

Feminine Psyche: A Comparative Study of Nayantara Sahgal's This Time of Morning and Alice Walker's Meridian.

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Abstract:

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most prominent Indian writers, whose works are predominant in raising voices against patriarchal society and gender marginalization in Indian writing in English. She is a journalist, political columnist, and writer and her writings advocate women's quest for Self-Identity, Individualism, Interpersonal Relationships, and Social and Political Issues against women. On the other hand, Alice Walker is a famous American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist- who is the first African-American writer to win Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her work "The Color Purple". Her womanist novels accord voice to the African American women who were subjugated to suppression. Walker herself prefers to call herself a womanist because according to her Womanism is far better than feminism as it prefers and appreciates women's strength, culture, and emotional flexibility. This paper attempts to examine and explore the portrayal of the feminine psyche and the quest for "self" in their works. The paper particularly illustrates the comparative study of Nayantara Sahgal's This Time of Morning and Alice Walker's Meridian and justifies how both writers are similar in voicing out for women's freedom, identity, and rights, against cultural and political upheavals or trauma.

Keywords: Self, Repression, Freedom, Violence, womanism.

Introduction:

Alice Walker, who is best known for her womanist novels has produced a variety of genres that embraces Children's literature, non-fiction, poetry, and screenwriting. Her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, 'The Color Purple' reaches out and solidifies most of the themes she presented in her previous works in which even 'Meridian' was one among them. This novel 'Meridian' depicts the series of actions of the personal and the social upliftment of the life of a black woman, which stretches out its own for self-consciousness and liberty. The novel scrutinizes the concept of womanly freedom, which means a lot to Meridian, a black Civil Rights worker in the instantly altering cultural atmosphere of the 1960s, and how her quest for self-salvation is accomplished when she can re-conceive her role which has been presented to the black women through customary and community.

Similarly, Sahgal is a socio-political novelist and feminist writer, the first Indian woman writer to comment on the politics of her times. This boldness and courage of standing against social issues and political upheavals during a post-independent time in India runs in her blood - as she belongs to the rich, affluent family of Nehru and Gandhi. She is a niece to Jawaharlal Nehru and a cousin to Indira Gandhi. Her novels portray female consciousness, Gender Politics,

Marginalisation, existentialism, the concepts of feminist psychology, and cultural conflict of Tradition and modernism against women in the narrow-minded conventional society of India. Her writings hold a flag for feminism and are autobiographical as a result of her failed marriage. Sahgal's woman characters are valiant and heroic in their journey through "self-discovery" anticipating patriarchal community, social and political insurgency, and unrest.

Meridian is structured into three significant parts; The first and foremost part centres on Meridian's movement into adulthood and her preparation for a journey. The second part examines her active involvement in the Civil Rights Movement after the renunciation of her child, and, the third and final part centres on the recuperation. The novel 'Meridian', Walker's second work centres on the lives of African-American women and determines how the past and present associate and establish the future and targets in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement which obtained its strength during the period of 1960s. It kindles protests against the racial discrimination policies which altered and paved a great way for the lives of the African Americans in the South. Besides Sahgal's novel "This Time of Morning" is a pure political novel that narrates self-identity and self-growth through woman characters like Rashmi and Nita, who break the stereotypes of male dominance and marginalization. Like Alice Walker's protagonist Meridian, who fought against the illness in marriage, human relationships, equality, identity, and rights; Sahgal's woman characters Nita and Rashmi struggled with ill fate in marriage, suppression, conventional society, and tradition of India. They signify the New Woman transition in the novel.

Walker's Meridian Hill is engrossed in the quest for self by finding out the truth in her roots and conventions. She carries over the fight against the oppression of black women and struggles to retrieve her past and reanalyze her connection to the Black community. She finally acquires the inner strength to encounter hardships. Meridian, a fiction of maturation, is an examination of the growth of Meridian, her development from childhood to womanhood, and her emergence as a strong woman. Walker depicts her protagonist as a lone pilgrim, whose goal is targeted by markings and signs related to subjugation and emancipation. The Quest is for self-salvation, and recuperation, which ultimately paves the way to superiority, and has finally found herself and her connection to the World.

Likewise, Sahgal's woman character Nita and Rashmi struggles in the search for Self-Identity and freedom in male dominated society. The character Nita is denied her concern in marriage and is controlled by her father Dr. Narang who makes all the decisions in Nita's life. Nita, the daughter of Dr. Narang and Mrs. Narang is a well-educated girl, who wants to live a free life and find true love, desires, a Western lifestyle thought process, and a job. Unfortunately got engaged by the commodity of marriage to Vijay, with whom she doesn't find any attachment. Another character Rashmi, is a wife of Dalip with whom she encounters misery, misunderstanding, poor communication, and clashes in their marriage life. After being contemplative, she thinks a divorce is the only option that will help her live a better life than hooking on to this meaningless marriage. Analyzing both Meridian and Sahgal's woman characters, it is obvious that both the author's women are fighting for their 'self-discovery' rejecting the values, norms, and tradition that their own culture insists upon them.

Sahgal pens the conflict and sufferings of a woman who pursues a life of modernism in this novel "This Time of Morning". Analyzing the character Nita psychologically, a twenty-three-year-old girl who is in their transition period from adolescence to adulthood can no longer accept and follow the restrictions, the parents force on them in their life. The transition period from adolescence to adulthood is a stage in which people like experimentation, freedom, liberation, change, development, and increasing attitude in risk-taking activities and behavior. When Nita got restricted from drinking and smoking at club parties, she neglected the words of her parents and urged Rakesh to give her cigarettes rather than chocolates. She says "Isn't it silly not being allowed to do anything until one is married? Suppose I don't marry till I'm forty-five? (TTM.40)".

Likewise, Alice Walker's complex narration about Meridian's transition period from childhood to adolescence to motherhood is critical, and painful with defencelessness. Comparing the suffering of both the author's woman characters –Nita, wants to live a life of western infused with Indian Tradition and culture. Under the shield of protection, her desires and dreams are trimmed by their parents in the name of marriage. Nita's quest for her own identity, happiness, and self-growth with financial Independence. Similarly, Meridian seeks and searches for her own identity and self-discovery in the American Black community and later passing all huddles joined the civil rights movement to protest against Racism, Discrimination, suppression, legal rights, and marginalization.

Meridian's experiences, in the beginning, are described as stressful and painful within the narrative presentation of the complex element. She wasn't taught what to expect from men, from sex, by none in her family. The lecherous Daxter,

the funeral home in charge, pursues Meridian when she is only twelve. She noticed his assistant's seducing another schoolgirl. Unaware of her physical amenability, she obtains a young boyfriend named Eddie. She married him and was waiting for the birth of her son. The entire life of Meridian is altered by the incident which she didn't even cherish. Meridian considers sex as a 'sanctuary'. On an occasion in her sanctuary, Meridian admires if she could "look out at the male world with something approaching equanimity, even charity; even friendship" (M.62). Her marriage with Eddie fails because she perceives that her life will always be empty as a wife and she cannot lower herself. Besides, like his name, Eddie, "would never be grown up" (M.70).

Walker introduces a cultural context in which motherhood becomes a ladder for the upliftment, of Meridian. Walker presents two frames; The first one depicts that the culture provides women few choices to the suffocation and the sacrifice of traditional motherhood and wifehood. The second one is the family life of the hills. She finds that motherhood is "being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick." Her mother makes her feel guilty for "shattering her mother's emerging self" (M.51). Meridian girlhood and young adulthood show periods of emotional impoverishment. The process of entering into the new responsibility of motherhood was a total shock for Meridian. As she knew she did not want the child. Soon after the birth of her son, he did not feel like anything to her, but "a ball and chain" (M.69). She does not want to raise her child in a society "where children are not particularly valued" (M.174).

Walker prescribes that it is not an easy task for Meridian to chisel out the frame and get freedom from the mythic image of motherhood which is imposed on her by the name of culture and society. The Chapter "Battle Fatigue" establishes the confrontation and the inner conflict of Meridian in the name of motherhood. Being a seventeen-year-old lone wife and a mother, beware of the past and present, decides to give away her child for the betterment of her life at Saxon College and to give her child a good life. Meridian's constant conflict with an immoral self-image because she could not cope up to "the standard of motherhood that had gone before" (M.91) results in her illness and the "spiritual degeneration" in herself (M.92). She awaits healing so that she can study at Saxon and actively take part in the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian gets rid of her illness, her periodical dream of death, and herself thought of being incomplete and "primeval guilt" (M.96) when she is reunited with her mother in a dream and whispers: "Mama, I love you. Let me go" (M.125). Miss Winter, who treats Meridian as her child, forgives her and makes it easy for her to face the unruly world with the gained strength.

Even though marriage and motherhood are negative experiences for Meridian, she tries to transform herself. Her journey through myth and legend, hurt by the dream of her mother, takes her back in time and space as she prepares to move forward with awareness. When she gives up her child and leaves the small town of Mississippi to attend college in Atlanta, Meridian Hill begins the first journey toward self-salvation. Saxon College symbolizes white values that have been oozed into the thinking of middle-class blacks. The college was a training ground for capitalists and for "ladies." Meridian, Anne Marion, and other like-minded friends decide that they have two oppositions: "Saxon, which wanted them to become something - ladies that were obsolete, and the larger, more deadly enemy, white racist society" (M.95). Meridian despises capitalism and by her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the Atlanta Movement she wants to seek social justice, she wants black women to be "accepted" as equal.

In Sahgal's novel "This Time of Morning" Nita is a true example of Female consciousness when she expresses her sexual desire and excitement when her parents force her to marriage "She had never been properly kissed or alone with a man for more than a few minutes" (TTM.207). Her personality and attitude show the changing image of Indian women who are ready to break the stereotypes of male patriarchy and social barriers that society frames for women. Sahgal criticizes that Indian parents are ready to spend lavishly for their daughter's marriage but the concern of their daughter regarding the marriage is neglected or taken for granted in the name of protection or parents' duty or social frame. Sahgal has written this;

"Her mother had been collecting a trousseau for her for years. Saris ordered from Bangalore and Banaras and Kashmir had been laid away in tissue paper in trunk.... her father would give her a bank account of a lakh when she married. Stocks and Shares, money and clothes. What about her body and its desires, she wants to cry out, the body that pulsed for something with an urgency she had never known? A month later her future was decided and she had acquiesced to it" (TTM.207).

Sahgal says, Indian woman after a long period of male dominance in the family in the image of father, brother, husband, and society; are voiceless, suppressed, existentialist, symbolising as maids, slaves, and property or commodities; who are preached that women are always subaltern to men, is no longer ready to accept this social statement. They

understand that self-respect, individualism, happiness, identity, education, and job are much more important than the culture that treats women biased and marginalized sex. Sahgal says Nita being a generation of changed society and social norms, a New Woman neglects the engagement with Vijay with whom she doesn't have any emotions or feelings. She says she didn't find any future marrying Vijay. Both Rashmi and Nita find love outside of marriage. Nita falls in love with an older person named Kalyan, a minister of external affairs. Her Western personality and desires made her neglect the values of Indian culture and have sex with Kalyan before marriage. Sahgal narrates this pre-marital affair of Nita as; "I don't know." She said almost in a whisper. But don't make me go.' He rose from his chair, 'Nita...' She got up, too, and came like a sleepwalker into his arms, clinging to him. Don't make me go, please don't make me go.' He took her by the hand then to his room" (TTM.211).

Meridian expresses her disappointment in her love life when Truman also ditched her having another love for a white exchange girl student named Lynne Rabinowitz. She says it is "doubly unfair that after all her sexual experience and after one baby and one abortion she had not once been completely fulfilled by sex" (M.115). She realizes that to attain salvation she must rise above bodily claims. Alice Walker narrates the complex life-changing moment of Meridian explicitly. Meridian's act of abortion and sterilization symbolize her anger and frustration against Truman, pregnancy, and motherhood. It is a metaphor for rooting out sexual weakness because Meridian wants to meet Truman at an equal level. It is a key event that pushes Meridian forward to act on her own. Meridian's "pilgrimage" cannot be complete until she transcends sexual, maternal, and racial categories through her participation in the revolution and her commitment to "recreate" the world where black children may thrive without thorns of guilt. Walker then pauses to focus on the complex relationship of Meridian, Truman, and Lynne. She analyses how sexism and racism work to influence black woman-black man-white woman relationships. Truman marries Lynne because he wants a woman who is perfect in all the eyes of the world, an ideal woman, and the white woman is the closest thing to power he can get in white America.

Walker proceeds an ingenious leap in the final section of the novel. Meridian stands as a witness to the common lot, a survivor of the movement. She, who did not want to kill people in the movement, is converted to a new approach to revolution. She has reached a point in her life where she is no longer evasive. Listening to the old music, she is moved by the beauty of the black church. Her commitment to the revolution will be her "memory songs." For it is "the song of the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost, the people suffer and are without a soul" (M.201). To transform their society black people must understand their heritage and transform themselves. It is in the process of attempting social change through: the movement that Meridian discovers her path. This discovery is itself the core of the novel. Truman atones for hurting Lynne's feelings. When Truman asks Meridian if her love for him has changed, her response "No, I set you free ..." (M.216) shows that she has freed herself from the sexual bonds and intends to pursue her self-salvation.

Meridian's quest for salvation can be defined as her attempt to express the completion of self and how that self is related to the world. It is a search for recuperation, freedom, joy, and contentment in being a woman, self-love, and a yearning for social love. In association with the black literary tradition, it is a search for freedom from the body and freedom for the soul by discovering "the truth" in the darkness. Walker suggests that Meridian is "Free at last" on her own. Her ties are not with a man or a family within a specific community. Motherhood for her includes not only rearing children, but nurturing life, and continuity of life. She sees her existence as inseparable from all black people and writes: "There is water in the world for us brought by our friends through the rock of mother and god Vanishes into the sand and we cast out alone to heal and re-create ourselves" (M.213).

Both Alice Walker and Nayantara Sahgal portray how social norms, society, tradition, marriage, and motherhood restrain the happiness, liberation, legal rights, voice, and existentialism of women in both their novels "Meridian" and *This Time of Morning*". Their works help women to change from voiceless to a voice in society. Sahgal interprets her woman character Rashmi as the realization of New Woman, who neglects the social norms of marriage, tensions of culture, and tradition that typical narrow-minded Indian society obligates women with moral norms. Rashmi feels separation and divorce is a better decisions than trying to prolongate an unhappy marriage. Like Nita and Meridian, Rashmi feels love outside marriage with Neil Berenson. She says that old virtue can no longer be honored and protected. Mira, the mother of Rashmi is unhappy with Rashmi's decision on her marriage life.

However, after understanding the reality of Rashmi's life; she says "She realized now that the moral order did not degenerate, nor was it enshrined forever in unchangeable pattern of behaviour. It had to be refashioned and protected in every age and every generation found its way to do this. Mira was not reconciled to Rashmi's attitude, but she could

concede it" (TTM.221). Mira Sahgal portrays the changing nature of the society of India, where Women undergo changes as New Women with Self-Discovery, Self-Identity, and Individualism and pursue their lives with their own choices and happiness.

CONCLUSION:

This proves that Meridian, Nita, and Rashmi break the barriers of social constraint for women, and discover their own 'self' with Identity, Individualism, and Contentment. Meridian's search for self-salvation and recuperation attains a mythic dimension. Meridian takes to her heart the heritage of black, her woman's heritage, and reaches out to her people. She is a woman of privilege who knows what she should take from the past to create a new future. "The new part had grown out of the old" (M.219). Meridian's affiliation with the community is, in quintessence, a state-of-the-art towards completion and self-salvation. Similarly, Nita and Rashmi illustrate the vitality of Female consciousness against the social and cultural conflicts. Thus, both Alice Walker's "Meridian" and Nayantara Sahgal's "This Time of Morning" proved the significance of self-discovery, self-identity, and female psyche in their novel through their woman characters.

ABBREVIATION:

TTM- This Time of Morning.

M - Meridian.

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