

## Feministic Sensibility in Nayantara Sahgal's Novel: Storm in Chandigarh

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**Abstract:** *Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defining equal political, economic, and social right for women. In addition, feminism seeks to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. It aims at ensuring for womanhood freedom in all respects. Sahgal primarily deals with feminisms in most of her novels. She is a writer of feministic perspectives. This paper beautifully analyzes the feministic sensibility in the Nayantara Sahgal novel: Storm in Chandigarh. The result will be formulated on the basis of position of women and feminine sensibility, neglect of women in patriarchal society and gender disparity and longings of women in the given novel.*

**Keywords:** *woman's quest, identity, struggle, freedom, traditional, modernity and exploitation.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Storm in Chandigarh* was Nayantara Sahgal's third novel. It presents a contrast of two worlds: *the personal world of marriage and the inter-personal world of politics*. The theme is very much similar to her earlier novels. The issues that she deals with are also much similar: lack of communication and extra-marital relationships. It deals with the storm in the marital bliss for three couples: Jit and Mara, Inder and Saroj, and Vishal and Leela. Their marriages are juxtaposed against the political drama that took place in Punjab and Haryana over the ownership of Chandigarh. Therefore, similar to the previous novel, the political scenery is inspired from real-life scenarios.

The characters of the novels are shown to be traditional and modern, and how the diverging thought processes could stand in contradiction and cause trouble. The novel deals with the usual man–woman relationships along with themes such as love, education, morality, architecture and political clashes.

The novel serves as a mirror to the happenings and events during the historical partition of Indian Punjab in 1966. Written in narrative style, it has a sprinkling of emotion. It makes the readers think and ponder on the state of women. Strongly resenting the objectification of women, it seeks to rewrite the stereotypical representation of women as passive entities. Apart from women, Sahgal is highly concerned about the ethics and morality of her characters. She finds the value system becoming diluted and insignificant in contemporary India, with involvement in politics not being for the common good but personal gain.

*[...] Majority of the people are inspired and guided by the crude instincts, hunger, sex, power.*

As the name suggests, the novel is set in the city of Chandigarh. The period of the story was when Chandigarh was designated to be the capital of the newly created states of Punjab and Haryana. These states were in constant conflict with one another. During this time of crisis, Gyan Singh is shown to be the Chief Minister for Punjab and Harpal Singh for Haryana. Both were critical of each other and took juxtaposed stands. Vishal Dubey, an ICS officer in the Ministry of Home Affairs, is assigned to bring peace between the two Chief Ministers. However, he is recalled to Delhi on the death of the Home Minister, who would have sent him in the first place.

As a political novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* talks about the disintegration of human values in contemporary politics post-independence. Though India fought the British Raj based on Gandhian values, after freedom, Gandhi and his principles seem to find no space. In fact, freedom marked the death of Gandhian values. The purpose of entering politics has become tarnished with power and money becoming the order of the day. However, the novel encourages noble values and integrity in action. It condemns all who involve in vested interests from positions of power that are meant to do common good.

Sahgal shows how people who adhere to Gandhian philosophy, like Harpal Singh, have to undergo a lot of hardship while the unethical Gyan Singh seems to get his way. Harpal Singh is portrayed as an ethical and upright individual in both his personal and professional fronts. He has a nationalist vision. He understands the expectations of his people and fights for a secular, united statehood. He finds no reason to differentiate based on ethnic grounds. He is ready to embrace a multi-cultural, multi-lingual India.

However, with prevailing pressure, he has to succumb and accept the division of Punjab. Gyan Singh, in contrast, has devilish intentions, who have given up his conscience for personal gains. He is selfish and displays evil instincts. He is portrayed as an individual with no integrity and unethical. Gyan Singh's popularity is the result of cheap gimmicks. He emotionally blackmails the public to gain popularity. He resorts to all unscrupulous means to retain power, using money and muscle power to achieve his ends. It is under such unethical environment that Harpal Singh has to accept defeat.

The Union Minister is also portrayed as an individual adhering to Gandhian principles. He is the personification of integrity and justice. He yearns to achieve his goals in a non-violent manner. Witnessing the deadlock between the Chief Ministers, he anticipates trouble in the future and so sends Vishal Dubey to bring about reconciliation. To calm the brewing storm, Vishal Dubey tries to bring about a peaceful resolution. However, on his deputation to Chandigarh, he finds himself in the eye of the storm.

Vishal Dubey represents a competent officer in a corrupt, bureaucratic system. The Union Minister shows full faith in his prodigy to resolve the crisis. Vishal Dubey too believes in oneness of the nation and is against the division of a state. His strong belief in the Indian institution and integrity of the state makes him the ideal candidate to resolve the issue at a human level. The Union Minister dies at the end of the story, signifying the death of Gandhian values. From a common man's perspective, the people of Chandigarh yearn for:

*second chance, a starting from scratch.*

Nevertheless, their dreams are shattered as there seem no signs of peace among the warring factions. For them, the leadership of both Punjab and Haryana has let them down. Sahgal draws relevance to other parts of India, where selfish people seem to be finding in roads in all spheres of life.

Sahgal finely depicts how some of the evil is spread by sex, hunger and power. Gyan Singh is representative of how evil can overshadow goodness (represented by Harpal Singh). This political backdrop serves as a setting for personal stories. Apart from the storm in the state, there is an ongoing personal storm in the lives of three couples. Sahgal is against the roles set for women by society. She strongly opposes the notion that women are only meant to do household chores, raise children and have no self-identity of their own. Sahgal highlights the importance of ethics and values in both the political and personal fronts. Iftikhar Hussaine Lone sums up the dream of Nayantara Sahgal as follows:

*[...] pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness. (Lone, 2015)*

This fictional creation artistically deals with the realities in the political scenario of India in the late sixties, depicting the deterioration of moral values in the public, personal and private spheres of life.

## 2. FEMINISTIC APPROACH IN STORM IN CHANDIGARH

*Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) pleads for an innovative marital morality based on shared trust, deliberation, openhandedness and nonexistence of pretense, selfishness and self-centeredness. It deals with multifaceted human relationships in which love, friendship, uprightness, freedom and fairness

play a vivacious role. The characters in the novel conduct themselves modernly but at the same time do not segregate themselves entirely from tradition. This merger of tradition and modernity can be detected in their approach to love, morality, education, man–woman associations and even architecture.

Nayantara Sahgal portrays married couples with no emotional communion between them, in spite of their several years of married life with having children. Saroj signifies the new woman who is trying to preserve her individuality and breathe liberally in the overpowering atmosphere of passionless and unfulfilling marriages and to live in self-respect, thus indirectly challenging a re-alignment of the constraints on which marriage functions. She is a person who prizes mutual trust, contemplation, honesty, communication and absence of pretence in a relationship. She is thoroughly truthful to Inder and her honesty in marital relationship can be judged from the fact that she even admits about her pre-marital relationship to him with the intention of looking forward to a clean break from the past. But this confession essentially dooms their marriage.

Inder keeps on tormenting her mentally and physically ever since her confession. Inder embodies the traditional patriarchal attitude of society toward woman which puts high premium on female chastity and virginity before marriage. The double standards of patriarchal morality are visible from the fact that Inder who wants to make Saroj feel 'ashamed' of her pre-marital affair, himself has many sexual involvements before marriage. But women have no right to question male promiscuity or indulge in practices which are deliberated to be male prerogatives.

Saroj represents the modern women who want to institute a new order with changed standards, where they can be true to themselves and where character is adjudged by the purity of heart and not chastity of body. Saroj's longing for acceptance, communication, honesty, freedom and lack of pretence in a relationship draws her near Vishal Dubey who totally shares her emotional desires.

Jit and Mira is another couple in the novel. They too suffer a similar dilemma. They are a childless couple who grieve from the emotional void in their life. The exploration for communication makes Mira come towards Inder. In her relationship with Inder, Mira arouses his mind and involves him in ways no woman ever has. Their relationship comes to an end when the understanding advents on Mira that there is some part of Inder which she could never completely aware of it, in spite of her best efforts.

Sahgal shows women's grief in marriage life and the courage to come out of the suffocating bondage by favoring divorce. Sahgal displays of the dilemma women trapped between traditional conventions regarding womanhood and the stimulations of individuality very suddenly and skillfully. Women are also entities and marriage is a partnership, not an institution. But the whole social set-up is geared towards the command of men over women, whether it is marriage, sexual relationships, child birth and even adultery. Always, it is the woman who is victimized. The day women are acknowledged as equal partners, a new age would begin.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The primary responsibility is that of encouraging the emancipation of women. Women are oppressed even during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. The failure of marital relationships, the solitude of living and private horrors is the matters of great concern. Women characters grieve because they refuse to submerge their individuality and adhere to their personal identity at all costs.

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