

SOCIAL ALLEGORY AND POLITICAL PARODY IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF NAYNATARA SAHGAL-THIS TIME OF MORNING AND A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the allegorical representation of social issues and political changes in the multifaceted Indian arena. On the one hand, the study delineates political duty, transition, crisis, turmoil and chaos. On the other hand, personal desire, preference, and fulfilment. In a nutshell, there are controversial conceit between the conventional values and modern ideals at both of social and political context that has experienced since independence.

KEYWORDS: Social Issues, Political Transition, Conventional Values and Modern Ideals

INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal is an Indian writer in English. Primarily, her fictions deal with elite's responding to the crises caused by political change and political upheaval. Her novels vividly present an authentic picture of independent India. Her fictions generally have twin themes; they are social and political issues. She is one of the first Indian woman writers in English to receive wide recognition. She is a member of a Gandhi-Nehru family. She was much attached with Nehru. She resembles like him both in looks and temperament. Sahgal is the only Indian woman novelist who employs politics as a backdrop for her social theme.

"I try to create the virtuous woman, the modern Sita, if you like (Nayantara Sahgal's letter. 1976, 116). This is the proclamation of Nayantara Sahgal in talking about the multifaceted Indian woman. She has created in her novel is demonstrative and expressive of multiple view on woman in Indian religion, myth and history. She reformulates and redefines the archetypal exemplary image of the Indian woman from austere, chaste, coerce, submissive to strong, free and human, this is her perspective of Indian woman, the modern Sita and Draupadi who reveal the spirit and quintessence of India, its ancient past, the transforming present and future of utter transmutation. Indian life well-shaped by the plurality of tradition with its innumerable philosophies, totality of concern, disquisitions is the basis of the multiplicity of perspectives already mentioned. All of which is responsible for the diversified and multifarious conglomeration and that is life today. Sahgal, a daughter of the Indian tradition, who has been a key witness to vast and climatic changes, in the land of its people, registers such aspects in her multifaceted characters.

When discussing about the Sahgal's novel one would have to accentuate on her combination of authentic artistic projection, with historical accuracy. History shows nothing true but true names and dates, but in literature everything is true but names and dates, is quite applicable to Nayantara Sahgal's fiction. Though in providing expression to historical

reality and to political happenings, she indulges in ideal artistic licence but never compromises on the veracity. Besides, Nayantara Sahgal attempts to give expression to the issue she experienced heavily about, through her novels, as she has done through her journalistic writings. Freedom and social responsibility and humanitarian values are the key issues she is concerned and undergoes that such positive qualities should be accentuated in social and political life. She not only portrays contemporary scene of “human details” (Bhatnagar 55) but also forecast the direction of “political wind”(Bhatnagar 55). Her description of socio-political and cultural reality is more political than historical because her novels are basically analytic and predicative rather than retrospective in the historical context. Sahgal, as a person and writer, whom politics is an innate one and embedded in her every drop of her blood and deep in her “bones and marrow” and in her “emotional and intellectual makeup” she can never remain a mere bystander or spectator (Sahgal From Fear, 41)to happen and affect the human interests. We see therefore that she integrates the account of real political happenings with certain basics. Sahgal, as a human being and writer considers values and has always been committed. She does incorporate and represent the basic issues or bewail the absence of these by placing her stories in a historically recognizable locale. Her considerable contribution to the art of fiction in Indian English writing is giving shape and buttressed to the political novel in its present form. She discerns that politics is not the concern merely of politicians, but it is a pervasive influence overwhelming life at all levels. “Each of these novels, more or less reflects the political era we were passing through”(From Fear 115).

Sahgal typically employs the political theme which is one of the major aspects of her fictions, the other being the exploration of the religious theme and the issues of women in contemporary society. A significant feature in Sahgal’s fictions is that the political scene in her fictions has been presented in human terms. Her fictional political universe throbs with blood and flesh of human figures rather than mere abstractions. She employs psychology to implant her humanitarian concerns on the private and public selves of her characters and are interblended and explored. One gets from political writers like, Sahgal, not the bitter and cold truth of the political scientist, but the pleasant and hot truth of an artist. Sahgal is very thoughtful and delicate to human reality; presents the political happening in a wider human framework.

The political events in each fiction presume a kind of allegorical dimension. The cultural context and political events become an allegory for life. The public political happenings revealed so exactly by the writer becomes a contemplation of private-personal happenings. Sahgal shows the glaring imperfections and defects in the Indian social and political world and holds it up against the deserving and ideal tradition of the Gandhian era, in her fiction like, *A Situation in New Delhi* and *Rich Like Us*, Where apparently secure world of order and discipline promulgated by the Emergency is actually an allegory of the filth and grim of the actual Indian politics. Parallels are drawn between the actual political situation and the domestic situation. The two fictions selected for study- *This Time of Morning* and *A Situation in New Delhi*, present the intricacy and complexity of human bonds against the background of actual political happenings.

This Time of Morning is set against the background of a just emancipated nation and undergoes to catch chaos of a country just passing through the birth pains of new era. The end and aftermath of the Nehruvian era ending in *A Situation in New Delhi* and dynastic rule of Indira Gandhi which ends in the declaration of emergency in the 1970s.

Nayantara Sahgal’s *This Time of Morning* is set against the background of a just liberated nation and seeks to catch the quandary of the country just passing through the birth pains of a new era. The novel discusses about the mind set of Indians for whom power has suddenly become a potential reality. Here we see all canons of dignity, decency and

decorum overthrown, in the hunt for power. Power here becomes a political reality, to be used or misused. Sahgal employs satire effectively, forcefully, vividly in this novel to explore the manipulation and disloyalty that goes on behind the scenes in the Indian political ground. The private and the public are interweaved to focus on the reality – the incompatibility and the imitation world of the Dr.Naranga family serves as an analogy to the addled and bewildered in the Ministry of External Affairs. This fiction emerges certainly and undoubtedly as a political one, concerning with itself both the idealism of the political world and the corruption. The humanitarian and enlighten spirit is the quintessence of Sahgal's ideology and thinking and this idea encompasses her concerns, social, political and ideological. In This Time of Morning, The Post Independence issue of freedom and progress is given individual colour. For men like Somnath and Harimohan it is power, for others it is the chance to create a new society through service. From the one point of view, this novel provides an insight into the working of politics. On the contrary, it seeks to explore the causes and effect of these as they workout in the life of the individuals. Rakesh observes the political chaos and disorder in his country and also the signs of the economic development. He understands clearly that time has come to find an identity of their own as Indian of the new era – an identity based on wise and sensible mixture of ancient values and modern ideas. The seeking of identity that Indians dreamed for in these early years of Independence an identity based on an amalgamation of the best aspect of the west without severance of their own tradition and custom is paralleled by Rashmi, Nita and Rakesh themselves exploring to express them own individuality and corroborating their own identity.

Aspects of a society in the transformation are expressed in the life and mindset of women like Rashmi and Nita. Rashmi's the fractured relationship and the broken marriage are the result of disastrous relationship and changed perceptions from earlier orthodox ones of woman's chastity, appeasement, self- sacrifice and submission. Rashmi wants understanding and depth relationships; to her a marriage should be based on love, affection, endearment and humanistic values. Rather than to suffer in silence; to aghast at growing detachment and disinterest to relationship, Rashmi walks out of her marriage, which has turned into a farce. Nita is a new woman who desires to live her own life, with a job, earning her livelihood and leading an ideal life. She begrudges an arranged marriage, which is adumbrated by material concerns where even emotional and sexual acts merely conventional facades. On the other hand, Mira (Rashmi's mother) is an orthodox woman for who traditional relationship and marriage and images are unalterable for they keep society and life together. Her daughter's firm decision of divorce shocks her, but she realises transition and changes are inevitable and life has become complicated: "New vistas presented a range of new conflicts and tensions that society had never known in their youth."(TTM, 161)

In This Time of Morning, Rashmi and Nita are early exploration of Nayantara Sahgal and they take the plunge. Saroj(Storm in Chandigarh) takes the brave decisions to change their lives and depose the claustrophobic images inflicted on women by tradition than their earlier contemporaries. This progress shows Sahgal's awareness of gradual changes marking the mindsets to women by women themselves as also by society. Transitions and changes are becoming faster and more drastic with the passage of time. Her later heroine is, Davi,(Situation in New Delhi) stronger, powerful and effective. Their actions, Decisions and attitude are wide-ranging and more powerful. They remain not individual with themselves but emanates as polar stars bringing transitions and revolutions to the society while transforming themselves.

The social and political concerns of Sahgal, which the writer diffuses distinctively in her fictional narrative, make her a very meaningful, serious and significant writer to most of her readers and critics. As the critic Makarand Paranjpe

comments “to me Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are meaningful chronicles of a larger narrative, indeed as most Indian English fiction is.”(159) The story of the growth of India has certain key themes, which can be characterised as colonialism, nationalism, partition, independence, regionalism, communalism, urbanization, feminism, capitalism and socialism etc. which form the essence and backdrop of our lives as well as fiction. In Nayantara Sahgal’s writing these issues are appropriately interspersed in her themes.

A Situation in New Delhi is a remarkable novel, which marks out another important political phase in Indian history, this time the crisis and the major upheaval in the political scene which occurs after the death of Jawarhalal Nehru – the poised and charismatic first Prime Minister of India. This novel which explores and dissects the duality of existence of politicians life by focussing on the character Devi, who faces vacillation and perplexity in her stubborn insistence on living at the political and personal realms of experience simultaneously. Nayantara Sahgal’s most powerful creation of a central character in Devi – modelled on those strong emotional and sensitive women associated with freedom movement whom Sahgal experienced and encountered countless times during her youth is perceptively portrayed here, women like the strong and vibrant Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, (Sahgal’s mother) the powerful Indira Gandhi, the sensitive poet Sarojini Naidu etc. As the women in power Devi could yield to her personal earnings for she “was public property, sharing Shivraj’s house and perpetually in the lime light”. (SIND, 52) Sahgal in the major character of Devi explores very effectively and expertly the conflict between personal desire and obligation, between private trauma and public tension in the life of public figures. Devi, the sister of Shivraj, the late Prime Minister of the country is thunderstruck at the chaotic conditions and unscrupulous politics at the highest level, destroying the Gandhian philosophy of the Indian political tradition and is one of the Nayantara Sahgal’s most powerful and persuasive representations of a women politician. The character of Devi explores the conflicts between obligation and duality of existence and the multidimensional faces of modern Indian womanhood in the role of a public leader and politician and breaks new ground in the depiction of woman in Indian English fiction.

In the depiction of tribulation, trauma and triumph of the Indian woman Sahgal differs from the other writers. Sahgal has created the image of woman as leader. This she has done, from the viewpoint of her background, as the descendant of India’s foremost political family boasting of influential and powerful political leaders both men and women. The two women, Sahgal has explored in the novel selected for this study are Devi and madam as Politicians. In these women, the writer has described vividly the opposing pulls between personal preference and public duty between one’s principles and obscure realities of public political life, thus creating realistic and animated personalities and outlining known and unknown truths and well accentuated the desires, resentments and triumph of this breed of Indian woman. In Devi, A Situation in New Delhi, Nayantara Sahgal has tried to bring out the conflict between the woman and the Cabinet Minister. She seeks for fulfilment at both levels, in the political front or public. She strives to live up to the ideals of her charismatic brother, Shivraj, by projecting clean and value oriented policies in the ministry and also seeks fulfilment in love with Usman and Michael. She goes through frustration, resentment and tragedy at her son’s wilful violent ways and refusal of her proposal at the cabinet meeting, but attains fulfilment in the mass-movement she later takes up with Usman. But as a woman she is hopeless, in an evasive search for personal fulfilment. In the character of Devi, Nayantara Sahgal crafts a rare combination of feminine institution and political leaders of principles and forethought – a positive image of the Indian woman with her strength and failures.

As had already been enunciated, Nayantara Sahgal has redefined the idea of the virtuous woman of Indian myth and legend. Her women in their search for freedom and individuality; often overcome the conventional boundaries barriers of moralities. In her novels, Nayantara Sahgal deals with man-woman relationship in an unconventional manner- frankly and honestly. "Chastity for her is not a concept of the flesh, it is one of the spirit"(Jain,158)In this novel, Devi typifies the continuation of the search for freedom, both at the personal and political levels. Devi as a woman of life does not permit marriage to be a means of bondage for the self – she does not desire to end her life at husband's prey. The quest for fulfilment take her to Michael and Usman, but Nayantara Sahgal is sensible and realistic enough to leave Devi 's quest unfulfilled, for at that particular juncture, Indian women, even those from upper-class or at high place, were not ready for such unconventionality.

As a writer for whom politics and public life the mantle for the artistic and the personal, this novel is almost autobiographical and confessional for it reveals her strong attachment to the ending influence of her uncle Nehru and mother Vijayalakshmi on her life. This novel demonstrates changes in both political and personal life, the death of Shivraj(Jawarhalal Nehru), which indicates the end of the older and the beginning of the new. Shivraj's death indicates the beginning of downhill and dwindling trends in the Indian politics. From realism, honesty, commitments, the scene has now become suffered with corruption, dishonesty, power play, and lack of commitment. In this new environment Usman and Devi, representatives of the older breed find themselves incapable and helpless, as they experience they are living in an era they cannot understand and where their principles, policies and values have become obsolete "fog, breathing charisma until it chokes us" (SIND, 117). The novel clearly documents the cult of violence represented by the Naxalite movement and student great agitations of the late sixties and early seventies. Rishad, Devi's son, falls a victim to this brutality as Madhu to student savagery and patriarchal oppression. Madhu commits suicide after she was raped by a gang in the University campus and usman is exploited and victimised for seeking justice for her cause. Though the political upheaval, trauma, turmoil, lawlessness, violence and personal tragedy, Nayantara Sahgal raises certain questions about the state of public life and politics. The victimisation of the common person and the uneasiness and restlessness of the youth vis-à-vis the issue of taking law into ones's hand.

Nayantara Sahal represents a nation in transition, between conventional values and ideals in culture and politics and changing trends of the modern era, these aspects are paralleled in the life key characters that also caught between the past and present and old and new. Sahgal posits the crucial idea that one must prepare for transition and equip oneself to face the new, for one cannot hold something obsolete. Shivraj's bequest failed because he did not groom suitable and appropriate followers with his vision. Transitions or changes are irrevocable, inevitable and Sahgal feels that the best way out would be careful mixture of the old and new.

From the idealism of the Nehruvian era when the extreme elation of independence was still tactile reality, one reaches the transitional stage of turmoil and political deterioration depicted in A Situation in New Delhi. From here stage switchovers to the era of modern the female imperialist when the nexus between politics, business and crime become powerful and Indian politics reached its darkest stage. This is vividly depicted in sahgal's most powerful novel Rich Like Us. Here Sahgal takes up a significant political event in the history of modern India – The declaration of the state of Emergency from 1976-1977. Sahgal tells the nightmare of this suffocating and confined political atmosphere bearing down on the life of a few people vividly and sensitively in the fiction.

CONCLUSIONS

Observing at the nature and essence of her thought process and perspective on woman and society from a critical angle, one may point out that Nayantara Sahgal narrates from the point of view of the elite, advantaged woman. This may provide an incomplete and insufficient picture of the ground realities of the common Indian women and their lives who may not be similarly advantaged. However, Nayantara Sahgal's view of high places, the political world and its men and women is a very faithful one. It is very useful portrait too for talks of the chief protagonist who are in a position to change conditions, change attitudes and ultimately societies and even lives for better. Whether they are enterprising, and successful or helpless, sincere or egocentric and mischievous are perused and analysed by a writer who had much experience and research in these areas. As Sahgal presents, a political leader quandary or a bureaucrat in vacillation, a student in trouble, a house wife in peril, a minister charged by a mob, she gives a changing perspective to the kaleidoscopic ground realities of the Indian societies.

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