



**GENDER MARGINALIZATION IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S THIS  
TIME OF MORNING AND ARUNDHATI ROY'S  
THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Nayantara Sahgal, the winner of Sahitya Akadami Award is a significant voice in the literary tradition of women in Indian writing in English. She is a woman who wrote not only about the sufferings and humiliation of women in India due to the rigidity of male patriarchy but also depicted the changing images of Indian women in the society in the post-Independence era. Arundhati Roy, winner of the prestigious Booker Prize too did a similar attempt in her celebrated novel **The God of Small Things**. She is a prominent emerging woman writer in the field of Indian writing in English. She too similarly portrayed the dilemma of Indian women under the heavy burden of patriarchy. The present paper studies Nayantara Sahgal's **This Time of Morning** and Roy's *The God of Small Things*. It highlights that how both of the writers have successfully portrayed the devaluation of women under the rigidity of social norms in traditional Indian society.*

**Key Words:** Gender marginalization, sexism, male patriarchy, exploitation, mental Slavery, etc.

Manikamma and Radhika M.K write in the article “Women Exploitation in Indian Modern Society”: “*It is realized that the long run supremacy of male over female in all respect in the patriarchal society in India is highly responsible for arresting the empowerment of women.*” (01)

The Indian women writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy ,Kamala Markandya speak about the dilemma of Indian women's sufferings and humiliation at the hands of male patriarchy.Both Nayantara Sahgal and Arundhati Roy depict the images of women that show women's subordinate position in the society. Ranga Rao, in his famous article “The Book of the Year” rightly observes, “Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English, which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things, children and fourth, woman and untouchable” (17) Nayantara Sahgal in her *This Time of Morning* throws light upon the sufferings of a woman who is educated. Here Sahgal wants to show how the education itself is unable to change the mentality of the society.The female character Nita is from a well- to –



do family. Nita is the young beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang. Mr. Narang is a queer blend of Eastern and Western cultures. In his Western life style, drinks, dance and bridge are part of his culture. However, he treats his daughter, Nita in the most traditional manner. It indicates the double standard of Indian male dominated society, which exploits women He imposes severe restrictions on the movement of his ambitious daughter. The Narangs never send their daughter unescorted to parties. Mrs. Narang says: “We don’t allow Nita to go out alone. Her father would not hear of it” (30) The Narangs’s concern for the safety and protection of their daughter illustrates their conformity to traditional values. In *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal explores the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage, in the character of Nita. M. Selvanayagi writes: “Sahgal seems to expose conventional narrow-minded Indian society through the character of Nita. In Indian society, the parents choose life-partners. The parents arrange for the two young souls to live happily ever after. Sahgal strongly attacks this social convention and names this kind of marriage “just organized rape”. ( qtd : 274) In *This time of Morning* Nita’s parents would not allow their daughter Nita to smoke, to have drinks or to attend club dances until she gets married. It comes like a shock to him when she learns about her parent’s decision to marry her off to a stranger. In her essay “Women Persons or Possessions” Nayantara Sahgal criticizes the wrong attitude of the patriarchal society towards women, which consider women as commodity. “When I heard someone remark we never allow our daughter to go out or I cannot do that, my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar, alien jargon. As if, I thought ,women were property ,not persons.” (68) Nita has a thirst for doing something, and does not want bound herself to any conjugal knots as yet. She requests one of her friends Rakesh to influence her parents in the matter: “I don’t want to marry at all just yet. Now you are back, Rakesh, do persuade Mummy and Daddy I should have a job. It’s ghastly doing nothing”. (32) Later her parents allow her to take up a job, but for a very different reason. Kalyan, a Minister, had offered the job and they simply did not have the heart to refuse a Minister’s offer. However, Nita looks for something more than merely a job; she strives for independence and her individual identity. She thinks: “a job was never enough [...] A job led to money and freedom, and freedom demanded a flat of one’s own away from the prying eyes and inquisitive voices” (148) of men and women who do not permit women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfillment. Sahgal has tried to give voice to the voiceless in this novel where the silent sufferer Nita sees a new hope in Kalyan. She gets attracted towards him. She finds a strange comfort in his company and visits him frequently. Once she refuses to go home and expresses her love for Kalyan, she tells him: “You gave me the freedom to be myself. I had never had that before. I’d never have known it but for you”, (219) and she finally admits: ‘I’ve been so happy with you’ (220) This is her attempt to find solace in the male company. A woman whose existence is denied by the family members tries



to find happiness in a man of her choice. There is nothing wrong in her attempt to seek comfort in the company of Kalyan. As Jasbir Jain opines about Nita's sexual involvement with Kalyan, "With Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally to her not because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by convention." (42) Here Sahgal tries to convey the idea of sexual freedom for women. Nita, a woman who is burdened with her parents' wishes feels suffocated sees a man of her choice in Kalyan but unfortunately her parents don't agree with her. Apart from Nita there is Rashmi in the novel who too like Nita searches for happiness and freedom. Being married, she finds herself in the narrow confines of societal bonds. Eventually, she is ready to divorce her husband after her encounter with one foreigner, Neil. He is portrayed as a man by Sahgal who makes Rashmi aware about the meaninglessness in marriage. Her mother resents with her after knowing about her decision which shows the attitude of mothers in patriarchal Indian society who don't allow their daughters to live a life of freedom. Thus, the characters of Nita and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* stands for the unheard female voices in the male dominated Indian society. They are the silent sufferers and their attempt to find source of joy and happiness is crushed down under the heavy burden of societal norms and customs. Sahgal attacks on the age old ideology of marriage which kills women's freedom and individuality. As Purnima Bhardwaj writes: "As we find in patriarchal society, a woman is driven on verge of deprivation and marginalization of her existence; it does greater damage to the emotional life of a married woman who as a victim of wrong marriage continues to be subjected to persistent persecution of male tyranny and ego." (39)

Similarly Roy in *The God of Small Things* shows women as products of the male dominated society. They don't have any right to do anything on their own. They have to just follow the orders of their parents before marriage and of husbands after marriage. Ammu, a female protagonist of *The God of Small Things* is a divorcee woman and a mother of two children. She is deprived of parental love and care and gets secondary treatment from the family members as a female child before marriage like Sahgal's Neeta which shows the attitude of the society towards women. No one is serious about her education. Male Chauvinism, a concrete manifestation of psychic disorders, is the most blatant violation of human dignity and the principle of equality amongst all human beings. This is universal phenomenon which has engulfed almost all societies and cultures and has been prevalent in all periods of history. Ammu's father Pappachi does not consider Ammu's education as a primary need. Roy has shown him as a father who does not think about the future of his daughter. "Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl; She should wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father does not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry" (Roy 38) Ammu is



compelled to have an easy taste of chauvinistic brutality and hypocrisy through her own father. Her married life also is not happy; it turns into a great failure. Her husband Baba is portrayed as a man who uses his wife, Ammu for his own selfish purpose. He considers her as a means of fulfillment. His boss at the office, Mr. Hollick wants to enjoy sex with Ammu. Baba does not hesitate to order her to do so. And therefore Ammu takes divorce from Baba, and returns to Ayemenam with her twins, Estha and Rahel but her humiliation has no end. After her return to Ayemenam, no one consoles her on the contrary they consider her as burden. Every one humiliated her calling her as divorcee. She is not treated properly by Baby Kochamma, her aunt, who is portrayed as a character who turned bad into worse. She is most uncomfortable for Ammu and her twins. She says that a married daughter has no position in her parents' home. And for a divorcee daughter, there is no position anywhere at all, and for a divorced daughter from a love marriage well words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. It throws light upon the place of women in Indian society, especially that on the divorcee women whose position is more vulnerable. Her brother Chacko an embodiment of male patriarchy marginalizes her who denies her share in the ancestral property saying: "My house, my pineapples, my pickle." (225) Through both Ammu's husband Baba and brother Chacko Roy subtly exposes the hypocrisy of male chauvinism in traditional Indian society. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are the victims of male patriarchy. Mammachi is also a physically and psychologically abused wife alike so many women in different societies who undergo torture and trauma and never speak out. In losing her factory to her son Chacko, Mammachi is marginalized in terms of class and gender. A descendant of upper class Brahmins, she, however, is not a victim of caste prejudice. Marginalized by her son in old age and facing an economically disadvantaged position, Mammachi is a subaltern in more than one way. Antonio Navarro-Tejero points out about the marginalization of both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in her article titled, "Power Relationships in *The God of Small Things*": "The first generation of women in the novel give extreme importance to patriarchal social norms, indeed they succumb to them...." (105). As Altaf Ahmed and R.S. Chavan write: "*The God of Small Things* highlights the position of women folk in India. It presents before us the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative society." (11) The relationship between Ammu and her mother Mammachi is affected by the orthodox male patriarchy. Ammu's love relationship with Velutha who is an outcaste is considered as illegal by her mother Mammachi. Mammachi stands for the male patriarchy in the novel who does not allow freedom to her daughter Ammu. Even she does not accept her children Estha and Rahel. Being a divorcee and a mother of two children Ammu is exploited and humiliated in the novel due to the negligent attitude of her mother Mammachi towards her. Roy here shows



Ammu as a victim of male patriarchy on the account of weak mother daughter relationship. Mammachi does not accept Ammu as well as her children's existence after the death of Ammu's husband. Being children to a divorced mother is, according to Mammachi, a fate "far worse than Inbreeding" (59) Here Roy exposes the mentality of Indian mothers to look at their grandchildren in the absence of their fathers. Actually it is the evil effect of male patriarchy that has killed all the senses of Mammachi who takes her daughter as a burden in the house. Mammachi's attitude towards her son Chacko is totally different. She does not accept the love relationship of her daughter with the outcaste, Velutha. Here Ammu's situation is similar to Sahgal's Neeta whose love affair with Kalyan is denied by her family members without any proper reason. Both just try to seek comfort in the man of their choice but their attempt is failed on the account of male patriarchy. On the other hand, Ammu's mother defends Chacko though he has illicit relationship with women. As Angelika Olsson asserts: "Without any sense of shame she openly demonstrates her double standards in condemning her daughter harshly for her affair while at the same time vindicating her son for his illicit relationships." (25) Mammachi does not have any objection on Chacko about his female visitors, she simply adjusts to it. Mammachi here is a woman who neglects her son's attempt to fulfill his sexual gratification with other women. On the contrary she pays money to women who secretly visits home to meet Chacko. When Baby Kochamma complains to Mammachi about the female visitors, Mammachi defends Chacko by saying that he cannot help having a "Man's Needs" (160) Mammachi's liberal, forgiving attitude towards her son does not apply to her daughter and her extramarital relationship. She considers that Ammu has "defiled generations of breeding" (244) by having a relationship with a Paravan is unbearable to Mammachi. Ammu has denigrated the family name forever, while Chacko couldn't help having a 'Mans Needs'. Chacko is treated differently. The standard that Ammu is measured is not applied to measure Chacko. It shows the mother's double standard that is found in Indian orthodox cal society.

On the account of his love affair Velutha is exploited and humiliated and at last he is sent to the prison though he did not do anything wrong. Both Ammu and Velutha are parted on the account of rigidity of social laws which don't allow intercaste marriage. Thus both Sahgal and Roy succinctly exposed gender marginalization in their *This Time of Morning* and *The God of Small Things* respectively. The women depicted in the novels lived in a state of mental slavery under the pressures of societal traditions. The women like Mammachi in *The God of Small Things* is a victim and a product of male patriarchy who does not help her daughter Ammu in her difficult times which is a kind of slavery. The novels are the true documents today in the 21 st century where women find themselves in a society which does



not allow freedom to them. The novels try to bring the social reality of gender victimization to the limelight in order to promote the ethics of equality, unity and brotherhood.

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