

An Analysis of the Selected Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

Sajjad Ahmed

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English
Rabindranath Tagore University, Bhopal(M.P)

A Time to be Happy and *Storm in Chandigarh* are the two novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Her first novel *A Time to be Happy* is set against the background of Saharanpur, the very title of the novel is suggestive of socio-political consciousness in the year 1857. Written in the backdrop of post-independence era, with the locale as Saharanpur, a small town, the place was inhabited by a middle age man like the narrator in the novel. Sanad is the young hero of this novel. He is working in Selkrik and Lowe: he wants to leave his job as an officer in the firm. The narrator who breathes the social consciousness has taught her that “it was for her husband, she felt to rigid his action in the eyes of God. Like any good Hindu wife, she believed that his concern was with God and hers with God in him” (Sahgal 5). Sheela was the wife of his cousin, and Rohan Masi, the aunt was a matriarch and all of them adhered to an orthodox Hindu social consciousness; so for as the narrator himself was concerned. An altogether different social infrastructure is reflected in the depiction of the Shivpal family; Ammaji, the mother of Govind Narayan Shivpal a wealthy landowner of Lucknow, as an elderly lady of a domineering nature, in the township of Saharanpur. Sanad is a complex character of typical socio-political awakening. The socio-political consciousness took possession of Sanad’s mind when a salary lower than that paid to the British recruits was offered to him and he refused it. Selkrik and Lowe had their offices in the four storey building on Clive street in 1860. The administration of India was taken from the East India Company and the crown took over it. Mr Trent offered Sanad an insufficient amount of salary and said “that is what we start our British recruits on, but they have a different contract altogether. You must remember they leave their country to come and work out here” (Sahgal 104). Sanad was a man with national consciousness; he knew that the East India Company was the murderer of Indian workers, so he hated it as:

The East India Company as you know, monopolized the trade in Bengal killing it forever as an independent industry, Lancashire cotton flourished only because of all Indian competition was wiped out. Well, since Selkrik and Lowe its very

existence and certainly all its wealth to this monopoly, I felt the balance needed redressing (Sahgal 104).

The most powerful harbinger of socio-political consciousness is the awakening of a nation through education, duality of education system is the most harmful irony of a polity; the ruler does not want that the government should be capable of independent thinking, the political thinkers when they saw that the integrity of nation was threatened, asked the students to come out of the four walls of campus and to spread their learning among people. This is what Kautilya did when he asked the scholars to come out of Taxila University. The same was done when Gandhi invoked the intellectual power and started Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement. This has been highlighted in the novel as:

What did India need more than the enlightenment of an education? It had been the repeated fulfillment of a challenge to watch each generation of young minds forever to a love of learning and appreciation of the values that would outlast the passion and fevers of an era (Sahgal 186).

Self-identity is another significant constituent of socio-political consciousness, with this purpose in mind the novelist has created the problematic character of Sanad whose story has skillfully been recorded in the novel. He is faced with the problem of understanding what his real self is. The darkness of ignorance prevails everywhere, the lamp to the right path is to be kindled by ones own self. The political consciousness tormenting the mind is to know and understand what his country really is, and what problems the India has to face and what can Sanad do to tackle with these problems. The greatest and impregnable impediment is the aftermath of British imperialism; the tyrants who made the polo grounds, where Indians were not allowed, have to see and swallow the bitter pill to see natives taking possession and arranging rural pair there:

Sanads problem is self-identity, awareness of himself in relation to his own culture and country. His final decision is to become familiar with his own country. This rounds off the action. While the narrator concludes, after a mock dialogue with the portrait of Charles a symbol of British imperialism, moving out of the club premises (76).

Sahgals novel gives an accurate chronological account of the post independence political history upto the imposition of the emergency. It is thus that the quill of Nayantara Sahgal has made a

small divisional headquarter of Saharanpur a pioneer in the field of cottage industries of wood carving in the purani mandi, and the grass rope spinning on the Gandhian charkha still humming in Jasmore near Shakumbari shrine. The botanical gardens, have been raised to the status of horticulture research institute. Small scale hosiery factories are in plenty, the Gandhian dreams have come true.

The Storm in Chandigarh is singular by virtue of a double plot structure, so far as socio-political consciousness has been concerned. The socio-political consciousness is seen in a state of disease, ailment and neuralgia resulting in the paralysis consuming the entire system. The novel displays that the fundamental cause of the spread of violence is that it is tolerated, the irony is not that there are bad people but the good people remain silent and allow the evil to prevail. Political leaders like Gyan Singh are merciless and shrewd enough to cash upon the passivity. The Hindus have a domineering nature and thus dominate people:

A scapegoat has to be found for bad behavior. Like your great grandmother, dead three hundred people, being held responsible for strangling your neighbor... in a number of ways she is still alive. Sometimes I think it will need a tearing up by the roots to get her out of the way (Sahgal 58).

This diplomacy is the backbone of socio-political consciousness and forms the proto thesis of the novel. In the socio-political consciousness sex also does not have its negligible role to play. This is evident from the relationship of Dubey and Gauri. For a considerable period of time Dubey had been knowing her the concept of urgency by this time had melted into thin air, a friendly familiarity had replaced it, as the affair was begun in the state of mental disequilibrium it was brought to an epilogue very soon:

Affection and friendship were cultivated between him and Gauri who, he was sure would have been content to spend an evening in quiet conversation, had it ever occurred to her that such a thing was possible between the sexes (Sahgal 13).

On the municipal level of Chandigarh, the socio-political consciousness assumes the shape of bureaucratic turmoil and the evils of male chauvinism. It deals with the city passing through political turmoil and of involvements of government officials. To conclude socio-political consciousness is inconceivable without reading between lines. As a woman she gives voice to feminism or women's liberation movement. Her novels show her as a champion of modern Indian

womanhood; traditional Indian women are setting with an instinct of revolt to become like western women. According to the eminent sociologist P A Sorinkin stands for the dictum that “culture is the sum total of everything through conscious or unconscious behavior of two or more interacting individuals” (441-42). Hence, it is evident that in the verisimilitude of Shakespear’s *As You Like it*, in which love lives in many forms, the socio-political consciousness lives in the pages of Storm in Chandigarh be it political, social, economic, religious, impressionistic as the cause may be.

References:

Sahgal, Nayantara. *Storm in Chandigarh*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008.

... *A Time To Be Happy*. New Delhi: Routledge Press, 1958.

Sorinkin, P. A. *Contemporary Sociological Theories*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928.