
NAYANTARA SAGHAL'S STORMING OF CHANDIGARH - A RUMINATION OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: Nayantara Saghal in her work *Storming of Chandigarh*, 1969 brings out the degeneration of Gandhian ideals in post independence period, during the partition of Punjab into Punjab and Harayana respectively, based on language. The novel points out the dichotomy between Gandhian ideals that bound India into a nation and the parochial opportunism of post independence era that threatened the crux of nationhood. Through the character of Dubey she recalls and reminds the essence of being human without a label (religion) and the need to go back to the spirit of Sathyagraha and ahimsa.

Keywords: Gandhian, Dichotomy, Idealism, Nation, Nationhood.

Introduction: Gandhian philosophy is the religious and social ideas developed by Gandhi, first during his stay in South Africa from 1893-1914 and later in India. To a layman the two cardinal principles of Gandhi's thought are 'satyagraha' and 'ahimsa' which could be translated in English as truth and non-violence - considered the highest law of human kind. Gandhi's ideals are wrought from personal experience and act as a double-edged weapon transforming the individual and the society. His social goal could be described as Sarvodaya a term he coined in paraphrasing John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last* which means welfare of all without exception. Gandhi supported economic decentralization and political decentralization, with village as the basic unit. He supported production for need than for greed, emphasized cooperation than competition and stressed on eradication of poverty. He was for dignity of labor and greater purity of rural India and had a deep respect for Mother Nature. Mahatma Gandhi called the downtrodden Harijans and invited women to actively participate in the freedom struggle. Thus it could be said that the Mahatma gave India a nationhood.

Mahatma Gandhi's ideals and his populist following were captured by many Indian English writers during the 1950 and 1960s as highlighted by Srinivasa Iyengar in his work *History of Indian Writing in English* who for the first time dedicated two chapters to Gandhian novels. The triumvirate - Raja Rao, R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, have presented the Gandhian wave in their novels. Anand's *Untouchable* deals with the problem of untouchability and refers to Gandhi's speech about Harijans towards the end. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* brings out the massive effect that the Mahatma had on common villagers transforming the freedom movement into a homogenous national popular movement. Other important writers dealing with nationalist themes were Bhabani Battacharya, Nagarajan, Gosh, G.V. Desani, Khuswant Singh and Ahmed Ali to name a few. It was during the 1960s that Indian women novelists like Kamala Markendaya, Anita Desai, Vijayalaksmi Pandit and Nayatara Saghal began to present the themes of nation and women spaces in their novels that have won international acclaim.

Nayantara Sahgal is the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of the acclaimed Vijayalaksmi Pandit. She like Anita Desai enjoyed international readership and openly talked about man woman relationships and many other tabooed things. Although she belonged to Nehru gandhi family she maintained her independent critical sense. She has openly criticized the emergency during the reign of her cousin, Indira Gandhi, in her works. She is well known for returning her Sahitya Academy award (awarded in 1986 for *Rich Like Us* 1985) in protest of the increasing intolerance and supporting right to dissent in the country especially the Dadri mob lynching incident. In September 2018 she was elected as the Vice

President of PEN International. Nayantara Sahgal's has written a number of novels, memoirs and collection of letters.

Most of her works are based on her personal experience "pieces of me going into men and women I created when I really began to write." (Fear Set Free) Her first novel *A Time to be Happy* 1958 presents the two worlds of two different families of Sanad and Kusum reflecting the two different worlds of Nayantara set in Gandhian values and Gautam from a pro-British family. The novelist presents that in the Post Independence India, people have deviated from the Gandhian moral values of chaste public and personal life and emphasis that it is not the equality of mind but the morality of human spirit that is essential for the progress of the nation. In her novel *This Time of Morning* she presents the post independence generation to whom freedom is no longer a dream but a reality and this generation lives side by side with an older generation which has struggled for independence. Nayantara Sahgal believed that non-violence is never a spent force even when she was confronted by the partition and its aftermath. She believed that its failure at a critical juncture revealed not its inadequacy but the weakness of human material.

Sahgal's viewpoint is also portrayed in her work *Storm of Chandigarh* written in 1969. In the novel Sahgal speaks about the number of problems faced by independent India where the administrative system still functioned through a colonial framework, and India found itself burdened by an alien system of values and education. The novel is about the partition of Punjab into two states, Punjab and Harayana with Chandigarh as the capital. Gyan Singh the Chief Minister of Punjab, a self made man plans to protest against the sharing of resources and benefits between Punjab and Harayana. The novel is about Dubey, a capable bureaucrat trying to settle differences and bring about an amicable solution between the warring Gyan Singh, the CM of Punjab and Harpal Singh, the CM of the newly constituted Harayana.

Dubey is deputed by the Home Minister, the last surviving veteran of the Gandhian era, to bring about a reconciliation. Nayantara through Dubey questions the wisdom behind partitioning of Punjab "it was why, in the first place, the Centre allowed Punjab to be re-divided twenty years after the grueling partition of 1947. Why was this mess been created? It was the kind of questions civil servants did not ask politicians." (*Storming of Chandigarh*, 9) The author brings out the practical problems of displacement - a person who has considered Lahore as his home is forced to move to Punjab because it is no more his home. The same person after 20 years is forced to vacate Punjab because it is now called Harayana and thus no more his home. She states that this was due to the lack of larger vision for the sake of smaller loyalties.

Nayantara brings out the irony of post independence era when she states that two states were created based on language that is Punjabi and hindi speaking population whereas the chief ministers of both the states were Punjabis and Punjabis residing in this part of Harayana had suddenly become Harayanis. She states that men always wanted power and they used religion as a weapon and it would not be very soon when Punjabi would be taught in schools in Punjab and Hindi in Harayana like Tamil and Bengali in their respective states. "Religion why should everyone have a label could not one just be human?" (119) She brings out the irony in the post modern politics through the new political leaders. Gyan Singh wanted to be a champion of the underdog but does not hesitate to kill a person from the underdog in order to get elected. The author uses irony when she states "dedication, sincerity, austerity he never used those words in his speeches removed them like old coins no longer used" to bring out the degeneration of the ideals of nationhood.

Nayantara Sahgal brings out the failure of the administration in the post independence period. Though Chandigarh was commissioned to world's reputed architect it was suffering from lack of infrastructure. There are frequent complaints of government vehicles breaking down. The police and bureaucracy are exposed to face the challenges of a break down. A police officer is held responsible for firing on a mob that injured several policemen and even killed a few of them. Thus the gap between idealism and reality is exposed in the novel set in post independence era where satya and ahimsa was a far cry. Nayantara uses this to compare the changing man and woman relations in the upper class society in India. She

brings the relationship between Inder and Saroj, Nikhil and Gauri, Jit and Mara, Dubey and Leela to expose the changing relationships of husband and wife. The author uses the relationship between Inder and Saroj to bring out the patriarchal mindset. While Inder is unable to come to terms with Saroj's free life before marriage he tries to maintain a relationship with Mara. While Saroj is tortured by Inder for her past deeds Inder escapes scot free. In a conversation with Mara, Inder states "there is no shame nowadays no barriers women think and talk like men..." Mara states "perhaps they just behave like human beings than possessions." (92) At the same time Leela, Dubey's wife seldom has a close relationship with Dubey, marries him for the money and the high society.

The dichotomy between nation and small loyalties, modernity and roots, ideals and reality reaches its climax with Gyan Singh's strike where all anti social elements break loose. Inder's office is severely damaged by the mob and Saroj is sent to Delhi to be looked after by Gauri and Nikhil. Dubey tries all means to keep the state machinery running with the help of Harpal Singh. The mob behave in the most inhuman manner "One doesn't feel safe in one's own town one's own street...we seemed to have slipped into a decay... the one upheaval might have had meaning. But the noiseless chaos is like the ground dissolving as you walk, that has filled after independence."(76) The death of the Home Minister restores things to normalcy as Gyan Singh calls back the strike, as a mark of respect to the home minister. His death "... would mark the end of an era known as Gandhian. In politics that had meant open decision, open action. No stealth, no furtiveness, and therefore no shame. Every act performed in sunlight." (217) Peace is restored and Dubey having brought the situation under control leaves for Delhi. Dubey feels that this would have a lasting impact on the citizens and make Indians think about Gandhian ideals and how Gandhi was able to arouse and unite the people on the basis of nationhood. Thus the author retraces the readers to Gandhian ideology that had held the nation together in the freedom struggle and urges the need to recall it to survive in the post independent era where human values should precede power politics.

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