

# Socio-Political Discernment in NayantaraSahgal's Storm in Chandigarh

PALADUGU BHANULAKSHMI<sup>1</sup>M.A.,M.Ed.,M.Phil.,

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Research Supervisor, Department of English, Prist Deemed to be University,  
Chennai, Tamilnadu.

K.RAMYA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Research scholar, Department of English, Prist Deemed to be University,Puducherry.

## ABSTRACT

This paper tries to bring out the impact of the contemporary political scenario in NayantaraSahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*. *Storm in Chandigarh* contains episodes which expose her as a forecast and harbinger of the future of the political events the country has witnessed. She thus possesses the knack of foretelling well in advance the outcome of the political scenario. Sahgal also brings to light the various lacunae and pitfalls in the bureaucracy who must act as a bridge between the politicians and the people. *Storm in Chandigarh* has their main plot revolving around the life of bureaucrats. Thus she strives to unmask the bureaucracy operating in India since independence. It also exposes her socio-political acumen and perspicacity in the depiction of the political scenario in the country. Her ability to present the reality of the contemporary society by examining the mode of behaviour of the political leaders as well as the public has also been analysed.

**Keywords:** Society, Politics, Disillusionment, Disenchantment, Socio-Political

### **Socio-Political Discernment in Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh***

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the Indian novelists who are also political columnists. One can see the taint of western liberal journalism pervading in her writings. As a political columnist, her articles are known for their vividness, boldness, and straight forwardness. If her themes are viewed in this sense, then her novels can be segregated in the genre of political novel. In her novels, a new outlook is presented- the age old native heritage and culture imbibing certain western values. Sahgal, a niece of Pandit Nehru and the daughter of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit is a rare combination of sophistication and simplicity. She wields the English language with a charm and grace that is characteristically her own and writes with a verve which communicates itself to the reader. Fiction is her abiding love while journalism is her conscience. She has published over twelve books besides a large number of articles and short stories in Indian and foreign magazines.

The efflorescence of Indian politics is accompanied by a growing critical interest as well. This critical interest has found its most consistent articulation in the pages of political fiction by Sahgal. Her entire fictional corpus revolves round the theme of politics and its impact on contemporary society. Shyam M. Asnani, in "Contemporary Politics in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal," says, "As a novelist her contribution to Indo-English fiction lies in writing novels that mirror faithfully the contemporary Indian political scene. It is in this sense, that her novels can be classed in the genre of political novel" (39).

Contemporary socio-political scenes serve as the apt pabulum for many political novelists and Sahgal excels in this criteria. She is able to imbibe the odd Socio-political strains that have run down into the society with her creative urge at its helm and from the expertise worthy of being a renowned political columnist; she is able to weave the matrix of her novels bringing the contemporary Socio-political issues to the fore front. Her painstaking and conscientious efforts to set right the society which has been taking meandering decisive

turns deserves a special mention here. Sahgal's primordial predilection being politics, she has presented both the brighter and gloomier sides of contemporary Indian politics in her own characteristic fashion. To successfully drive home the subtle truths of politics in the current era of independence is no mean task and in this respect she has done exceedingly well. The ambience of the upper middle class life in the country is clearly unveiled and the treatment of the variegated aspects of human life in such a political and social milieu makes her present a whole perspective of man.

Sahgal's third novel, *Storm in Chandigarh*, presents a juxtaposition of two worlds: The personal world of man-woman relationship and the interpersonal world of politics. The interpersonal discordance happens to be the predominant theme in the novel presenting the husband-wife estrangement and alienation ensuing from miscommunication, extra-marital affair, existentialistic issues, and temperamental incompatibility. The storm in the lives of three married couples Jit and Mara, Inder and Saroj, and Vishal and Leela is portrayed against the political background of storm or challenge between the newly divided states of Haryana and Punjab over the issue of Chandigarh.

The anticipatory nature of Sahgal's political perception can be quoted at several instances. *Storm in Chandigarh* bears evidences of her anticipatory nature. Urmila Varma in "Social and Political Scene in Nayantara Sahgal's Earlier Novels" says:

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the prominent novelists of India, who recreates the Indian social and political scene just before and after independence in her writings. She is constantly concerned with men and women engaged in contemporary political life and ably describe, interpret and analyses the forces which determine human destiny. (104)

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal portrays the political turbulence in Punjab after 1947. The forced linguistic bifurcation of the Punjab, twenty one years after the partition of the

country, disturbed the normal functioning of the state in many ways. She is able to anticipate the manoeuvres outside political channels and conventions, outside the party and outside the cabinet. The demagogic nature of politicians and the street rallies and demonstrations efficiently organized to stir up the people are vividly described. The violent upraise of the people regarding the bifurcation of the elusive capital together with the power and natural resources division and the political upsurge which testifies to the fact that absolute power corrupts absolutely are also drawn to the forefront. In “The Book I Enjoyed Writing Most,” Sahgal firmly declares, “Storm based on the second division of the Punjab and the creation of Haryana State, with both demanding Chandigarh as the capital was written a year or more before this even came to pass” (42).

*Storm in Chandigarh* captures the sense of disillusionment and disenchantment that has caught hold of the younger generation. It also heralds the curbing of the natural growth of post Nehru leadership within congress. There is a generation gap between the old line of leaders who fought for India’s independence and the newly formed line of leadership of the younger generation. The two sets cannot be toed on to a single plane of action and the kow-towing of the newer generation to power is one of the major reasons for creating the yawning chasm between the lines of functioning. This theory finds ample evidence in the way of approach of Harpal, the Chief Minister of Punjab and Gyan, the Chief Minister of Haryana. Gyan tries to be mediocre in his approach but he is not able to sustain the violent actions spearheaded by Harpal. Vishal, the emissary of the Home Minister has the tremendous task of making these unlike poles attract each other.

The theme of the novel *Storm in Chandigarh* is purely historical - the plight of a state when it is divided on a linguistic basis after two decades of partition; the partition in one way or other is the Pandora’s Box from which several problems like sharing of hydro-electric power, river water and even the capital city arise. The single act of partition gives rise to a

series of problems. The post-Nehruvian political scenario is portrayed in a very excellent way when the clash of personalities is described. The fissiparous forces which had been the reason for the division of the country if allowed in any form to revamp again may become the concealed reason for freedom as a cherished treasure. The retreat from Gandhism is one of the main concerns of Sahgal in *Storm in Chandigarh*. The retreat has penetrated into the personal world also. Though it seems to portray the confrontation between Gyan and Harpal, it also reveals the confrontation between Saroj and her husband Inder. Finally, it ceases to be a question of violence and non-violence. It reduces to taking or not taking a stand. It is the question of the victim to slow down before the oppressor or to claim its right for survival. Gyan has never wasted his time on emotions. He has always displayed a ruthless attitude; for him, there is always a profit to be gained.

Harpal is concerned with human beings and human values. Likewise, there is Inder who has no patience with emotional ligancies whereas Vishal hopes that decent human relations can be built, with care and love, when possible and otherwise with time and interest. He says “And always with truth or as much of it is as the other person will allow. All of that reduces the heartbreak and a lot of the loveliness of living. But it is damnably hard to do” (194). Gyan and Inder are men of a kind in their contempt for other human beings. Anyhow, they are masters of gaining public sympathy; they also have the knack of organizing a following. Though Harpal takes a long term view of the political situation, he is not able to garner the requisite amount of support just as Vishal. When they are in a predicament, they do not have adequate courage to take a stand. The message, the novelist wishes to impress upon is the courage involved in taking a stand against injustice and tyranny. Though Vishal had been enchanted by Delhi, he was bitterly disgusted by the power snatching capital. The snobbery in the hypocritical society had angered him to the extent that his feelings are aptly described by Sahgal. Vishal felt that he was not only stale but also curdled. He needed a sort

of inspiration and assurance. But it was hard for a man who had begun to doubt his basic credentials to find assurance.

Sahgal's preoccupation with the political administrative scenario depicts the impact of transition. The disillusionment and disenchantment since independence is highlighted in *Storm in Chandigarh*. Furthermore, the degeneration of human values, manipulation, and manoeuvring in political lobbies, unhealthy political climate, and corruption are also brought to the forefront. She is also disgusted with the typical Indian inertia towards burning issues of national importance. The novel succeeds excellently in realism. Waiting patiently for rain, birth of children, for death and doing nothing is an Indian characteristic.

Characters in *Storm in Chandigarh* masquerade as modern but when it comes to the core of their personal lives, they do not shed inhibitions. India is a superbly drawn character against this context. And Chandigarh with its Janus faced personality has been turned into a battle ground for water supply and electricity. Politicians capitalize on this situation because in the horrible rat race to get to the top and stick there by fair or foul means, everything has become part and parcel of the game. The story reaches its climax when Vishal the liaison officer of the centre with his exemplary insight achieves success in restoring law and order in violence ridden Chandigarh. Anita Mahajan, in "*Storm in Chandigarh: An Assessment*," indicates,

*Storm in Chandigarh* also touches upon the theme of tradition and modernity in terms of ethics and morality ... though interrelated and often confused they have been given distinct identities and the meaning by modern educated people like Trivedi and Vishal. (164)

On the emotional level, Vishal is the focal point of the novel. People around him such as Saroj and Inder, Jit and Mara are couples trapped in marital disillusion and lack of candid communication is the root cause of every misunderstanding. Vishal is a victim of maladjusted

marriage and later discovers a blooming friendship in Saroj. In this context, Jasbir Jain opines in *NayantaraSahgal*, “Human beings need emotions, and communication and love. Even Inder who is so set in his way feels the need for the oxygen of understanding. Progress is not important in itself; it is the end product of progress which matters” (156).

*Storm in Chandigarh*, in one way, is a convincing piece of life which Sahgal portrays re-establishing fundamental needs of man, love and understanding through communication and Gandhian values of peace and codes of conduct in national progress. FerozaJussawalla in “Of Cabbages and Kings: This Time of Morning and *Storm in Chandigarh*” feels:

In the early morning of a new nation’s life NayantaraSahgal finds, like the Walrus, that the time has come to talk of many things. A new order replaces the old, consequently causing disorder not only in the physical environment, but also in the psychological realm. The new philosophy calls all in doubt including one’s own identity and roots. In dealing with these themes, NayantaraSahgal seems to build up a novel in the Austen tradition, a novel where the milieu is the matter. (43)

Sahgal’s forte is the political novel in her works. She has tremendous historical, social, and political visions. Sahgal’s works comprises of ministers, diplomats, politicians, beautiful wives and daughters of high society. Only the felt experiences are dealt by her. As she has urban roots, she never goes to the rural area in search of themes.

Sahgal has submitted facts in a candid way. She feels that it is imperative for a developing country like India to dissolve the political bands and endow the people with certain inalienable rights which will not obstruct the administration of justice. Her prudence and careful foresight deserves a special mention in this context. Mankind is more disposed to sufferings alone. The huge multitude of masses who are invariable in their pursuing of diverse ambitions and aspirations are least bothered about what is happening in the political

scenario. They will be awakened from their snooze when there is a necessity which would constrain them to have a peep into the affairs of the society.

The social realities are ingrained in Sahgal's psyche and this helps her to weave her stories excellently. She is also able to weave together her own social and political opinions. She is very much disturbed at the scenario of post-colonial India. Her novels can be regarded as an unquestionable authentic fictional correlative of the tempo of Indian life in the citadels of power in Delhi. Her artistic vision is intensely moralistic and the ingrained influence of Gandhi and Nehru shapes, structures and sustains all her works of fiction. She is somewhat unique in her approach to all socio-political problems.

Sahgal is an adept in viewing problems from a multiple angle. She adroitly turns every episode into introspection. The setting right of the society on a very wide compass may not be possible by the creative work of an individual. May be there will be a starting point from which emerges a trailblazer. Being an eternal optimist one can say her novels can serve as a trailblazer as the political happenings are dealt with the immediate possible social realities. Anyone who wants seriously to come into grips with the experience of post-independent social realities can have their thrust quenched by peeping into her novels. She always writes with a vision in her mind. The novels are unified by their locale of recent Indian political happenings. She has a sense of realism attuned in all her novels. She is not only alarmed but also horrified at the current prospects in our motherland. Her work bubbles with the enthusiastic stratagems confining to the conscientious efforts of a creative artist. She does not remain as a passive spectator. She tries to rope into the political scenario making use of her relationship with the then first family of our country. Her intimateness with the political realm does not make her succumb to the subjectivity of the material but she surfaces reflecting the objectivity of her approach. Such an impartial and unbiased approach radiating to the core of her self-styled philosophy lends calibre to her creative potential and enables her

to guide the layman to weather the socio-political storm centring in the Indian peninsula after independence.

To prepare a change in the society is not so easy. The change can be effectively implemented, if one brings about a change in the attitudes, because attitudes determine altitudes. The perceptions do result from experience, both contemporary and historical on the basis of which human development constructs over a period of time. These mental constructs embroidered in human memory are conditioned by beliefs and myths prevailing in the culture of a society. These factors have decisive influences on the process of change. The culture of a country reflect the belief systems that society values and by reducing uncertainty they establish the kind of order necessary for long societal change contributing to its growth in a positive way.

Sahgal envisions an India in which her fellow compatriots are compassionate and compatible in a democratic, secular, and diversified cultural setup. She, being a political columnist, is a power to reckon within the realm of genre of political novels. It may have been the circumstances that prevailed at home which made her to set out to learn the ropes of politics with her characteristic doggedness and humility and applying her innate eruditeness in the field of politics.

## References

AsnaniShyam M. "The Novels of NayantaraSahgal." *Indian Literature*

(1973): 36-69. Print.

Jain, Jasbir. *NayantaraSahgal*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1978. Print.

Jussawalla, Feroza. "Of Cabbages and Kings: *This Time of Morning* and

*Storm in Chandigarh* by NayantaraSahgal." *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*

5.1 (1977): 43-50. Print.

Mahajan, Anitha. "Storm in Chandigarh: An Assessment" *Indian Women Novelists*. New

Delhi: Prestige Books, 1993. 163-72.Print.

Sahgal, Nayantara.*Storm in Chandigarh*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988.Print.

---. "The Book I Enjoyed Writing Most." *Bhavan's Journal* (1974): 41-44. Print.

Varma, Urmila "Social and Political Scene in NayantaraSahgal's EarlierNovels." *Indian*

*Fiction in English: Problems and Promises*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1990.

104-09.Print.