



Battle of power: A critical assessment of corrupt politics in Nayantara Sahgal's Novel *A situation in New Delhi*.

Arif Mohd Shah

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ABSTRACT

The present paper operates on Nayantara Sahgal's novel *A situation in New Delhi* and attempts to examine critically the corrupt force behind attainment of Power. Nayantara Sahgal's novels are steeped in the political ambience of the times. It is quite implicit to call her an outstanding Indian-English Political novelist. An interesting fact about her is that she is a journalist and has distinguished herself as a political columnist. She not only belongs to a family which has been at the forefront of politics in India but also has had the privilege of being in close contact with her Mamu Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, Mahatma Gandhi and various other national and international political leaders of great eminence. Their influence especially that of her Mamu, has shaped her political consciousness. The novelist endeavors to measure the downfall of Indian politics in the days of emergency from the height of Gandhian and Nehruian principles and philosophy. The protagonists in her novels are highly disguised versions of the living politicians holding important positions in the government. Her proximity to political power has enabled her to project the kaleidoscopic view of the political changes in the country. She indeed is the ring-side view of the happenings behind the political and bureaucratic curtains. This paper while mirroring the trans-temporal and trans-spatial appeal of the novel will particularly focus on the battle for power in the backdrop of corrupt politics.

Key words: *Authoritarianism, Blood- Bath, Non-Voilece, Power Crisis, Self-fulfilment.*

INTRODUCTION:

Being a sojourner in the corridors of power she is thoroughly acquainted with the political scenes, happenings and maneuverings. It is debatable to call Nayantara Sahals novels political novels. Morris E. Spear defines political novel to be affective work "*in which the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of personages who maintain Government or of forces which constitute government.*" (Spear, ix)

Nayantara Sahgal does not propound any political ideology nor is she a propagandist for any political cause. She is not committed to any political or social reform. However, she not only writes about the political situation of her times, she also foregrounds it. The protagonists in her novels are highly disguised versions of the living politicians holding important positions in the government of the country. She knows the pre- and post-



independence scenario intimately and presents a living picture of it in her novels *A Time to be Happy* and *This Time of Morning*. The former is “a political novel, a chronicle of the India National Movement while the latter is about the post-Independence India. But within the ambit of the political theme, the novelist also brings out the hypocrisy and corruption of anglicized people, the magic of Gandhi, the gulf between the politicians of the old and new order.

Similarly *The Day in Shadow* and *A Situation in New Delhi* tell the tale of India after Nehru and Gandhi but they also highlight the theme of violence and corruption, the rise of self-seeking politicians, violent unrest on the campus and the war cries of the Naxalites. *Rich Like Us* is a class apart from others. The tone of the novel is harsh and bitter and the novelist appears to be deeply hurt by Emergency which is the main theme of the novel. The attack on the authoritarian rule, however, gathers in itself the theme of the natural inclination towards dynasty rule, the breaking down of the steel-frame of administration i.e. bureaucracy and unprincipled self-seeking and unmitigated sycophancy. *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity* are not very significant as political novels. However, they vividly render some of the stirring political events in India before independence like 1908 Tilak trail, rise of Gandhi as a towering political leader, the support of the Congress for Khilafat movement and the British suppression of revolutionary activities. Thus, political happenings and various issues and questions associated with them form the first thematic pattern in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

Objectives:

- 1) Analysis of trans-temporal and trans-spatial appeal.
- 2) Supremacy of money over man.
- 3) Contemporary politics and cult for power.

Novel under surgery: A critical Assessment of Corrupt Politics.

The novel *A Situation In New Delhi* looks on the Nehruvian era with anguished concern and nostalgia. It describes contemporary India's corrupt politics and politicians written with an insider's eye for the telling detail and the veiled nuance. Nayantara sahgal exposes the ugly facets of political corruption in this novel at the time when it was felt by people but never made big public issues. The novel is a biting expose of corruption in body politic particularly in bureaucracy and in politics. There is, by and large, to put it in the words of Jasbir Jain, ‘an atmosphere of greed and irresponsibility.’ (*Jasbir*, 142). It is about Jawaharlal Nehru in the guise of Shivraj and his sister Ms. Vijaylaksmi Pandit under the fictional name of Devi. Though she does not put it in so many words, the P.M. she refers to in the novel very well fits in with Mrs. Indira Gandhi with who she and her mother had serious differences. The novelist has been very intimate with her Mamu, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and has lots of love and admiration for him. She draws a telling portrait of Nehru as a statesman and individual, his ideals and his working as Congressman and first P.M of independent India. There are three major perspectives on Shivraj: Michael Calvcr't's, Devi's and Usman Ali's. For Michael Shivraj was a natural and charismatic leader not only of India but also of Asia.



For that, far ahead of an Asian actuality, was what he had been: a symbol of the fight against colonial rule, a hero who had resurrected a legend so much of Asia shared and given it modern meaning renouncing gilded ease to sleep on prison planks. A leader, at least is an inspiration, of so many beyond his own borders. (ASND, 06)

The novelist observes a sacred bond between Shivraj and his people. They believed him and hold him high in their eyes. Shivraj in turn also had all the sympathy for them without palpable design. To put it in the words of Michael again,

And for Indians, a man who took the people with him on uncharted journeys, on the frail, unbreakable, so very unpolitical bond of trust .. A politician who till the day he died had never learned to make a political speech or to trim his sails by the exigencies of politics. No spell weaver himself, he had never trusted the breed. The spells he had woven had been unintended Like it or not. (ASND, 06)

Usman Ali Vice Chancellor of Delhi University intensely misses the presence of Shivraj. He considered him a precious gift from God, who would all the time put things in motion. The most precious gift according to him, Shivaraj had was “the gift of putting things in perspective.” (ASND, 28) He considers it to be the main task of the leadership.

To gather up the facts and the discouragement and place it where it could be seen against the whole the past, the future. To assemble the broken fragments and light up their possibilities to tell the cripple, take up the bed and walk, to resurrect the dead. Leadership did not join the ferment, scream with the mob. Leadership led. (ASND, 28)

Devi is deeply attached to her brother. She thinly she has a duty to Shivaraj. “It is almost religion. Without it, my life would have no meaning.” (ASND, 55)

She thinks that in some ways “he lived through me.” (ASND, 56)

She has a very high opinion of her brother, whose absence cannot be filled by any other person in her life.

Shivaraj was both rest and excitement, new and familiar, longing and fulfillment, and, for her, the way men could be hence, when the planet evolved a finer breed. (ASND, 75)

In fact all the three consider Shivraj as a human being who had a blend of both humanity and divinity. Michael becomes poetic while describing the charmed circle of Shivraj:

With them he entered light and warmth, an atmosphere where feelings were ardent and arguments reached height never before scaled. They were friends who lived on each other, their lives continuously touching as if they could not have enough of each other's company.

(ASND, 85)



Michael might value Shivrajs large vision, Usman his gift of putting things in perspective and Devi his ability to permeate the inner being of an individual and all the three might agree that he gave the country a new direction and put it on the path of freedom and happiness, the fact remains that he did not succeed to the extent he should have succeeded as a politician, as a leader who could ensure that after him the country would not deflect from the path along which he himself walked with the teeming millions. This, however, has already happened. Shivraj is dead, not only physically, but in the terms of influence and impact on the people. He is dead even in their money:

And Shivraj, said Michael to himself, is dead. He had not believed it even on the day in London when he had read the news and mourned his physical passing, and certainly not as he breathed life into Shivraj's personality day by day through the pages of his book Yet now, here in his country, he knew Shivraj was dead, for there is no one more dead than the ignored and forgotten. (ASND, 110)

A Situation in New Delhi emphasizes the truth that Shivraj was dead not only to his enemies but also to his followers soon after his death. Usman laments the fact that it were not Shivraj's enemies who were undoing what he had done. It were his friends, his followers, those who had written pearls of praise to him. Devi also realizes that,

Shivraj's successors, playing at revolution, have set the clock back dangerously. All the sovereign forces that bring change and improvement and mellowness in the curse of time have been cut off Perhaps deliberately. (ASND, 16)

Shivraj's death gave rise to censorship and authoritarianism, a prelude to the Emergency imposed on the country by Indira Gandhi. Sur Humphery, a foreigner, feels that there a general drill in the direction of more controls over newspapers, films, books and so on, more censorship though it isn't defined. His death also opened the floodgates of violence, undoing of quality education and pursuance of populist but harmful policies and practices in the name of social justice. Violence erupted in the late sixties and early seventies as a result of the need to rebuild society. Perhaps people found the ideals of Nehru inadequate; perhaps they became disillusioned with his concept of democracy perhaps as Usman Ali realizes it was of no use t cling to the ideals of Shivraj in a society which was in need of change.

Revolution went on. They did not get congealed in their tracks or follow beaten tracks. And people who loved as he did, the past, the present and the future of their country, had to be willing to change. But need for change does not necessarily require the type of violence which has been associated with the Naxalite movement, the type if violence which Naren and Rishad advocate in this novel and which is aptly described in the following words:

This was the violence of the 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 the new social order arise. (ASND, 58)



Ironically enough one of the advocates of this cult of violence is Rishad, Shivarajs own nephew, son of his own sister Devi. Naren might have some justification for becoming a Naxalite leader though he too was a Ph.D. from Harvard but Rishad having never felt any pangs of poverty was swayed only by ideological compulsions. Rishad is not one of those hypocritical and self-centered followers of Nehru who turned their back on him the moment they felt he was dying. He is a passionate believer in social change and wants to create Indian Utopia. He becomes involved with other mens misery and lays down his life. Shivraj in spite of all his charisma did not accelerate the speed of social change to the really desirable limit and it brought about the death of Rishad.

Another facet of violence of those days was rampant students` violence. A girl is raped. When Usman Ali as Vice-Chancellor expels the culprits, there is a violent agitation in which he himself is hurt. The whole education system is in a mess. A person like Usman Ali, who was the ideal person to preside over the destiny of a University like Delhi, finds himself irrelevant in the new situation in Delhi. He has submitted a plan about education, in which, with infinite care, he took the prevailing educational pattern apart and in prose approaching literary flourish had put it together again. In this plan,

He had suggested outlets for skill and training before university age and drilled neat holes in current theories about higher education being everyone's inalienable right. He had recommended an end to the weed-burst of new universities and frees functioning of those that existed. (ASND, 114)

His document is rejected because it does not fit in with the book of rules and the burning concern for the masses. Though violence is the result of the end of an era, of the prevailing circumstances in the country and of the increasing dominance of the leftist ideology, the novelist does not approve of it. She feels that change is necessary but not violence, revolution is necessary but not bloodbath. She speaks through Usman Ali when he says,

The state owns the big guns. Any confrontation with it, if it is succeed, must be non violent. There never was another way. Besides, do you realize it is the only way most people in this country understand and will give their allegiance to? (ASND,116)

Sahgal dwells upon the political and social changes faced by a young country. Thus within the ambit of political theme, the novelist brings out the hypocrisy and corruption of the old and new order politicians to the surface. The novel in fact tells the tale of the rise of self- seeking politicians who build a steel- frame of administration and unmitigated sycophany.

II.CONCLUSION

Nayantara Sahgal is an exemplary writer of the contemporary India society. Her engagement with the human conditions of modern civilization is politically realistic. In this novel we find an honest and authentic description of uneasiness and pang of doubt about moral conduct were emotions are sharpened and brightened by her personal experiences having direct affinity with authorities. For these, Sahgal selects investigations and



judgments for her nearest associates: politicians, officials in power, the business and diplomatic magnets. By using these characters in the framework of imaginary legends, Sahgal clearly reveals sinister happenings taking place in the corridors of power, in the guest rooms of diplomats and in the anterooms of parliaments. Thus the novel under discussion describes the problems arising out of clash between junior and senior officers, quarrel for government posts, hunger for identity and the rampant corruption.

The only abbreviation used, (ASND) stand for “A Situation in New Delhi”

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