

Leftist-Socialist Stance in Nayantara Sahgal's Novel *A Situation in New Delhi*

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Abstract: *An eminent Indian English writer, Nayantara Sahgal has represented a nation which was emerging out into a new nation in the form of independence. Keeping in view this transitional phase, the present study will be focused on changing social situation of postcolonial India. A Situation in New Delhi is a remarkable fictional work which represents an important social and political phase in Indian history. The novelist has posited some crucial ideas that transitions or changes are inevitable and one must be ready to accept changes. In the novel transitional elements have been between conventional values and ideals in culture and politics and emerging trends of the modern era. The objective of the present research paper is to find out the leftist-socialist mechanisms after going through the study of the novel A Situation in New Delhi.*

As in the novel the legacy of Shivraj failed because it could not groom appropriate and proper followers with his visionary ideals. The new generation is not ready to accept the old orders and ideals due to the fast-changing modernity in all spheres of life. So, the novelist views that changes or transitions are inevitable and irrevocable and the best way out to accept the new by keeping in mind the old too. In this way one can tread towards progress and improvement of inefficiencies. The conflict of goals which is the main conflict of the contemporary society has been portrayed in different way. In the novel there are two types of people those who are ruthlessly urge for progress and those whose who are driven by humanistic values are represented in larger extent to differentiate between the two.

Keywords: Transition, conventional, new generation, old orders, modernity.

Introduction

There have been ample of Indian writing in English in several domains of knowledge in which Nayantara Sahgal's novel *A Situation in New Delhi* stands prominent in the study of Transitions which occurs at

different levels. Different concepts of revolution have been examined which come into conflict with each other on the basis of ideology. On one side there is government, committed for action and on the other side is Mr. Rishad stands with his idealistic attitude shocking the society into awareness. But these both revolutions abandon the main issue of constructive task of individual and national building. The change which breaks or avoid past is disastrous and the revolution which seeks to do so is an imposition as well. It does not take individual with it. In face it cannot reach to reality if it ignores the past. The novelist represents the cabinet members who are far away from common masses of their country because they don't bother about the common people in general.

The young generation is engaged in their own campaign as it is projected by a purpose to find out the real objective in life like Rishad. "The critical brilliance that made him an outstanding student, the fine-grained sensitivity. . . . Caught between ancient myth and industrial present, it was no wonder if any young. . . . (18). They are attracted by immediate success that violence has brought for them. For violence, their code of conduct is different, it has to be disciplined, clean and cold and unassisted by mental deviation. Their objective is to build some ideal projects for the peasants and downtrodden without realizing the violence, the pain and suffering it create. The psychology of power is pertinent today because in a democratic country which is in need of revolution, both social and economic. This becomes a political resistance in *A Situation in New Delhi*. Sahgal understands that violence takes place due to the selfish, narrow attitudes. Perhaps it is natural for the people to become violent when integrity and idealism starts giving birth to unscrupulous and ambition in national life.

Freedom of expression becomes a primary social concern in a country in which internal and external conflicts and exploitations prevail. Mr. Rishad is dissatisfied with the situation going on but he is unable to point out the factors responsible for this. The novel *A Situation in New Delhi* is set

evidently in sixties but it captures the desperation and urgency of the pre-and post-emergency political scenario. Rather than decreasing the ‘mute agony’ of the masses the government attempted to cover it up. Shivraj states that, “Any Danger to India could only come from its own people, not from outside” (*A Situation in New Delhi* 106). The novel represents graphically the indifferences of the Westerns to an emerging democracy. Through Usman and Rishad Sahgal presents the positive aspects of her views of the affluent masses give and take process because they come from the academics and upper middle class. Both are fully aware of the harsher realities of life. The novelist states Rishad’s views that:

Panic was like as glass. You could release it according to plan. . . . This cult of violence had to be clean, cold and disciplined, unaided by drugs or mental aberration. This was the violence of sane with a passion for justice. To build a new world the old one had to be razed to the ground. The way to do it was through the systematic creation of panic. Panic to chaos to ruin. And out of ruin open revolt and power. Only then could new social order arise. Not Utopia. Just food in the stomach and a decent wage. Utopia for the poor and downtrodden. An Indian Utopia. (58)

The novel thus takes the presentation further through highly suggestive and significant juxtapositions of persons and situations: Shivraj’s humanistic idealism, Rishad’s honest violence, the cabinet intellectual’s pseudo-radicalism and Devi’s befuddled helplessness. In the novel *The Day in Shadow* the country has turned into oil exploration and is about to change its established status of non-alignment to an alliance favouring the Soviet Union. This novel ends with a suggestion that leftist revolution is coming, an idea that is picked up at the beginning of *A Situation in New Delhi*. The old leader is dead and those who make revolution by words seem to be in power and youth of the nation start working on their own. There are many unresolved issues.

Sahgal tells the story as a multi-focused narrative and we become familiar with different characters and their representations: We notice Michael, who is English biographer return to India after ten years to write the life of Shivraj, the dear national leader who has died. Devi, dead Shivraj's sister, now an Education Minister. Next Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University and an old companion of Devi, is always dedicated to the ideals and values of moderation which Shivraj incarnated. About Shivraj's entity the novelist states that:

Shivraj had had the gift of putting things in perspective, and since his death Usman had become convinced that that was leader's main task. To put into perspective. To gather up the facts and fevers and strands, the achievement and the discouragement, and place it where it could be seen against the whole, the past, the future. (28)

Nayantara Sahgal's novel *A Situation in New Delhi* represents the situation aftermath a great popular Prime Minister, Shivraj, who dominated the scene of political and national for a full decade. It was he who sacrificed his and his family's luxuries and comforts for the welfare and freedom of the country. The novel points out the Naxalite movement and student agitation and unrest, and above all the Nehru's death and social and political conditions prevailing in India. The novel is very much based on facts and reality. It deals with the problems of alienated and frustrated younger generation of university students. They seek changes protests against the older law and order. When the atmosphere in the university becomes hostile, it creates chaos.

There is a gap between private world and the political world; both the worlds are reciprocally treated in which actions and characters are amalgamated. Obviously, the novel is the representation of the situation in the whole country. In the novel, Sahgal concentrates on the values of violence in the context of political events and common mass relations. Devi appoints Usman as the Vice-

chancellor of Delhi University. Due to the political ideology they share, he is compelled to accept it as it is offered by Devi who needs him to survive in the office. He is burdened due to the troubles, violence and agitation in the university. Usman is of the view that the great ideals should not remain as merely words in the scriptures. He states that: “if you want to be pure, you can’t run a government —though Shivraj did work to establish the nearest thing to a republic of virtue” (80). In actual practice, scriptures survive only when people follow them. He remembers the unique sense of perception of Shivraj and condemns the political interference in the academic institutions. He states that:

Yet nowadays, unlike any age past, people actually took time to destroy, deliberately made this very bizarre us of time. Surely this was the only era in history when what had gone before had been ear-marked for demolition to make room for change. In other ages men had built on what they already had. . . . (26-27)

When the situation in the campus reaches to its peak point, Usman decides to resign from the post of Vice-Chancellorship and from the party. The novelist shows a strong relation between brother and sister. She analyses the problems that confront a newly independent and developing nation by focusing her creative attention on young men and women of free India is sensitive and convincing. The novel is set against political consciousness and background and it is build upon the facts of social, political and cultural history. One of the most important exhibitions of social and cultural change during post-independence era is the assertion of individual freedom and identity.

The novel *A Situation in New Delhi* crystallizes the conundrum and confronting the Indian nation sad demise of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, and the rise of simultaneous group of Nexalite, a nihilistic decadence eating into the marginalized sections of India. Edward Said surveys the lamentable situation of post-colonial nationalism and states in *Culture and Imperialism* that:

True, there has been a disturbing eruption of separatist and chauvinistic discourse, whether in India, Lebanon, Yugoslavia. . . . In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place and if everyone were to insist on the radical purity of one's voice all we would have to the din unending strife, a bloody political mess. . . . (xxxiii)

A Situation in New Delhi is retrospective throw back to the zeitgeist of this momentous time of statesmanship and a lament on the loss of the illustrious star, Shivraj. There are various facets of this undercover revolutions are unveiled through the situations of Mr. Rishad, a bright student of History in University of Delhi for promotion of revolution in the sixties.

Rishad had primarily worked in the organizing sections in a query, fixed in their time “time-stopped existence and stone-anciency” (97). In this sort of exposition of Naxalism, the novelist has attempted to create the purity and beauty in human nature, its unending possibilities and mind-boggling achievements, and impressive imagination. Sahgal quietly prioritizes the idea of revolt over revolution – an open arising of the public to express opposition and intolerance of political regimes to bring about positive changes at all levels of life. In the novel Sahgal has drawn attention to the fact that the ideologies of the revolution lies in the packets of eastern and central India were upper-caste of India like Devi's son Rishad and his companion Naren.

In this scenario, French has reinforced much earlier on the paradoxical composition of the so-called egalitarian campaign that Sahgal has highlighted: “More than forty years after the campaign of strategic of slaughter had begun, the Moist supper structure was composed of the same old types [upper class revolutionaries]. . . . Only in the middle and lower rungs of the CPI (Moist) did you find the people” (189). Sahgal's fiction deep rooted and inculcate into the ethical infirmities of an evident fanatic crusade enhances the contemporary relevance of *A Situation in New Delhi*. The communist movement all over

world got a political beating and its proponents are re-inventing themselves to fit into democratic and changing market economy.

In this text, Sahgal has juxtaposes three categories of politicians in the transforming era of 1960. First it is a political discourse on the fading lamination, like the late Prime Minister, Shivraj, who had fought for justice, dignity and freedom of his countrymen and women and worked and contented tirelessly to establish a paramount democratic tradition with secular values and a welfare state with logical and scientific learning. His success escorted in an everlasting worsening period of opportunism, hollow demagoguery sycophancy and corruption in the governmental portal —a sorrowful reversal of the vision and commitment which took birth quite naturally in the advance guard of the independence movement.

The novel is essentially the student unrest in Delhi. A group of students, led by Mr. Rashad, is involved in the acts of agitations and violence against the university in general and the Vice-Chancellor of the university in particular. Sahgal states that India is a country in continuous revolution. She also says that there are “good” and “bad” revolutions. The violent revolution of Rashad is contrasted with the passive revolution of Shivraj. The novelist represents before us a country which is caught between two worlds — the ancient and modern. Michael states that India as a “staggering old country, old and settled and structured when Britons were painting their bodies blue” (107).

The focus of this novel is on political attitudes. The conflict of goal and power which is the major issue of contemporary society has been described in a different way. The political leaders in power consider even progress as a means of gaining maximum advantage. Rashad and Usman, belong to different age group and generations are both follower of participation. They consider maximum involvement of masses for change and the importance of human participation and awareness in this process, though their methods are not matching. The entire issues are based on values values rather than on emotions and

feelings. The newly elected politicians believe in class-division. “They were for the poor and the small against the rich and the big and as proud of it as if they discovered social justice all by themselves” (21).

In *A Situation in New Delhi* the novelist has tried to analyze the politics and its consequences in its totality. In actual practice, the political events and happenings of two decades have been telescoped into the half of the time. Sahgal shows concern neither with Devi nor with Rishad but with the significance of revolution and she suggests the ways for real revolution. Devi realizes that political system has completely changed. It has diverted its direction which was there during her brother’s reign. Usman states about revolution that:

Revolutions, if they had any meaning, meant putting oneself into the crucible of change. Revolutions went on. They did not congeal in their tracks or follow beaten tracks. And people who follow loved as he died, the past, the present and the future of their country, had to be willing to change. (30)

Rishad feels that the older generation is genuinely not in a position to accept change. Subsequently, he joins the Naxalit movement to get his companion ready for violence. He fails to consider that changes in order to be significant have needed to involve public and begin with oneself. In contrast, Usman has the strength and courage to do something prominent which mostly people in power cannot do. He resigns from the post of Vice-Chancellorship; he keeps himself away from the position of power to provide right direction to agitation of students. He is of the view that what has been true for himself may not be right for the next generation. So he understands the gravity of the situation and acts accordingly.

Through this novel, Sahgal describes a different type of relationship between the people and their social deeds. The new ministers have no imagination; no idea and what is discomfit no involvement. Devi, an education minister feels totally isolation among new privilege around the cabinet table. Usman goes out

to build a new future on faith, trust and participation. Rishad and his companions show more concern and join Naxalite movement on his desire to extract some solution regarding the situation.

Within this revolutionary framework of the country strong divisive factors such as untouchability, caste and linguistic chauvinism functions at various levels. Caste is also seen a strong element in the novel. Pinky and her arrange marriage, represents and satirizes the caste system. Devi, the education minister feels inability in political domain in the period following her brother's death and is seen to question the direction the country is leading towards. Rishad, her son, a student at Delhi University, also notices stagnation in the new government and its practices. Their aims seem to produce a new social order from ashes of the old. The novel presents a disturbing realistic picture of Delhi in post-independence era. Sahgal exposes the failure of political machinery in the absence of an ideal leader. She also reveals corruption and opposition in the seemingly democratic government. There is ever need for a rededication to the values in Indian democracy in post-Nehruvian era.

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