

Political Consciousness in Nayantara Sahgal's Novel 'Rich Like Us': An Overview

Mr. Nitin Keshaorao Wasnik

(Assistant Professor of English), Shivramji Moghe College, Pandharkawada Distt. Yavatmal

Abstract:

Recently, Indian English Literature has attributed a wide recognition in both India and abroad. It has attained a distinct place in the literary sphere of the world. It has also made a significant contribution to the development of world's English Literature. Novel, a new genre came to India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a voice of Indians. The new literature is characterized by Indian themes, Indian reality and Indian sensibility on a large scale. Today, this literature born in Indian soil acclaimed widely because of its sensible contents, heart-touching appeals, and an earnest for liberation. There are distinct Indian novelist who reflect India in their novels. Nayantara Sahgal is called a political novelist. She is one of the first female Indo- Anglian novelists to receive wide recognition. Being a member of Nehru –Gandhi family, the second daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sister of Jawaharlala Nehru, witnessed the struggle for freedom of the nation. She has been concerned with the plight and problems of the people in the country. Sahgal has been greatly influenced by an ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru. Mahatma Gandhiji and Nehru played a very important role in Struggle for Indian Freedom. Hence, most of her novel depicted the historical events, incidents which she experienced, observed and sensed herself. She emphasizes on women empowerment and reformations of the society. She imbibed political ideology from her environment which proved a rich material for her novels. Her family members were actively involved in the struggle for freedom. She herself confessed in her autobiographical work, '*Prison and Chocolate Cake*' "Our growing up was India's growing up into political maturity".¹ There is a fundamental relation between the novels of Sahgal and politics. As we know literature is a reflection of author's feelings and contemporary society. Sahgal's works link features and phases of India's cultural, political and social history into the themes. She presents characters with hope and courage. They disclose their views, experience and sharp vision in their daily life. Thus an attempt has been made in this paper to explore and analyze political consciousness in 'Rich Like Us'. Nayantara Sahgal is much concerned with the battered situation of the nation at the present. It was her initiative to return the Sahitya Akademi Award in protest of rising intolerance in the country. She returned the honor after the murders of writers like Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh.

Keywords – consciousness, Gandhian Ideology, politics, corruption, literature, liberation, independence, reflection,

Introduction –

Nayantara Sahgal is the most distinguished Indo- Anglian novelist in the Independent India. Her writings reflect various issues of national importance. She is the prolific political novelist in India and the recipient of prestigious Sahitya Academi Award for her novel '*Rich Like Us*'. Most of her novels are woven round some important political events. Nayantara Sahgal recalls the patriotism, selfishness and sacrifices of freedom fighters before and after the partition of India. She also focuses the contemporary politicians who are shameless and greedy for power. Sahgal brought up in Anand Bhavan, an important center for Indian Freedom Movement. Hence, she witnessed many incidents and placed them in her novels. she was placed in an environment where the political and personal life were inseparable. Her family – parents, cousins, uncles and aunts were actively involved in the Indian Freedom struggle and were at the centre of India's politics. Sahgal herself confessed in her autobiography '*Prison and Chocolate*'

"Our growing up was India's growing up into political maturity-a different kind of political maturity from any the world had seen before based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace."¹ (Prison and Chocolate, p-15)

Sahgal has greatly been influenced by the thoughts of Nehru and Mahatma Gandhiji. She has successfully transmitted personal experience into a general one. Sahgal is of the opinion that 'everything around the writer is material for a novel.' She enriched with the first-hand knowledge of India's politics, and the intense personal experience. In all her works there are two worlds the personal world of man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. Nayantara Sahgal was born one of the eminent and political families. Hence, she has been deeply influenced by Gandhian thoughts and ideology. Most of her novels are enriched with political upheavals and disruption. Hence, her novels concern with the conflicting attitude of idealism and materialism in the post-independent of India. As we all know, Literature cannot remain away from the socio-political background. Nayantara Sahgal has tremendously influenced by the thoughts and action of the Indian Freedom Fighters. More importantly, as we have read, her entire family was involved in the freedom struggle. Hence, her novels are authentic material for the knowledge about socio-political movements. Moreover, politics is the part and parcel for her novels.

The writings of Nayantara Sahgal deal with a wide gamut of themes ranging from personal dilemma of problems to Indian freedom struggle. Her female protagonists are affected by the political disruption in the country. Sahgal depicts the happenings behind the political bureaucratic curtains and her novels project a chronological account of Indian politics from the last phase of the freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in mid-seventies. 'She herself explained that politics is embedded in her bones and marrow.'²(Dr. Verma Puja, 'Nayantara Sahgal, Political Reality and Literature' Yking Books:2018) Hence, we must say Sahgal is the novelist to treat the political issues of the time. Politics is an integral part of her writings. Thus Sahgal's novels present the problem situations of Indian politics and provide remedies for the same. She does not leave the characters in her novels without instructing a system of freedom and liberation with a strong urge for humanistic concern which can bring a drastic change in the present situations. Sahgal very intellectually places and develops the plots of her novels with an influence of an ideology of Mahatma Gandhiji. It was an impact of the thoughts of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sahgal turns towards the political themes for her novels. She is a patriotic novelist among all the female Indian novelists in English literature. She presents very courageous women who do not wish to follow the traditional ways of womanhood. On the contrary, her women characters break the chains of slavery which kept them within the four walls of the house. But we find that these individuals are disturbed with the political upheavals and chaos in the country. Such reflections appear in Sahgal's novels time and again. She often recalls the principles of Mahatma Gandhiji at the time of political chaos occurred in the nation. There are some novels of Sahgal which reflect political consciousness on a large scale.

Objectives :

1. To focus the involvement of Sahgal's family members in struggle for freedom movement
2. To study political consciousness in Sahgal's novels
3. To focus Gandhian Ideology in Sahgal's novel 'Rich Like Us'
4. To observe the influence of Gandhiji on Nayantara Sahgal
5. To illustrate the reflections Politics in Sahgal's novels
6. To study the various genre of literature and characterization.
7. To analyze the characters and plot development from novels of Nayantara Sahgal

Research Methodology :

Descriptive research method has been used for this paper.

Data Collection :

The data has been furnished from the primary sources, related articles, books and novels. The secondary sources have also been used for writing a paper.

A Glance towards Some of Sahgal's Novels –

'*Storm in Chandigarh*' – This is the very famous novel of Nayantara Sahgal which gives a picture of political turmoil over the issues of the two newly emerged states of Hindi-speaking Haryana and the Punjabi speaking Punjab. The partition leads to the quarrel over boundaries, water, and electricity. Sahgal presents the two chief ministers for the states. In these ministers one follows the Gandhian ways to tackle the issue in

the state. On the other hand, the Chief Minister of Haryana, Harpal Singh wants Gyan Singh to discuss the issues occurred due to partition with friendly and amicably. He believes that Gandhian ideology can keep the balance between the two states. The important thing is that the lives of common individuals are disturbed due to political upheavals. Sahgal points out that the political turmoil spoils the lives of Saroj and Inder as well as Mara and Jit. These couples are greatly worried about their prospects due to political disruption in the state.

Similarly, Sahgal's other novel, '*Plans for Departure*' also presents a political consciousness at a large scale. Besides, the novel '*Mistaken Identity*' also presents a clear picture of political turmoil in the country. In this novel, Bhushan Singh is in jail, facing the charges of attempt to overturning the British rule. This novel mirrors colonialism in India. '*This Time of Morning*' gives sufficient discourse about political effects in lives of individuals. In the book '*Nayantara Sahgal – Political Reality and Literature*' quotes:

Nayantara Sahgal's approach to political and personal problems is based on Gandhian Values.² (p-6)

Gandhiji brought a drastic change in the Indian scenario by making the people not only politically conscious but also politically active. In '*The Day in Shadow*' Sahgal presents a number of incident which have a glimpse of political consciousness. In this novel, Raj Garg, a young independent member of parliament follows Gandhian ways towards life. In this novel, Sahgal seems to retreat from Gandhian ideals in the contemporary political situation. In '*A Situation in New Delhi*' Devi is a minister in the Union Cabinet and her son Rishad tries to find salvation for himself and his generation through political methods. Usman leads a non-violent movement in this novel. Gandhian ideology reflects in every novel of Nayantara Sahgal. She is closely connected to political situations and its consequences on human beings lives. The very important novel of Sahgal '*Rich Like Us*' is replete with politics in the nation. This is work for which Sahgal received Sahitya Academi Award which she returned in 2015 in protest of intolerance in the country.

Rich Like Us –

The novel '*Rich Like Us*' is a historical and political fiction novel by Sahgal. This is completely focused on Emergency occurred in 1975. It is set in New Delhi. Sahgal presents how the political environment bears down upon the lives of two female protagonists Rose and Sonali. The political turmoil has been described throughout the novel very skillfully. According to some critics the novel teems with the actualities of life in India. The realism reflects in the novel. Sahgal's one of the main aspect of fiction is her traditional faith and attitude to politics and personal relationship. '*Rich Like Us*' offers an authentic picture of India under Emergency in 1975. The Emergency affects the lives of common people in India. The plot depicts the breakdown of Indian socio-political ethos, corruption, the past and the cruel tradition of Sati and the political upheavals due to emergency. Sonali Ranade, a civil servant in the Ministry of Industry. She fights against the malice in the bureaucratic hierarchy in the Government sector. Here, Sonali portrayed with high courage and empowered with broad intellectual capacity. Sahgal succeeded to portray a courageous, strong woman in this novel. But the politics and politician or bureaucracy tries to victimize her despite she discharges her responsibility with sense of patriotism. She expresses:

"The emergency had finished my career, but suddenly I did not want a career in the crumbling unprofessionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus Emergency"³ (P-32)

Sonali responded Emergency with hatred. She expressed her innermost thoughts to Saroj, a wife of Ram. Sonali thinks the officers are corrupt and cheaters than the common people. Nayantara Sahgal invests reality as a springboard to realize her vision of fulfillment in the life of her characters. She recalls the spirit of freedom through the consciousness of her characters. The novelist projects a social – political reality at two levels the level of the masses and the level of an individual. In this novel, there is also a female character who wins sympathy of the readers at very high level. Rose reveals her integrity towards India. She gets married with Ram, a rich businessman. She suffers a lot due to Emergency.

Dev, son of Ram makes a forgery in the bank. He makes a duplicate signature of his father and withdraws all the money. In this malice activity, he is supported by the bank manager. The novel depicts how corruption takes place in administration and how political power absorbs all these. Sahgal has been

influenced by Pandit Nehru in political stance. She mentions partition, corruption, emergency, independence at several places in the novel. She reminds the motivational words of Nehru in 1947 :

“At the stroke of the midnight hour, While the world sleeps,
India will awake to life and freedom”.³ (P-186)

‘*Rich Like Us*’ also highlights the old custom of Sati. Thus politics is presented in art through the medium of living man and woman and their actions. The novel is so much interspersed with political dialectics out of harmony with fictional context that one cannot help seeing beyond the curtain. Puja Verma in her book on Nayantara Sahgal says Rabindranath Tagore asserts that political consciousness in India get molded as nationalism under the direct impact of and as a reaction to the English rule. The spreads of political concern was the consequence rather than the cause of the political struggle for freedom.² (p-12) On the other hand, the novelist concentrates in this novel on the artistic value of violence in the context of political events. On the whole, it perhaps the best authentic political novel with a striking ambivalence in its artistic import ever published by an Indian novelist in English. Sahgal concerns herself for a particular situation with specific point of view and presents it very intellectually with extreme care. Hence her novels are measured with a political scale keeping in view the Gandhian ideology and Indian Freedom struggle as well as Colonialism in India.

Conclusions –

Puja Verma mentions in her critique on ‘Nayantara Sahgal Political Reality and Literature’ “Nayantara considers her novels to be political in content and intention and in her view each of the novels more or less reflects the political era we were passing through. The use of political genre is one of the main aspects of her novels”.² (p-122) Sahgal holds a unique place as a writer of political novels in Indian literature. As a novelist she not only mirrors the political situations but explores measures to tackle the socio-political turmoil occurred due to bureaucracy or politicians. Nayantara recalls the ideology put by Mahatma Gandhiji and Pandit Jawaharlala Nehru and her parents. She wants women empowerment in the country. Therefore, her women characters in the novels rebel against the injustice in society. She cannot tolerate intolerance by the hands of politicians in Government. She makes efforts to tackle the issues in society. Sahgal returned the Sahitya Academi Award which she had received for the novel ‘*Rich Like Us*’ protesting the increasing intolerance in the country. Moreover, her novels have reflections of Freedom Struggle of India at various places. Her protagonists fight for the liberation of India. Sahgal tries to unite the Indians against the injustice, corruption, mal-practice, selfishness, exploitation, upheavals through the characters she portrayed in her novels. Hence, it is concluded that her major contribution to the art of fiction in Indian English writing is the genesis of the political novel in its present form. Her main contribution has been her concern with politics. She has developed the scope of the political novel, widening its area of content. In her one interview she explored that politics is an integral part of human beings.

Work Cited and References –

1. Sahgal, Nayantara, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, London : Victor Gollauz, 1963, p-15.
2. Verma, Puja, *Nayantara Sahgal, Political Reality and Literature*, Yking Books : 2018, p-12,122.
3. Sahgal, Nayantara, *Rich Like Us*, London: William Heinemann, 1985, p-32,186
4. Jain, Jasbir, *The Politics of Hinduism in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal*, Littercrit, 2, 1976,
5. Sahgal, Nayantara, *Storm in Chandigarh*, London: Chato & Windus,, 1969.
6. Sahgal, Nayantara, *Mistaken Identity*, London: William Heinemann, 1988.
7. Sahgal, Nayantara, *A Time to Be Happy*, New Delhi: Sterling Paperback, 1975
8. Sahgal, Nayantara, *Plans for Departure*, London: Heinemann, 1986.