

## East-West Conflict in Shagal's A Time to be Happy

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**Abstract:** *Nayantara Sahgal is a renowned Indian author who has written extensively on the theme of East-West conflict. She has experienced the life style and ideals of India as well as the western countries like America. So, she is able to bring out the difference between the two cultures. Simultaneously, she holds the opinion that cultural interaction is always fruitful for the sake of learning. Apart from his own country, one should know the culture of other countries also. That is why her characters freely visit foreign countries and mix with foreigners with least hesitation. East-West conflict is the theme of Nayantara Sahgal's novel A Time to be Happy. It includes pre- and post- independent Indian surrounding with a special reference to Sharanpur, a commercial city. This change has profoundly Sanad.*

**Key Words:** *Sahgal, Sanad, Ideals, Culture, East, West etc.*

Indian English Fiction has been enriched by the theme of political and social realities, educational idealism, cast and class struggle and spiritual truth. Some of the novelists have also chosen the theme of east-west conflict in their fictional writings. Nayantara Sahgal is one of them. She is a renowned Indian author who has written extensively on the theme of East-West conflict. She has experienced the life style and ideals of India as well as the western countries like America. So, she is able to bring out the difference between the two cultures. Simultaneously, she holds the opinion that cultural interaction is always fruitful for the sake of learning. Apart from his own country, one should know the culture of other countries also. That is why her characters freely visit foreign countries and mix with foreigners with least hesitation. As writes Mr Sanyal:

These two strands-the indigenous Indian tradition and the imported European conceptions are prominent in the complex fabric of contemporary Indian civilization. Traditional Indian values and resources on the one hand, modern ideas and attitudes on the other- the confrontation between the two resulting in tension, creative or otherwise appear with greater subtlety in the novels during the twentieth century. (Sanyal, 72)

East-West conflict is the theme of Nayantara Sahgal's novel A Time to be Happy. It includes pre and post independent Indian surrounding with a special reference to Sharanpur, a commercial city. This change has profoundly influenced the characters of the novel. That is why the hero Sanad's declaration of leaving the job does not amaze the narrator.

Slave India was teeming with Britishers who belonged to ruling class with a superior instinct, and a different mode of life and culture. They exposed their learning, ways and gestures in such a way as some of the Indians tried to imitate them blindly, but gradually the realization of losing their identity and being stranger to their own country led them to rootlessness. It became a problem for them. Neither they could adjust themselves to British ways and culture, nor India appeared familiar to them. Gradually they realized their confusion and came back to espouse Indian spirit and culture. Sanad Shivpal represents such men. His surrounding, his habit of imitating and his likings make him stranger to his own country but his countrymen make him realize his hollow race behind dreams.

The place may be the same, but I wonder if I shall feel as satisfied as it you know, Mr Mclvor, it is a strange felling to be midway between two worlds not completely belonging to either. 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. What do I have in common with most of my countrymen? (A Time to be Happy, 151)

In fact, it is the story of Sanad who took education in English pattern. Tennis is his favourite play and rewards like sports-car and gold watches are given to him on passing examinations. He speaks English and Britishers are his ideals. His own family members, his luxury-loving grandfather, his uncle Harish, a blind imitator of English ways and his brother Girish, the youngest Director of James Mcdermott also become instrumental. People around him are familiar with Shelley and Shakespeare more than the geography of their land. Due to this English influence Sanad joins the firm 'Selkirk and Lowe' as a probationer in Calcutta in 1942. The shadows of this influence he clearly feels in the monuments dedicated to English-lords like Dalhousie Canning, Mayo, Lansdowne, Auckland, Roberts, Duffering, Kitchener and Sir David Ochterlony. Even public squares are named after Britishers like Dalhousie Wellington, Wellestey and Beacon.

For people like Harish and Girish life is full of activities in Calcutta where one can enjoy golf, beer, a curry-lunch, cinema, dinner and drink. But gradually Sanad is exhausted by this adopted Englishness. When he sees the difference between himself and his surrounding, his heart is tormented. His clothes, manners and speech all are labelled with blind imitation.

Take our clothes, our mannerisms, our speech. Take us. What are we? I'm not saying it's not a good thing to borrow from another cultures, but to take it over lock, stock, and barrel, and become an imitation of it- it's pathetic, Every time I drive around the city and see another monument dedicated to a British hero, I wonder what I'm doing here, and whether I haven't strayed into the wrong country by mistake. (A Time to be Happy, 96)

A hot discussion that goes on between Sanad and Girish points out the confusion of the hero, his rootlessness and his profound desire to follow the true Indian culture, Girish supports western culture, while Sanad symbolizes hundreds of those confused and uprooted Indians who are wavering between these two streams, Girish calls western tradition as the identification mark of all civilized nations and opines that all civilized people should follow one uniform standard in present age which is possible only by getting mixed with Britishers and imitating them. Sanad calls it blind-imitation that has nothing to do with uniformity and civilization.

Sanad belongs to the high class of society that was extremely under British influence but gradually he is stirred, apprehensive and aware of something deeper. The inkling of fame highlights it. His guilty conscience makes him realize the hollowness of drawing room decorations. The Narrator also gives a picture of this famine:

I saw a little girl outside, begging, I suppose, with an even smaller child on her hip, looking up at the lights. If she was asking for alms, I couldn't hear her because the music was so loud. But I noticed that the child she carried was emaciated beyond belief, his small limbs were rigid, and his head lolled toward her shoulder. Seeing me looking out, she raised his filthy shirt, the only garment he had on, and showed me his jutting ribs. (A Time to be Happy, 100)

Sanad determines to avenge the Britishers for his rootlessness by demanding equal salary but again he goes astray in the company of a blonde Marian Finch. When Weatherby invites him to his house to meet a few English people and enjoy drinking, he cannot convince himself, but when he accompanies Marian Finch at Mrs Hartley's house, he is again misled and decides to follow the Britishers by accompanying Marian to cinema house and tennis- court. Of course, his main problem is that due to social position, education and surrounding atmosphere he cannot stoop and get mix with his own countrymen who are lower to him in status and, as for the society of Britishers, there are certain limitations which he cannot transgress. This leads him to extreme irritation and frustration.

He did not feel that he belonged in either the British or the Indian set of Sharanpur. He did not associate himself with Indians of a lower social rung than himself, and he certainly did not belong with the English. With them there were boundaries beyond which he was not socially acceptable. (A Time to be Happy, 125)

This rootlessness sometimes leads him to vainglorious behaviour, as is apparent in case of Raghubir, a clerk in his company. Injured Raghubir is taken by the policeman and he does not touch him even in this critical condition.

Similarly, simplicity in the form of Kusum Sahai does not attract him. The more he imitates English ways, the more he succeeds in his business. Moreover, his new boss McIvor is there to mislead him.

You can't feel at home with 'most' people anywhere, Sanad. That's the sort of broad, sweeping statement that has no meaning. But why not look at it this way-you have the great advantage, with your background, of being able to feel at home among people of your class anywhere in the world. (A Time to be happy, 151)

Obviously the Britishers wanted to put the foundation of independent India on vain glory. They also wanted to change the Indians into strangers to their own country. Sanad reveals to McIvor that his condition is miserable. He is hanging between two worlds and surprisingly finds himself belonging to neither. His education, upbringing and outlook of measuring values- all have separated him from Indian cultural roots. Consequently, he ceases to identify himself with his own countrymen. McIvor tries to cajole him by asserting that peasant is the true Indian representative and it would be foolishness to descend to that level, rather the peasant should try to uplift himself.

"That doesn't mean you have no contribution to make to your country", McIvor said. It merely proves my assertion that you will make it on a level that suits your background and upbringing. I don't see what is to be gained by divorcing yourself from it. Treat it as the link between India and the rest of the world, an indispensable link because so few of your countrymen possess it. There are so few who dress as you do, so few who speak English, and so few, when you come to think of it, who have had the education which you say sets you apart from India. (A Time to be Happy, 151)

A Time to be happy is also important enough from the viewpoint of Sanad's retreat from the realm of vain glory to the real object of life. He confronts the modern pattern of life introduced by the Britishers for the discovery of self. He is in search of his own true image, though sometimes he joins Marion Finch, roams with her but soon he breaks his tie with her marrying Kusum. The difference between the two cultures makes him realize that their company, their union is in no way possible. He comes to know about his mistake and learns to adjust himself once more with renewed energy in Indian surroundings. Kusum can be compared with Premala of the novel *Some Inner Fury* (Kamla Markandaya), Savitri of *The Serpent and the Rope* (Raja Rao) and Kamala of *The Dark Dancer* (Balkrishan Rajan). All these women represent the true image of India and are capable of bringing the confused heroes back to their roots.

When Sanad gets rid of his rootlessness, he ceases to flatter Englishmen and determines not to visit Granges. All weatherby's efforts to glorify Dora as the big mistress of Sharanpur and an important figure in the game of power prove to be useless. After independence Sanad finds his free, former existence lost in the crowd. It may be due to his public school education and being the representative of an English textile industry. Britishers did their best to instil a sense of superiority and distinction in educated Indian minds but their departure made them utterly helpless. Sanad's company wants to send him to England for six months and he is also desirous to see the original Englishmen but his conscience forbids him to do so, as he knows it full well that he is no more than a carbon copy of Britishers. He feels himself only physically present in India, otherwise he is a complete Englishman except the colour of his skin. When he refuses all suggestions of Weather by to follow westerners to maintain his position, it shows the final retreat and slow home coming of Sanad.

Thus, the novel provides a glimpse of clash of ideals in Indian society. Mrs. Sahgal knows it full well that every Indian inherits traditional values from his soil by birth but when he grows up, he finds himself surrounded on all sides by progressive modern ideas and English influences. This leads him to confusion. Sometimes he struggles with these two ideologies and sometimes he moves to and fro. Sometimes both attract him by turns and mostly this confusion ends when one is able to identify himself with Indian tradition, culture and philosophy. The theme of conflict is very much important in the field of fiction as it makes us aware of changing times.

Through this novel, Mrs. Sahgal has proved that the influence of soil, culture and tradition is very strong. One may go astray for a temporary period but finally he regains happiness in his own roots. Sahgal's *A Time to Be Happy* seems to assert that Indians should leave the idea of imitating western culture, Indian culture and spiritualism are the true guide. One should be proud of them.

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