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

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### **Abstract**

Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with the political confusion in Punjab in the post - independence India. It depicts violence, disorder and the disturbing political situations of the late 1960s during the partition period. Punjab and Haryana are with formed Chandigarh as the common capital. Nayantara Sahgal portrays triangular relationship between three couples namely Inder and Saroja, Jit and Mara and Vishal and Leela. She projects all the three couples and how they are sheltered by the compulsion of marriage. In this novel, the protagonist has to face real-life social problems and learn how to survive in a difficult political environment. The story shows a conflict between two opposite ideas-violence and non-violence-represented by the two characters Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh. As the story goes on, violence in factories and a strike by electricity workers make the political situation worse.

### **Keywords**

Social Realities, Survival, Protagonist, dominant politics, triangular identity.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the prominent Indian English novelists who have tried to depict women suffering in a patriarchal society. She envisions a new world that should be based on equality and harmony between the two sexes. The novel pictures the political situation of India between the 1950s and 1960s. She displays a highly developed consciousness of the morality and social structures. She is primarily seen as a feminist. Her feminism is rooted in the larger framework of human rights related to personal freedom.

Nayantara Sahgal's novel is a medium of communication as well as a portrayal of the experience of life with all its stresses and strains in a highly sophisticated postmodern society. *The Storm in Chandigarh* is one of the best political novels written by her. It deals with the partition of East Punjab and portrays the personal tensions, failures in marriage and social life of people. An invisible and more subtle form of violence is discussed. It also reflects the human spirit in a social set-up.

The novel deals with the theme at two levels: one is the political, following the partition of Punjab into two states and the second is the personal or emotional conflicts between husband and wife. The two backgrounds - the political and the personal run parallel to each other and are well inte-

grated with the theme of conflict. The characters in the novel behave as moderns, at the same time they do not isolate themselves completely from the traditions. This blend of tradition and modernity is observed in their attitude towards modernity, education, man-woman relations and so on. Women characters no more remain confined within the four walls of their houses. They want to show case their talents.

Nayantara Sahgal demonstrates how violence has spread into the social relationship especially between men and women. She has consistently explored and commented in several of her novels. She traces its roots social and political life in the country's past. Besides the political background, her fictional world is represented by a variety of people, politicians, high-ranking civil servants, wealthy businessmen with international reputation.

Political turmoil in Punjab and Haryana represents the whole in India. It throws light on the reorganization of the states on linguistic basis and the problems resulting from it. It also highlights the role of certain historical figures like Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pratap Singh Kairon.

In spite of this political turmoil, Punjab remained intact and united even after the reorganization of other states in India. However, the antipathy between the lovers of Hindi and Punjabi could not be contained by the administrators. Though it appeared to be a case of linguistic arrogance, basically it was a struggle for domination between the Sikhs and non- Sikhs both of whom spoke Punjabi. In various agitations, demonstrations and fasting unto death created so much pressure that Nehru had to yield to the demands of the re-organization of Punjab into Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. But, instead of solving the problems of the two states it gave rise to further controversies, conflicts and violence.

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, the novelist is concerned with the Gandhian values. On the one hand, it is confrontation between Saroja and her husband Inder. Ultimately it ceases to be a question of violence versus non- violence. The question is whether the victim has to bow down

before the oppressor or to claim its right for survival. Gyan Singh has never wasted his time on emotions; he has always displayed a ruthless attitude for human beings and human values. Similarly, Inder has patience with emotional attachment. Whereas Vishal Dubey believed that decent human relations can be built. "All of that reduces the heartbreak and a lot of the loveliness of living. But it is damnably hard to do" (SC 80)

Gyan and Inder are men of a kind in their disdain for other human beings. They do manage somehow to gain public sympathy. Harpal who takes a long-term view of the political situation is unable to draw the requisite amount of support just as Vishal. When he sends Saroj to Delhi he finds himself socially wrong. Nayantara Sahgal wishes to impress upon is the courage involved in taking a stand against injustice and tyranny.

Nayantara Sahgal non-violence is a far more comprehensive attitude than merely a political weapon. It is an active and powerful force. It may have been ineffectively used on occasion for example by misuse of fasting, and the like, but it remains a potent force. If used in an organized way.

Gyan Singh the Chief Minister of Punjab in *Storm in Chandigarh*, is like Kalyan Sinha a man concerned only with results, not with methods. An orphan such as Kalyan has been brought up by his uncle Dhan Singh, a man of rough morals. Later John Meadows, an American Missionary, has helped him to study in school and a job in a factory, but his effort to instill a sense of conscience in Gyan failed. Gyan had learnt to value of honour only for: "Honour like prestige was public. It was a badge, the insignia of hardihood, the sign of a man's standing in the community" (SC 105)

Harpal and Gyan colleagues as well as rivals, holding position as Chief Ministers of neighbouring states. Harpal is concerned with long term measures in the task of nation- building. Gyan's main concern is on progress and power. Gyan who has been in charge of Harpal's first election campaign has made it clear to him

about the inadequacy of a soft approach to politics. He has told him that sincerity may be a personal crusade, not a political one. When one of their young worker is kidnapped, it affects Harpal's life and he finds it difficult to tolerate. Harpal feels for the kidnapper and the kidnapped. It is difficult for him to tolerate.

"He; an unknown on the political scene, had soon come to represent the revival of aspiration among the dispossessed" (SC 35).

The election campaign is by no means their first encounter. They have an earlier meeting in similar circumstances – Harpal in need of help and Gyan opt to help him. It was the time of the partition of the country when Harpal was on a relief mission to his home town. He had met only death and dislocation. The bus in which he had travelled to Delhi was driven by Gyan who had fully exploited the helplessness of the people. Untouched by the disaster around him, he had selected his customers in a business-like manner:

He was briskly selecting the better customers, the merchants who had been able to rescue their money boxes from the wreckage of their homes, and relieving them of their savings as he admitted them to the bus. (SC 24)

Gyan is very clever about his goals in life. He has no scruples to exploit anything to achieve them. When he advocates for a Punjabi speaking state he mixes the issue of religion and languages while, Harpal's view points is different. He has a humanistic and secular perspective. Each time there is a confrontation between the two. Harpal feels like losing his ground. Vishal Dubey finds more than a political battle: "The crowd surged towards the exit, blocking Dubey's way, and he was still trying to elbow his way through it when it ported to make way for Gyan and his colleagues" (SC 108).

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Vishal Dubey is sensitive to the social and political world around him. He knows the passing away of the older generation of politicians is also the passing away of an era of Gandhian ideals and goals: "Every act proudly performed in the sunlight. If all that had been worth anything, thought

Dubey, it will have been disbursed over this country, down deep in our blood" (SC 217). In each successive novel, the retreat from Gandhian ideals in the contemporary political situation seems to be the final truth. The writer is aware that if the spirit of Gandhian value survives anywhere in the world, it is certainly not in our country, India. Nayantara Sahgal doubts the availability of unity and secularism in India. She is aware that handful of men can't make it a reality. The reason for the distancing from Gandhian ideals are countless. Secularism is diluted by the conservative notions of orthodox religious beliefs.

Harpal is conscious of a withdrawal in his self. He has a sense of frustration and loneliness. He is unhappy that power instead of conviction has become the motivating force for men in politics. One had to be more than politician and if Harpal is a crusader, Gyan is a manipulator. Harpal is extra careful in dealing with human beings. Gyan refuses to make difference between the human and non-human. He does not have the awareness of a whole range of values. Vishal finds him a man quite free from complication in his functioning:

Not, Dubey thought, an unscrupulous man, for that would imply he saw scruples and ignored them. 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....(SC 64)

Som is obsessed by his materialistic ambitions, whereas Inder is obsessed by his narrow possessive attitude towards Saroj. Others use power or money or religion, Inder uses chastity as a weapon against Saroj. It is a part of his capacity to torment others and also torment himself. He finds satisfaction in Mara than in Saroj. While Inder is unable to go beyond the official approach in his talk with his labourers, Vishal is willing to do so with men of opposing political views. One wants conformity of the rules and behaves according to a set of pattern – the other understands the need of getting out of the individual caves and spending time and effort on nurturing human relationships. Vishal tells Saroj that is, "Life's precious obligation to rebel,

and humanity's right to be free, to choose from the best light it could see, not necessarily the long-accepted light" (SC 173).

Saroj is gradually destroyed by her marriage so the understanding of Vishal is essential to her. He sets free from the burden of guilt and helps her to express re-affirmation of faith in herself. In the same way, Simrit draws upon Raj's strength and understanding to resist the desperation of her situation. He involves in causes not with a hope of a reward or a reputation but merely out of conviction.

Nayantara Sahgal's strength lies in her ability to create convincing characters effectively. Her fictional world is represented by a variety of people, politicians, high ranking civil servants and wealthy business tycoons with international connections. On the political side the two new Chief Ministers, Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh. Vishal Dubey, Trivedi are civil servants. Nikhil Ray, the textile industrialist. Inder Mehra and Jit Sahani are from the business class.

Nayantara Sahgal transposes the insistent anxiety of a nation pulled under the colonial politics of the Punjab-Haryana conflict. The political rift between Gyan and Harpal caused problems in state boundaries related to water and electric power. The hostile Chief Minister of Punjab has threatened to lead a strike at Bhakra. By analyzing the Indian politics and society in *Storm in Chandigarh* it is easy to conclude that Nayantara Sahgal, through her writings struggles that conditioned partition period in India. She tries to show the important changes and the values of valuable modern India.

Nayantara Sahgal could not stop herself from expressing her political attitudes. She touches upon the Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals. The political novel in the hands of the novelist becomes powerful because it seldom disassociates itself from human concerns. The political theme is always intertwined with a deeply moving human story which shows the narrative ability of Sahgal.

Nayantara Sahgal is a member of the first family of politicians who expressed her concern

over socio-political side of the Indian subcontinent. She consciously considered the requirement of public life an integrated thematic structure in her novel. Nayantara Sahgal resisted mentioning the unpleasant personal details in her Memoirs. The autobiographies and letters reflect her compassion for the issues which bear witness to feminist ideologies.

*Storm in Chandigarh* is not merely a story of the division of Punjab and confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh. The story is interwoven with the story of love and passion of Inder and Saroj and Jit and Mara and small dramas, casual betrayals occasional but significant involvement make the development of the story. It may be concluded that "*Storm in Chandigarh*" has created a realistic as well as emotional tale of confrontation between the states (i.e. Punjab and Haryana) with a parallel story of Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh.

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