



Political and Personal Upheavals in Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*

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(Abstract)

Literature is called the mirror of societal life and reveal the multifaceted aspect of life at inner level and outwardly. The present paper focuses upon the political and personal turmoil in the lives of people portrayed in the novel *Storm in Chandigarh*. The relationship between politics and literature has been an interesting field of study since the ancient time. The novel highlights the radical political events happens in the contemporary political scenario. The paper also discusses the personal lives and turmoil parallely in the narrative. The researcher envisages and portrays Chandigarh as the new beginning in the inner political states. It is an endeavour as depiction in political novel is constricted to political aspects of history, whereas a historical novel extends beyond political terrain, to social, cultural, moral and economic aspects of history. This paper mainly explores the lack of mutual faith in socio- cultural , political and personal relations and it influences human life adversely which has been depicted Sahgal's present novel **Storm in Chandigarh**.

Key words: Social Realities, Human Values, Contemporary Politics, Marriage, Gender Bias and Marital disharmony

Nayantara Sahgal's novel *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) represents the chaotic political upheaval between Haryana and Punjab which is continue today. The further linguistic bifurcation of joint Punjab into Haryana and Punjab almost twenty years after the first partition based on religion and language. The political tensions between the two newly formed states regarding the political boundaries, water and electric power and other resources is the theme of the novel. On the other hand, the novelist implies the idea of political disintegration and decaying moral and ethical values in contemporary politics. Chandigarh itself being the apple of discord between the two states and becomes the centre stage for the action. Sahgal presents the realistic conditions and political situation of the two newly parted states on linguistic basis. The backdrop of the novel presents the political stances and series of happening of Punjab and Haryana. She artistically depicts and insinuates the political disintegration and

paradigm shift in the thinking of modern politicians and political tactics. Jasbir Jain aptly points out in the preface of her book on Nayantara Sehgal, "Nayantara Sehgal has been active on literary scene both as a creative writer and political columnist... rewarding in her writings is genuine concerns for human values and human beings" (Jain 9). She has the opinion that Sahgal's main contribution thematically has been her deep involvement and concerns with politics however her deep concerns with Indian politics is never digressed her human concerns.

The political novels share common specifics and peculiarities with the historical novels. An historical novel can be designated as political when it specifically and directly deals with political history or time span of political activism. Nayantara Sahgal, belongs to first political family of the country, therefore politics is her background as an author, and she groomed in political environment, and it becomes her natural material. She tells, honestly, she grew up at a time when literature and politics went hand in hand and helped to illumine and interpret each other. It was a time when songs, poems and stories were the focus for the struggle against foreign rule and she do not believe in kings, queens or political dynasties. No one has no ideology; she confesses that she has never belonged to a political party. But in this country, politics-if by that we mean the use and misuse of power-invades our lives every day, both at the private, domestic level and at the national level political awareness is thrust upon us. In the words of Dr. harish Kumar, "The novel is the symbolic representation of stormy social and political activity in the background. The political violence between the two newly formed state is reflected in the personal violence of Inder and Saroj (Kumar 19).

In *Storm in Chandigarh* the scene of action shifts from Delhi to Chandigarh, but the same storm of this time of morning continues to rage in Storm in Chandigarh. The further linguistic bifurcation of Punjab into Haryana and Punjab nearly twenty years after the first partition based on religion is the situation; political tension between the two newly carved states regarding the boundaries, water and electric power is the theme and as the capital of the two states, Chandigarh is the stage for the action. The novel that begins with the sentence "Violence lies very close to the surface in the Punjab" (1). Depicts the conflict between the two diametrically opposite forces, violence and non-violence represented by Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh, Chief Ministers of Chandigarh and Haryana, respectively. If Gyan Singh, the power-hungry politician, is the Jack of *Storm in Chandigarh*, Harpal Singh, the Gandhian follower in the same novel. The novelist meticulously describes how Gyan Singh rises from anonymity to the Chief Ministership of Punjab through ruthless inhuman ways. Dubey finds out that "Gyan trod a path that involved no inner struggle A careless Atlas carrying the world like a bundle that he would not think twice about dumping if he felt like it." (35) Gyan Singh, the over ambitious politician, can "come to immediate grips with a situation, and manipulate it to suit himself." He never hesitates to use violence as a means if it can bring quick results. But Harpal, who has tremendous belief in the Gandhian idea of non-violence, is in anguish over the Chief Ministership for he feels that there is something sinister at the root of the Partition mentality and those who uphold it. Among the definitions supplied by different critics to the 'political novel', Irving appears to be 'viable' and 'radical'. He defines a political novel a novel in which political milieu is the dominant setting. In other words, a novel in which we take to be dominant politics ideas or the political ideas or the political milieu. a novel in which permits, this assumption without thereby suffering any radical distortion and, it follows, with the possibility of some analytical profit. Mankind's journey was towards integration, not breaking up of what already existed. But the very narrowness of Gyan Singh gives his arguments a crude strength

that no longer vision could ever have. Jit Sahni, a character in the novel who is an Industrialist, rightly observes, “Gyan Singh has a following. People feel he means business, gets things done, while Harpal Singh does not make any impression and gets put in the shade every time. As far as the civilized instincts are concerned human beings have not come very far. The crude basic instincts still rule us, hunger, sex and power. With the incidents like the violence that breaks out in the factories and the strike by the electricity men, the political storm gathers momentum.

Vishal Dubey the liaison officer sent by the Central Home Minister of the country to resolve the tensions between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh, suggests Harpal Singh that he has to take a stand against the violent attitude of Gyan Singh. In the process of delineating the relationship between the ends and the means, which is pointed out by Irving Howe as a difficult political problem while discussing Stendhal’s novels, Mrs. Sahgal portrays the disintegration of values in politics. Democracy has become a power game which carnal savagery’ and Machiavellian strategy, without which there seems to be no survival, have crept in. Elections, the backbone of the democracy has become a process in which, “only the big could afford to lose them. For the others there was not second chance. A mediocre barrister or doctor could go on making a living, but a failure in politics was a zero. Vishal Dubey wonders “how successful democracy was, superimposed on illiterate masses, exploding millions of them. And Harpal things wryly...Produce an idea and it would generate its own quota of fanatics to clothe it in colour, put it to music and fire a whole population” (45). The novel concludes when Gyan Singh calls off the strike when the Home Minister dies suddenly.

Thus, the storm is only temporarily mitigated. It is obvious that it is not because of the respect for the late Home Minister but it is only to save his own face that Gyan Singh calls off the strike. Thus, the conclusion of the novel may appear pathetic, if not altogether stage-managed. It remains one of the conclusions of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* where the naval officer arrives in a Trim Cruiser to rescue the children from the Coral Island. Though Golding himself calls it a gimmick, a symbolical conclusion is the only appropriate one to a novel of ideas like *Lord of the Flies*. The sudden demise of the Home Minister, ‘the last relic of the Gandhian past’, with which Storm in Chandigarh concludes, can be considered an appropriate conclusion as it symbolically signifies the further retreat from the Gandhian values. Mrs. Sahgal’s puts a point in her novel, *Storm in Chandigarh*, is the dramatically forced linguistic bifurcation of the Punjab twenty years after the first partition based on religion.

Her fictional world is peopled as usual with men of destiny and the women behind them living on equal terms. Vishal Dubey, the young I.A.S. officer, is the protagonist whose point of view remains constant throughout the novel. The well-to-do business magnates, their high-living but low thinking executives and their wives dominate the social scene in the novel. Mrs. Sahgal concentrates in this novel on the artistic value of violence in the context of political events and ordinary human relations. The confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is more significant than a mere ‘Clash of Personalities’ it is, more fundamentally, a conflict of ideas: the cult of violence and the non-violence and he creed of non-violence. Gyan Singh, who symbolizes the former, is a political murderer in league with the very devil for money and power.

In contrast, Harpal Singh represents Gandhian values. A shout-hearted integrationist, he is the political counterfoil to Gyan Singh in all matters. Expertly integrated with this theme of political violence, threatening the normalcy in the states of the Punjab and Haryana, is the theme of social hypocrisy and domestic disharmony. The cult of violence raises its ugly head in the form of male dominance in the domestic sphere Vishal Dubey stands out as the Jamesian 'Central Intelligence' in the novel. Saroj recalls Dubey's advice that There was only one way to live, without pretence. It would be the ultimate healing balm to the lonely spaces of the spirit beyond which there would be no darkness. Dubey's concept of Higher Morality is still more radical than Gandhi's 'inner voice'. It's a search for value, and an attempt to choose the better value, the real value, in any situation, and not just do what is done or what is expected. According to Meera Bai aptly observed, "as an individual with feelings and ambitions , a woman is involved in a complicated, demanding and exhausting relation, which makes her the 'subject' in the novels of female writers" (Bai 20).

Nayantara Sahgal's artistic exploitation of the cult of violence in politics and inter-personal relations comes off successfully towards the end of the novel. The storm in Chandigarh blows off when Gyan Singh calls off the strike – a gesture of peace from a violent-tempered man: and when Harpal Singh gets shot and wounded – a symbolic act of self-purification in the Gandhian tradition; and Vishal Dubey grows and calms down in his search for the real values of life. Mrs. Sahgal's awareness of the historical and political developments in Asia and Europe is quite evident in this novel. Even though she does not focus on any historical event in this novel, she alludes to the events appropriately. Similarly, the one event that is continually kept in the backdrop is the partition of India in 1947. It acquires a special ironic significance in this novel because of the second partition of the Indian part of the Punjab based on language into Haryana and the Punjab with Chandigarh as the joint capital. The political consciousness becomes a positive asset in her succeeding novels wherein she discards the broad framework of her first two novels and adopts a more compact and tighter plot-structure. The novel has five major characters and the personal and the political worlds run parallel to each other. The political atmosphere instead of stabilizing or improving seems to have deteriorated further. The downhill journey begun by men like Hari Mohan and Somnath is continued by men like Gyan Singh. The people who have some values or ideals are inert and passive and unable to face reality. Those that are active and aggressive have no values, and what is worse, no scruples. What matters most is the quality of a people. The building of Chandigarh symbolized a new beginning; it was 'a starting from scratch'. But soon the untainted atmosphere begins to be tainted by the same cant. Jit feels that the architects 'could not find the right breed of human beings to inhabit their perfect blueprints. It is the human element which is important, and which determines the quality of life. But unfortunately, it is not possible to give this a concrete shape or to put it into facts and figures and thus it is easy to ignore it for other concrete projects. Almost no attention is paid to developing the character of the people involved. The result is that at a time of crisis they succumb to the stronger forces. Dubey, who is only too happy to be freed from the narrow confines of Delhi, finds himself amidst a political confrontation in Chandigarh where Gyan Singh by linking the issue of language to religion is trying to exploit religious sentiment for his own personal position. His instigation is a threat to the peace and normalcy of life, but no one is willing or courageous enough to take a stand against it. As Dubey says: What Gyan plans is a demonstration to show the strength of his demands. He will call it off once he makes his point. It's a political trick, not a mass movement. (5) Dubey is unable to understand the

reasons for the violence of approach and attitude. He could have understood if starving, deprived people had worked themselves into a frenzy over political issues, but he had not expected it from the prosperous people of the area who have nothing much to crib about. He is surprised to see that violence to them has come to be associated with the acquisitive aspect of human nature. Violence was political blackmail. As Saroj puts it succinctly: Oh, I am not worried about any great disaster. I'm afraid of usual things going wrong, like milk not being delivered and my tins and packets running short, and the iron not working and not being able to get it repaired...It's when ordinary things go off the rails that life becomes unbelievable. In contrast, Harpal Singh has always counselled caution which continues to be his watchword in his career. A stout-hearted integrationist, he is the political counterfoil to Gyan Singh in all matters. He is easily altruistic where Gyan could be cynically egoistic. As he himself recalls, introspectively: He could not remember a time when he had wanted power. What he had passionately wanted was recognition as a champion of the underdog. And he had earned that. It had yielded dividends in the past and was again being used as a threat. Violence, Dubey feels, is the joint product of the age aggressive and the inert; it was a sign of urban discontent. Out bursts of brutal, calculated violence had become a part of the cities, 'It was given different names, indiscipline, unrest, disorder. It was dealt with each time-and forgotten', but it refused to submit to oblivion. In the confrontation between Punjab and Haryana it had become more than a threat; it had become a reality brooking no compromise and rejecting all but one solution. It was a manifestation of the fissiparous tendency, of the limited loyalty of mankind's primitive uncivilized emotions. Politics had virtually degenerated to a clash of personalities-as Dubey tells Nikhil, 'There are no issues left, only squabbles. Violence made ordinary people either selfish and inhuman or listless and indifferent. It also distracted them from the act of living. Sahgal, with a clever and imaginative use of the actual historical happening of the 1960s, leads the principal characters of the political sub-plot to a climatic point. India which had vowed to adhere to the Gandhian order of non-violence is portrayed as a country where confusion, disorder and chaos is widespread, where people have turned to be a furious, stone throwing, factory burning mob. By juxtaposing the situation in the country in 1947 and the one during the post-independence period, the novelist draws an appalling and bleak picture of the present where the politicians, with blinkers of self-centeredness on their eyes, have become oblivious of their responsibilities towards the country and its people. In 1947, ruminates Harpal Singh that there was still an Indian left to serve. Susie Tharu points out "No aspect of life in our country has been unaffected by colonialism. It disrupted existing social and economic structures, undermined the political system, forcibly retarded growth and inevitably in the process divested traditional institutions and values of their function in society" (15). Now there is no such vision left to bind us. The big vision has disintegrated. The conflict between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is thus not merely a political battle; it is a battle of philosophies. In a generation in which leadership means strength, force and authority, people like Harpal are thrown in the shade every time. Gyan's threat for strike becomes a reality. In the evening the violent strikers make an attempt on Harpal's life. He is luckily saved but badly injured. Ironically when he regains consciousness, he learns about the Union Home Minister's death and is told that Gyan Singh has called off the strike "as a token of respect for the death of a patriot. The situation in Chandigarh, Dubey begins to feel is, not one of tension but of paralysis; a situation in which one felt trapped and helpless, unable to come to grips with the problem. However noble Gyan Singh's goals may be, the methods he employs are ignoble. In his own words he is 'a simple man fired with a simple

purpose: to call his soil his own in the language of his forefathers.’ But underlying this is the desire to make others feel guilty and the immoral impulse to power. Nothing else is important and nothing can dissuade him from his course. The political deadlock in Chandigarh reflects the situation in other parts of the country. The watchword of the government, Hence Dubey feels, had become ‘wait and watch.’ People were afraid to accept challenges, afraid to act or to think. Dubey is conscious of the change in the basic approach to life and its problems, even the services had changed. Men like Trivedi belonged to the past and there were few who felt any involvement in the wider issues of national growth and interest. A general malaise seemed to have overtaken the whole country. In *Storm in Chandigarh* Nayantara Sahgal seeks to focus attention on this national ailment. As In the words of Lionel Trilling in his book *The Liberal Imagination* writes the novel to be “a perpetual quest for reality”. (Trilling 212). In this sense the novel is something more than fiction for it presents the reality of the political situation in the late sixties. She asserts, “I was conscious of being continually stretched in mind and spirit, of being encouraged to be venturesome, of doing the daring rather than the timid thing, of taking risk rather than playing safe” (15).

The novelist is successful in capturing not only the political issues but also the political mood and intrigues, in fact the deterioration that had set in the quality of public life and which was bound to influence personal and private values. Dubey’s advice to Harpal not to submit passively to Gyan Singh’s threat is an attempt to check this deterioration. It’s a risk, Dubey tells him but There are greater risks: the prospect of the machinery of two states running down at the behest of one man Without any kind of stand made against him-and that A man who believes, and correctly, that he has only to Call the tune. There is no room for such men among us. Let us take the risk. (196) Dubey is aware that he may be exceeding his powers in giving this advice, but he feels impelled to do so, it was necessary to bring Harpal to ‘grips with a problem that...reflected a graver disease, in the man and the nation.’ He feels that it was the only way to ensure continuity in ordinary life. Dubey’s advice does pay dividends for the very act of having made a stand restores Harpal’s confidence and bestows a positive tone to the government’s functioning. In *Storm in Chandigarh* the political and the personal concerns run parallel to each other and Vishal is central to both.

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