

A CRITIQUE ON WOMAN AND SOCIETY IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S NOVELS: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal a outstanding Indian English women novelist. Her novels portray on the assertion of vibrant female characters, matrimonial strain and household traumas understands the convention and modernity. The distinctive male seclusion that, she encountered there as well as the unpleasant inequality to females in social life that she pragmatic made her voice loud in protest against mistreatment of women in the society. The significant point regarding Sahgal's narrative route is that she does not hesitate to incorporate gender narrative within its influence. Her female character highlights the different positions available to women in Indian society. Sahgal entre fictional quantity revolves around the twin themes on political and the tradition and modernity. She is writes for women concerns, women conflicts in domestic, she fights for womanhood rights. Her aspire to create the good atmosphere for women's rights so that her fictional novels deal with the main concern of rights of women. Her characters endeavour for liberation. Her novels present the multicoloured depiction of Indian womanhood. Nayantara Sahgal is a practical spirited woman writer in Indian English fiction with a sensible approach and her mutinous intention want Indian women to be free from her shackles.

Key words: Convention, pragmatic, domestic, womanhood, depiction, liberation, spirited woman, sensible approach, shackles.

As all the family members took active part in freedom struggle, Sahgal's parents also involved themselves in the freedom fight. Her father was arrested several times for his support of Indian independence and died in Lucknow prison jail in 1944, leaving behind his wife and their three daughters Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal and Rita Dar. Her mother Vijaylakshmi also resumed her active participation in the freedom struggle. This jail-going of their parents was accepted by their three daughters as everyday reality. Such positive and healthy attitude of all family members towards the difficulties of life prepared the girls for the type of life they were going to have as the daughters of the Nehru family. It taught them never to allow the slings and arrows of fortune to detract from their cheerful zest for life. The influence of these strange politics wove into our lives a pattern of unique enchantment.

All the three daughters of Nehru family breathed the spirit of freedom from their early childhood. As children they never resented their parent's absence from home. On the contrary, we learned to take pride in our parent's contribution to the struggle and to feel that it was our own. Her earliest recollections are those of the political activities at Anand Bhavan as a child 'born at a time when India was being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into one of light'.

Her family background always remained a back-bone to her progress. There are several persons in each individual's lives who play a pivotal role in his/her character formation. As a family member of the Nehru's the most remarkable impact on Sahgal's character seems to be that of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. In her life-story we find full length life sketches of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, her mother Vijaylakshmi Pandit and her father Pandit Ranjit Sitaram. A career, especially a political one, is proverbially said to rob a woman of much of her femininity. It has never had this effect on my mother.

Another significant impact on Sahgal's character is of Mahatma Gandhi. The world in which Sahgal was born & grew up was dominated by Gandhian ideology. In twentieth century Gandhism not only united the country but

became a living part of any Indian who came into contact with it. Nevertheless, Sahgal's first and foremost encounter with Gandhiji is quite noteworthy. That is to say, the whole event focuses Sahgal's truthful, frank and honest nature. Sahgal frankly confesses that as a tender child she did not like Gandhiji when she had met him for the first time. There was a special prayer arranged to welcome Gandhiji at Anand Bhawan. Her mother advised her to offer a bouquet of red roses to Bapu and she objected. "But he's ugly; I don't want to give them to him. Having objected thus, Sahgal scowled at him; nevertheless, Bapu gave her a gleeful laugh and blessed her to remain as honest forever as she appeared at that juncture. Further Sahgal refers that she had also told her father not to attend such prayer meetings in future. However, in her later years she became one of the regular visitors of Bapu's prayers at Birla house and she also sang prayers for him. Gradually, Sahgal was coloured by Gandhian impact and the ideals of simple living and high thinking.

In her leisurely hours she began writing novels colored with political consciousness. *From Fear Set Free* does not openly condemn Sahgal's married life. However she often expresses a fear of being confined to a particular way of life. In her autobiography Sahgal does not directly express her feeling of suffocation in her marriage life. However she often expresses some kind of fear and being habituated to the monotony of life. While caught in the trap of her confusion, she also discussed her confusion related to marriage with her Mamu and he advocated a sense of freedom in every area of life. It is possible to do many things once fear has been shed. Not conquered, not overcome, and merely discarded like a restricting garment so that the body can breathe unimpeded.

Thus, it is founder urge for freedom inherent in the texture of her life-story. Thus, Sahgal's life-story expresses her inner life as a reflection of outward movement of India's freedom struggle. Her autobiographical works truly express the tone and temper of her Era. As she believes in complete inner freedom, often in the course of the book she feels ashamed about the fact. She was the only member in the Nehru house-hold who had nothing to do. She always pined for not doing something creative. Hence she pursued the path of creative writing. She firmly believed that Indian woman did not need to unfurl feminist flag. Gandhi illumined her with the spirit of Freedom. Indian women

did not have to march in suffragette processions to proclaim their equality with men, or don bloomers in place of their feminine garb. No such measures were necessary. Gandhi's call to women to take part in the national movement beside their men brought them forward as natural as if they had been born to such a life.

One of the most energetic living legends of the freedom struggle, Nanyantata Sahgal started her career as a journalist. She has delivered many important lectures Annie Beasant Memorial lecture at Banaras and Arthur Davecroft lecture at Leeds to name a few. She enjoyed various literary positions. Advisor of English Languages board and Sahitya Akademi member. Chairperson of Eurasia region in the jury of Commonwealth writer prize. She had been a fellow, Radcliff institute (Harvard) and a foreign honorary member of the American Akademi, arts and Science. She had been a member of the National Executive, Peoples union for Civil liberties; she was also a member, Indian delegation to the U.N. General Assembly in 1978. As a writer Nanyantara Sahgal has been more famous for her novels of political consciousness. In 1969 she started her political writing and wrote a column in a New Delhi fortnightly. She is also a freelance writer. Today, in the literary world she is more famous as a novelist. Apart from political dimensions her novels deal with many other aspects of Indian life.

Nayantara Sahgal served as an advisor to Sahitya Akademi's Board for English from 1972 to 1975. She was a member of Verghese Committee for Autonomy to Radio and TV in 1977-78. She has also held the post of Vice-President of People's Union for Civil Liberties. She was also a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington from 1981 to 1982. The Library of Congress has twenty-four works by her.

Autobiographical writing helps the writer to relive his/her past and to search the real self. Sahgal's fictional writings venture to break free of her Self through a search for others characters in a few of them she tries to see some experiences of her life through her fictional creations and tries to understand herself. On the other hand her autobiographies reveal her efforts in attempting to confront her earlier "Selves" which she had been perhaps trying to conceal".

Therefore, writing gives a kind of inward freedom to the writer. Writing releases our emotions and the more effective is this emotional release, when it is a life writing. Nostalgia for the past is one of the constant features of life writings. Recollecting her past, Sahgal refers to her gay and happy childhood. In the introduction to her life story Sahgal has declared her intention behind writing her life story *Prison and Chocolate Cake* was intended for me and my family, and for the circle of friends who had been part and parcel of the atmosphere it described. Thus, Sahgal's life-story is a recapitulation of the past dealing not only with the history of herself but with that of the whole nation. *Prison and Chocolate Cake* depicts the writer as a product of her time. It is a mirror in which the freedom struggle of India is at the centre and the writer's self is in the margin. Nevertheless it is a marvellous self-analysis of a woman who had experienced the development of freedom struggle brick by brick.

Nayantara Sahgal is the author of nine novels, six works of non-fiction, and wide-ranging political and literary commentary. It is not surprising that politics and history inspire and underlie much of her writing. Beginning with her memoir *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, which was published in 1954, Sahgal authored other political writings. *The Freedom Movement in India* and *Indira Gandhi, Her Road to Power* - along with a collection of essays, *Point of view: a personal response to life, literature and politics*. Novels bring out Nayantara Sahgal as a writer with feminist concerns seeking independent existence of women. She sees women as victims of conventional Indian society engaged in their quest for identity.

She has received the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Sinclair Prize and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. She has held Fellowships at the Bunting Institute (Harvard), the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, and the National Humanities Centre, and is a Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Leeds University, Distinguished Alumna Awards from Wellesley College and Woodstock School, and the Awadh Samman Award from Zee TV. She has served as Chairperson, Jury of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and on the jury of the Mahindra Awards for Excellence in Theatre. She was Vice President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties in the 1980's. Sinclair Fiction Prize in

1985 and Sahitya Akademi Award in 1986 for 'Rich Like Us', Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Eurasia) for 'Plans for Departure' in 1987; Diploma of Honour, International Order of Volunteers for Peace; Vice –President, People's Union for Civil Liberties; Honorary Doctorate (Doctors of Letters) from the University of Leeds; Alumnae Achievement Award from Wellesley College and from Woodstock School, Mussoorie, 2002.

As a socio-political novelist Nayantara Sahgal strictly adheres to her ideal of freedom as an essential and indispensable ingredient for the progress of a country and an individual. In all of her eight novels she expresses this philosophy and her deep love for India and for Humanity. All along, in her novels, while there is a great deal of admiration for the strength and dignity of the Gandhian process and a realization of the heavy price we are paying by bypassing it, there is also the awareness that the political method rides roughshod over it and the average man is ill-equipped to understand the Gandhian strategies. The structural experimentation in Sahgal's work often goes unnoticed as she populates her world with a host of characters, especially in the early novels, and absorbs a great deal of political environment in the narration. But under this seemingly sprawling structure there is an intricate pattern, especially in her later novels where the motifs are interlinked. The earlier juxtaposition of opposites has given way in them to the form of a mystery novel. In the next chapter the brief study of all Sahgal's work is given.

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