spirit a bluff. In his view suffering is an evil
which has to be torn up by the roots and not to be sanctified. Hence during the freedom struggle he refused to join the Congress which implied to him the passivity of long prison terms. He went into self-imposed exile. He took active steps in starting the India Centre at Boston and educating people about India during the period of the freedom struggle.

Gandhi's idealism represents for Kalyan an "oppressive antiquity," which, according to him, has left us far behind in the race towards progress. But for Gandhi "there would have been a revolution like any other - if not with guns, then with sticks and stones, teeth and nails" (p.133). Kalyan finds two divergent attitudes in the society as well as politicians - idealistic and materialistic.

Though Kalyan's patriotic fervour arouses one's admiration he is seen concerned only with ends and not means, for he believes, "Nobody asks a third - generation millionaire how his fortune was made. He could have made it selling human kidneys" (p.71). The only thing that matters for Kalyan is catching up fast. Towards this end he has always used people - first his foster parents who have only received in
return his contempt for them, and later Barbara, Celia and many others. The portrait of Kalyan enables Sahgal to expose career-hunting, power mongering, intriguing and scandalising that go on in the protected world of politicians and administrators of the South Block where India's Foreign Office is situated.

Kailas on the other hand is dedicated to the nurturing of the spirit of man. He believes that the human being is the measure of progress and the ultimate concern in all our dealings. No cause is so important as to justify the sacrifice of an individual, however humble he may be.

Kailas, drawing sustenance from Gandhian faith, is a foil to Kalyan. If Kalyan wants to bring about change through power, Kailas wants to do so through the human heart. Having staked everything on the ethicality of means, Kailas has realized that there cannot be any short cut to progress. Social change becomes meaningful only when the human being is not by-passed. He believes that even with all the will and co-operation in the world, "the slow way was the only humane way" (p.18). Factories and economic plans are not an end in themselves. In the words of Abdul Rahman, a colleague of Kailas, things in themselves are inadequate
without a corresponding human involvement and they ultimately stand "like abandoned human habitation in the desert" (p.212).

In spite of his association with Hari, a fore-runner of Gyan Singh in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Kalyan is not the man of his ilk. Kalyan is anti-conventional. He never submits himself to any party discipline. Alienated from Indian sentiments and dedicated to progress, he is forced to seek alliance with Hari Mohan. It is based on convenience rather than conviction. Hari, with his common sense, practical mindedness combined with money and power, becomes the best choice for Kalyan.

Kalyan's other associate, Somnath, thinks that running a government is different from leading the freedom struggle. The Congress must strive to become a political party like any other in order to achieve success. This group believes that unless official policies are changed and faith in non-violence shed, the country cannot extricate itself from its colossal post-Independence problems. But Kailas thinks that the party should not abandon its moral character which is its chief strength. Any change involving the erosion of
moral values will be self-defeating, according to him.
The comradeship of Kallas, Prakash Shukla and Abdul Rahman is founded on this philosophy. While forming an alliance with Hari and Somnath, Kalyan thinks thus:

Allies need not trust each other and they were seldom friends, but they served each other's purpose. (p.83)

This misalliance can survive only as long as the bargains are mutually beneficial. Hence Kalyan gives the contract of the Peace Institute to Hari's son, Ram Mohan, at high rates of commission. Ignoring the protocol and the advice of Arjun Mitra, Kalyan appoints Dhiraj Singh, a man of doubtful integrity, as the Director of the Peace Institute. Dhiraj has a flair for luxury which makes him not only corrupt but also unscrupulous. Kalyan confers his favours on such men as Hari and Dhiraj whose names have become synonymous with institutionalised corruption. They are not only amoral, but what is worse, their view is that morality is not relevant. They congratulate themselves on availing themselves of the opportunities that come their way. Kalyan has a 'subtle, intellectual' hold on the youth. His discussion groups help Kalyan to extract 'blind loyalty' from them through the magnetism of his personality. Kalyan
represents a type of enslavement brought about by means of personal magnetism. His advice, the resultant pregnancy and sense of shame make Leela commit suicide.

Jeevan, that slim, agile publisher of that single sheet of paper called The Wayfarer, comes under the spell of Kalyan. His paper as well as his body grows in bulk. He becomes placid and feels obliged to blow the trumpet of his patron, Kalyan.

Nita is another character who becomes susceptible to Kalyan's influence. In her we find a young woman whose desires—both spiritual and sexual—have not been understood by her parents. Despite their anglicised behaviour, Nita's parents are depicted as conformists. Her father retains the prerogative of selecting a husband for her. Instead of upholding self-expression, he reverts to custom. Like Ramesh in Rabindranath Tagore's The Wreck, though her westernisation makes her inwardly refuse to accept her father's decision, Nita outwardly accepts her father's decision. She is similar

to Shakuntala in Jhabvala's _Exond in India_. Her struggle against custom is portrayed through her interior monologue. It is humiliating to be degraded to the status of a capital investment fund. Hence her outburst:

Stocks and shares, money and clothes. What about her body and its desire, she wanted to cry out, the body that pulsed for something with an urgency she had never known? (p.149)

Yet she knows that she has to accept the demands of custom and give "herself to the game of pretence" (p.150). In acquiescing in custom Nita, like Sahgal herself, realizes that the demands of society are stronger than the will of a protesting individual who eventually must succumb to the collective will of the community. Yet she resents the slighting of her individuality. When Kalyan employs her, Nita's longing for carving out her own identity is fulfilled. She feels highly grateful to Kalyan. She is reluctant to include Triloki Nath in her personality page for the weekly magazine _The Wayfarer_ just because he is a severe critic of Kalyan. She is so blindly devoted to Kalyan that she thinks "what she did here in this office was an offering to Kalyan ... it would be disloyal to him to give space to a man like Triloki Nath" (p.129). This blind devotion,
this hero worship, is portrayed as inimical to the spirit of freedom.

Sahgal's chief concern in this novel is proper relationship between people in public life as well as personal life. She is highly critical of the pursuit of selfish ends and exploitation. People of Kalyan's sort, who have rejected emotion as a superfluous indulgence, cannot work alone. They seek an alliance which is based on convenience and not on conviction, loyalty and morality. Such an alliance cannot last ultimately. It "carries embedded in it from the start the seeds of destruction" (p.184).

This is what exactly happens between Hari and Somnath. Their unbridled ambition leads to rivalry which ultimately ruins them. Kalyan too falls with Hari. At the personal level, the failure of Nita's marriage is a foregone conclusion since in settling this alliance Vijay's family is mainly concerned with monetary benefits and not Nita the individual. Hari is the chief exploiter. In the beginning Hari desires to win the friendship of Kailas as he knows Kailas would be a great 'catch' for him. When his attempts fail, he turns to
Kalyan's tenderness, relaxed nature, and the inconsequential talk that flows out of intimacy are alien to his temper. Even in love he fails to relate himself meaningfully to any woman and hence he remains a bachelor. In this regard Maya in *A Time to be Happy* is a contrast to him. While the narrator's love for Maya has awakened in that 'apathetic woman' a sense of communicability which she ultimately channels into social service, the love of Barbara and Celia for Kalyan leaves him as he is—barren, reticent and dehumanized.

Yet Kalyan is not completely discredited. In *This Time of Morning*, as in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal deals with problems caused by a changing order. "A new order replaces the old, consequently causing disorder not only in the physical environment, but also in the psychological realms. The new philosophy 'calls all in doubt' including
one's own identity and roots."  

Unlike R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, Sahgal uses the urban setting and deals with the collapse of moral values in the civilized world. Sahgal is deeply involved in the 'here and now' of modern India. The city of Delhi is still a city groping in the dark suffering from blankness and indistinction. London is England and Paris is France, but Delhi is just Delhi, and not India. Here new fortunes and political ambitions choke ordinary values out of existence. The contradiction between Kallas and Kalyan reflects the contradiction between Gandhian values and the values associated with urbanization. Out of this creative matrix arises the urban novel which Sahgal has shaped. The world of Kallas is the moral world, a world grounded in our cultural heritage and which moves at its own leisurely pace. In Kallas's view freedom has to be nurtured with care and patience like young trees which 'grow in their own time.' But Kalyan's world is the modern world based on ruthless competitiveness. In this 'time-bound existence' everything is at stake if we don't

catch up fast. Personal freedom and sensitivity find no place in his scheme of values. His American education and his long stay at Boston "had lent the pragmatism to his outlook that had resulted in the search for dynamic rather than Gandhian men to serve his cause." Rapid urbanisation takes corruption in its stride. Hence Kalyan fails to understand the hue and cry raised against the appointment of Dhiraj Singh as the Director of the Gandhi Peace Institute. He cannot comprehend it and wonders "if Dhiraj Singh were upright enough to be Additional Secretary in External Affairs and ambassador to Norway before that, why should he not be Director of the Institute?" (p.217).

Sahgal feels with Nehru that urbanisation is an inevitable process. Her novels show how growing urbanisation and ind distinguishment become the lot of the average man. In Sahgal's opinion it is the elite - the industrialists, parliamentarians, journalists, educationists and civil servants - and their attitude to the average man that matters much. Since the vast majority of the people are illiterate and ignorant, this elite shapes their fate and can make or

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swar the nation. The novel offers an intimate analysis of the political scene in a changing era with its clash of values. This changing political scenario is depicted in terms of the creative configurations sustaining opposing viewpoints. Sahgal ardently desires that concern for progress and the concern for the individual should become complementary rather than contradictory. It is this desire that finally makes her humanize Kalyan through the agency of Nita's love. While other women are irresistibly drawn towards him against their better judgment, Nita alone comes to him freely. She occasionally drops in at his residence. She takes interest in decorating his house and in setting it in order. This voluntary work on her part while he holds office may not be strange. But she comes even after his fall. Fearing scandal he questions the propriety of her visits. She feels hurt. She says there is some inner compulsion which makes her come to him. This is because, of all the people she knows, he alone has given her freedom. Theirs is a relationship based on a recognition of each other's individuality.

There is no attempt here to use one another for convenience. Kalyan's whole being responds to this relationship
in peace and tranquility, even as he stands in the shadow of defeat. 'The past emptiness' and 'the tortures of loneliness to come' do not trouble him any further. "Mrs. Sahgal's creative sensibility achieves an ironic moral vision in the novel when Kalyan loses political power but gains personal redemption." This novel lays stress on a dynamic, political philosophy aiming at the quest for an impersonal humanity.

Whereas Anand, as a creative writer, reveals his humanism through protest, Sahgal's humanistic interest is revealed through her art of subtle evocations of history blended with fiction. M.K. Naik's charge against Nayantara Sahgal's plots is that action and characters are not solidly grounded in significant political issues. He thinks that the fictional story of the middle class characters "fails to coalesce with the political plot." A more balanced judgment of This Time of Morning comes from K.R.S. Iyengar who says:

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. 11

In This Time of Morning the political and social issues are better fused together than in her first novel, A Time to be Happy. The political and the social spheres both show a preoccupation with the theme of identity and the saving of the society from the predatory individual.

With a remarkable ingenuity Sahgal associates the Gandhi Peace Institute in a symbolic way with both the political and personal worlds. This memorial to Gandhi is ironically directed by Kalyan who calls Gandhi an 'emasculator'. Dhiraj to whom ends and not means count much becomes its director while the real Gandhian worker, Kailas, is disqualified for he is not practical. This symbolic "a-symmetrical structure" of modern architecture, a sermon in stone, supposed to represent a step in educating the public towards making peace a reality ironically, has turned out to be a hot bed of acrimonious debate and conflict. With its depiction of the ideological strife between humanistic and prag-

matic forces, as Kail Nicholson observes, this novel is akin to 'a twentieth century Morality Play.' But to stretch this analogy would be self-defeating, for Kalyan is not completely discredited, nor can he be identified with Bad. By juxtaposing the corruption and the idealism of the political world, the novelist only aims at providing an insight into the working of politics. Under people like Kalyan and his coterie for whom the non-human aspect is more important than human aspect, politics has degenerated. In order to prevent further erosion of political values, the Prime Minister calls Kailas to power as he alone can retrieve the degenerating political situation in U.P. When Kailas finally comes to power, humanity finally triumphs over the alliance of the conscienceless politicians like Kalyan, Hari Mohan and Somnath. Gandhism as This Time of Morning visualizes it gets saved in Indian politics. With the ultimate triumph of humanity in the personal as well as the political spheres and the fall of those who disdain humanity, the novel "projects a reality which is at once artistically satisfying and ethically vindicated."\(^{12}\)