

**A Study of Political Space in Nayantara Sahgal's
*Storm In Chandigarh***

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Abstract

Space has become an agenda very much, and Michael Foucault is much cited these days. There is an empirical shift from the temporal to the spatial. The Spatial turn has elevated the place of action, the character's approach, intimacy and a sense of the space in the narrative equally important, interpretative and communicative to the readers, for which the writer strives throughout the text. *The Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines space as "The container of everyday life and an active agent in it". Space is not something that has suddenly come into existence in literary theories but it exists from the days of Aristotle as *Topos* and *Chora*. If space is defined as a realm without meaning then place has human invested meaning. Many of the literary resources like social, political, economic issues are the off-shoots of the spatial phenomenon. The issues of nationalism, colonialism, post colonialism, gender, urbanism, eco-criticism etc. are the result of either dislocation or disturbed stabilisation of the inhabitants. According to Henry Lefebvre any search for space in literary text will find everywhere, and in every guise - enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated at etc. Of the forces conditioning space politics and power are the greatest. This paper aims at identifying a promising avenue of enquiry that seeks to explore the connections between space and politics with reference to Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*

Keywords: Nayantara Sahgal, *Storm in Chandigarh*, Space, Political Space.

Space is not a mere geographic location, but an active agent that designs the social relations and in turn the society conditions space. Space shape events and we learn from history that space itself is a product of political activity. When space is inhibited it transcends from being a mere objective geometric latitude positioning to a subjective, emotional and meaningful sphere to the inhabited. The Spatial turn has elevated the place of action, the character's approach, intimacy and a sense of the space in the narrative equally important, interpretative and communicative to the readers, for which the writer strives throughout the text. *The Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines Space as "the container of everyday life and an active agent in it..." Many of the social, political and economic issues that have become increasingly central in the literary studies have spatial dimension including- nationalism, colonialism, gender, sexuality, urbanism, eco poetics etc.

lights For instance the geographic location 33°52'18.627"N and 74°53'57.7536"E mean nothing but when it is named Pulwama, it means a lot to the Indians today. The name reminds of terror and threat to the entire nation. Thus an event endows meaning and shapes space. Thus spatial approach is the new dimension of unlocking the writer's perceived meaning of the text. Nayantara Sahgal is one of the earlier writers who put India in the literary world map. Her genealogy gifted her with the opportunity to move with the great Indian leaders and witness the historical freedom movement, riots, hartals and the whole independent period closely which form the stuff of her narratives. Thus her narratives are highly charged with spatial meaning. It's time to move Sahgal from the worn-out foci of feminist, historical, and political angles and study under the spatial.

Of the forces conditioning space politics and power are the greatest. Politics is thoroughly spatial and space is thoroughly political. It makes a Utopia or Distopia of it. Space is more a product of political conflict and competing political discussion. Borders are the sites where the inextricable links between space and politics crystallise more clearly bringing their intrications sharply into focus. Almost all the issues are about who is the 'insider' and the 'outsider'. Thus the study of political space is the study of a concept through which we analyse the world in order perhaps to highlight inadequacies, inequalities and deficiencies of democracy.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the earliest writers who put India in the literary world map. She was opportune to move with the great builders of the nation, witness the freedom movement, riots and hartals. She witnessed the becoming of the nation and also the aftermath massacre called partition- a catastrophe of the millions, a division of the social fabric and an end of communally shared territory. Her third novel *Storm in Chandigarh* is about the repetition of the massacre just after twenty years of the nation's recovery from the trauma - Indo- Pak fracture. The novel is about the partition of Punjab as Punjab and Haryana on the linguistic and religious grounds.

Chandigarh the jewel crown of Punjab, a planned city designed by Le Caubeshire, to replace Lahore of Pakistan after partition becomes the centre of claim for both the newly formed states. Thus the novel is about the rescaling of the territory into two political autonomies. On the other hand the novel also finds Delhi the identity of the nation -conditioning the life of many and is shrunk into a mere alley of cocktail parties and receptions. Both the places are politically conditioned and in turn influence the life of many that inhibit them.

The political storm, the political battle between Gyan Singh the Chief Minister of Punjab and Harpal Singh the Chief Minister of Haryana is to shape the space and in turn shape the lives of Vishal Dubey, a capable I.C.S. officer chosen to be sent to Chandigarh because of his powers of persuasion so that he may enable the Government to take one step ahead- hold on and wait. The Home Minister feels that Dubey has the capacity to counsel patience. This geographical configuration is power operated and it is to dislocate and disturb the stabilisation of the characters.

Chandigarh - newly built - has nothing to share and people have come there with something new they have to offer it. In all these years there had been no open conflict between state governments though there had been disagreements, now they have the will and the organisation to

risk an open threat. Gyan Singh the labour party leader operates the trauma. Both the states claim the central power of Chandigarh. The opening lines of the novel captures the frequency of the political power that operates the spatial structure of the nation and the state – “*violence lies close to the surface of Punjab. Violence has become a part of their routine*”. (p.1). This power propelled climate of the state soon to become the climate of the entire nation – “*violence lies close to the surface of everywhere*” – the dystopian ,ugly temperament of the country.

The map of India was becoming a welter of separate, sensitive identities resurrected after the independence due to the political rivalries which cease to even bargain. Gyan Singh threatens to show his strength by launching a crippling strike which is just a showdown , not a mass movement that ends in the attack of the Gandhian Harpal Singh. It a stance of how power in the wrong hand is manipulated for the personal cause. “*the labour legislation is making monstrous of labours and the congress party splitting*”- (p.18)

The strike reminds Vishal Dubey of his visit to the border district between Utter Pradesh and Punjab back in 1947 during the world’s greatest displacement called partition which was conditioned and structured by the political powers. This politically operated geographic configuration of a territory shattered the lives of millions. The political storm in Chandigarh is not a problem of two states but of two powers- that is to reshape the borders and the bonds and leave a mere bandage of fracture and pain. It is a state of the degenerated politics into a squabble. Harpal Singh recalls his escape from Jhelum during the partition and how a huge man took him to Delhi at the cost of everything that he had. Harpal Singh finds the very same man has joined the Congress, become a heartless thug murdering the poor huntsman for agitating to clear the area, later grown up to the status of the Chief Minister of Punjab – Gyan Singh. The murder of the huntsman for a piece of land had been haunting Harpal Singh and the memory has become the mode of his life. Similarly Dubey is haunted by the memory of the murder of the former Chief Minister of Punjab when he visits Kairon. These places are hand-cuffed with the memories of some trauma caused by the political activities. The events carve an identity scar, with which it is remembered and looked at. That space becomes inseparable from the conscience and the pain. Every space is conditioned by the social, political and economic structure and relation. Space as a container of events absorbs the referential force of the events.

On the other hand Delhi, the top drawer for the administrative service has become a lounge for cocktail parties, downgraded leisure and small talks. Dubey and Kachru from the same ilk, training and tradition upon whom is rested the onus of the transition are divided by nauseating hypocrisy. Delhi has become the dump house of the memories of Dubey’s married life with Leela which was a failure from where he wants to escape. In turn Chandigarh the jewel of the crown for the political powers and their battles to win it has made it a dungeon for Inder, Saroj, Jit and Mara, the ill-matched couple. Chandigarh becomes the object of the political battle and victim, a haunting reminder of the nation’s past and that can never be a whole. Dubey, himself being a pastiche of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah tries to patch the fissure. History is repeated- the political powers remap, rescale the territory as well as the lives. This repetition reminds that it may not be the last. It’s yet to be repeated by the powers yet to come and manipulate.

The study of Political space diagnoses the manipulation and the pulse of the manipulated which a work of art tries to voice to the world. This spatial dimension unlocks the role of place, the environment container where the action takes place as a prime force or the drive that invents and directs the entire action. This active space has been interpreted by Lefebvre that refigures the narrative. This impact of human habitation on geometric forms and the impact of form on the human habitation was charged by Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* from home to the chest as the various forms of space, This new foci of approach is vibrant in scope and as newly triggered the approach is to be nourished with more research and new terminologies and add up to the hermeneutics of the interdisciplinary literary studies

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