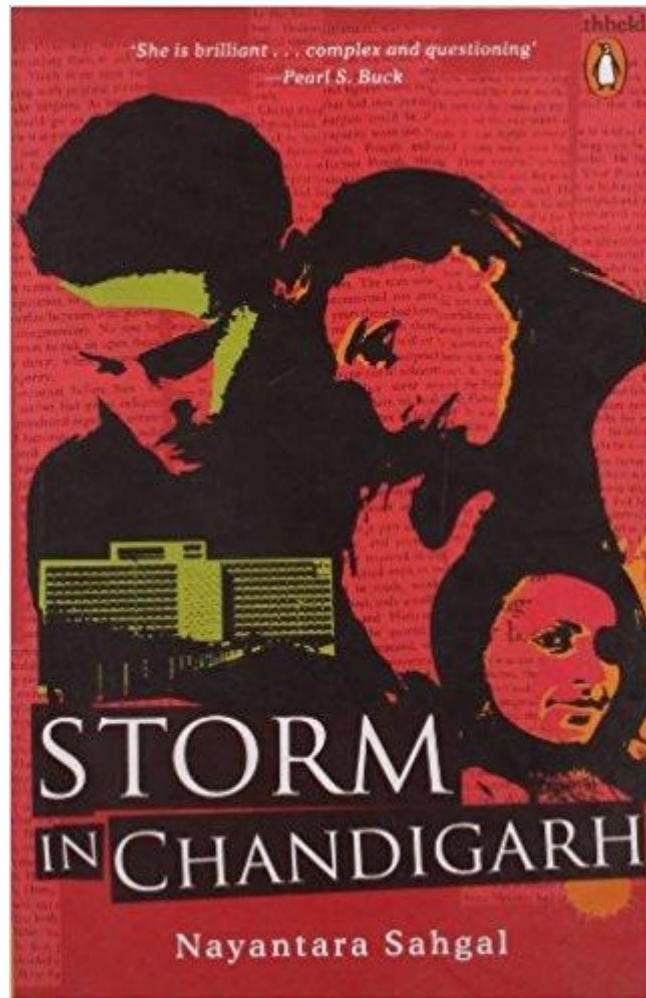


**An Approach to Parochial Customs in NayantaraSahgal's
*Storm in Chandigarh***

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Abstract

NayantaraSahgal is a post-colonial Indian writer who writes in English. Her fiction deals with India's elite responding to the crises engendered by political changes. Her themes primarily deal with social and political ideas. However, her characters are very much involved in political

philosophy which shows narrow mindedness of principal characters like politician and also her characters deal social concern like businessman. Her novel presents the power hungry politician and his pragmatism and nation conscious politician and his idealism.

Key Words: Narrow mindedness, Narcissistic, power, violence and panic.

Nayantara Sahgal

Nayantara Sahgal is an important Indo-English woman novelist and an active political columnist. She has written on the controversies in politics and her writings are published in the western liberal journals. Her theme is indeed a post-independence sensibility. She does not admit and advocate any specific political ideology nor does she propagate any definite political values. Her novels portray the contemporary political realities and focus on the gloomy mood and widespread adversity of the post-independence generation. Her novels are well endowed with greater artistic objectivity. Her major characters have been deeply involved in the vortex of politics. Hence politics can be called her “primordial predilection”, the central point, in whatever she writes. Against this backdrop, she analyses and interprets various political events with an intelligent and perspective mind and read the individual responses of the characters to these events with the unusual sensitivity of a mature artist.

The Storm in Chandigarh

Sahgal’s *The Storm in Chandigarh* is one of the best political novels which deal with the partition of East Punjab on the linguistic lines just when the state had recovered from the trauma of the 1947 partition. Vishal Dubey is an intelligent and intellectual administrative officer who has been deputed by the Home Minister to achieve the task of bringing out concord between the two warring factions and to reinstate peace and harmony among the people of Chandigarh.

The fight between the power hungry and violent Gyan Singh and ideal Harpal Singh is a fight of ideologies. It is a clash between the cult of violence and ideal of non-violence . Nayantra Sahgal shows the evil of dishonesty, hypocrisy and arrogance existing at the human level.

Characters

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Vishal Dubey is the protagonist of the novel whose point of view remains fairly constant throughout the novel. Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh together with the Home Minister of union government in the New Delhi act out their political roles. Karchru, Prasad and Trivedi complete the set of civil servants, who fully represent the bureaucracy in the central secretariat, both new and old.

The most significant and interesting characters are well-to-do business magnates and their high living and thinking executives. Sahgal shows the dramatically forced linguistic partition of Punjab twenty years after its first communal bifurcation in 1947. Her preferential artistic movement is the critical hostility between power hungry and violent Gyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab who has declared a general strike to demonstrate his political strength and ideal Harpal Singh, the Chief Mnister of Hararyana. The action takes place in Chandigarh which is the common capital of the Hindi speaking Haryana and the Punjabi speaking Punjab.

Violence and Clash between Personalities

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal gives attention to the artistic value of violence in the context of political events as well as ordinary human relations. The clash between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is more important than a mere confrontation of personalities. It is, more essentially, the cult of violence and creed of non- violence. The Chief Minister of Punjab, Gyan Singh is a political murderer in the league with the very devil of money and power. His wickedness and political atrocity dates back to the bifurcation days of 1947 and prolong to shrink and shadow his conscience even when he holds the highest democratic office in the Punjab.

Gyan Singh is an illiterate truck driver who has no moral principle and code of conduct and Harpal is an upright industrialist. Gyan Singh is a narcissist whose visions of grandeur and majesty and supreme strength have to be realized in a negative fashion. He calls for a general strike to demonstrate his strength which shows his unscrupulous character. Vishal Dubey has to deal with the two Chief Ministers who are not only two persons diametrically opposite as North and South poles in their approaches, they are also two political forces which resort to the methods of intimidation and suppression of the political opponents by sheer brutal force.

The one is shrewd, astute and cunning politician, whereas the other stands for broader perspectives and justice. Vishal examines the political longitude and latitude as well as principal characters. Sardar Gyan Singh, the power hungry Punjab Chief Minister, as Vishal discovers, is an unscrupulous opportunist. He is a charismatic figure at the conferences and is published in the newspapers as a living monument to the urban networking class, a man who rose from the ranks. In an age that is conscious of the needs of the common man, Gyan is its most distinguished representative in the country.

Harphan Singh, the Haryana Chief Minister, broad- minded gentleman, even-handed, sober with concrete political aims, a true patriot whose loyalty to the nation is unquestionable. He revolts against the division and believes that there is something sinister at the root of the bifurcation mentality and those who uphold it. (Sahgal 68)

Sahal Describes a Conflict of Philosophies

Sahal has constructed the novel with the use of historical happenings and imagination of 1960s. By juxtaposing the situation in 1947 and the one during the post-independence period, the novelist brings a dreadful and bleak picture of the present where the politician, with blinkers of narcissist on their eyes, have been unmindful of their duties towards the country and its people. Harpal Singh contemplates that there is no such a possible vision left to bind us. The big vision has broken apart from the vision of mending the political turmoil. The clash between Gyan and Harpal is thus not merely a political battle; it is a conflict of philosophies.

In politics, leadership means strength, force and authority. Whereas people like Harpal, the Chief Minister of Haryana are thrown in the shade of every time, Gyan's Chief Minister of Punjab becomes a reality. In the evening the violent strikers make an attempt on Harpal's life. Harpal is luckily saved but badly wounded. Ironically when he recovers his consciousness he learns about the Union Home Minister's death and is told that Gyan Singh has canceled the general strike "as a token of respect for the death of a patriot. The "storm" on the political surface abates temporarily. Vishal feels an intense personal grief; for Vishal. Funeral of the Home Minister signifies the loss of "the last remaining figures of the Gandhian era".

Sahgal strongly believes that the destiny of the three institutions, the family, the society and the state are interconnected because cooperation between the family and larger society is important. Without such cooperation both would fall apart.

Chandigarh is not unfamiliar to the problems of violence in all the three patriarchal institutions. Chandigarh was a politically paralyzed victim of the two partitions that took place within a period of two decades -- the exhausting partitions of the 1947 on the basis of religion and the troublesome partition of the 1960s on the basis of language and linguistic lines. Chandigarh, designed by Lei Corbusier, reveals how the cities of the modern world become the scene of outburst of brutal calculated violence.

According to Sahgal, violence is shown in different names like unrest, disorder and indiscipline. In *Storm in Chandigarh*, the Home Minister who has never had much experience of violence in his life is in charge of law and order. He humbly considers himself as the student of the subject of the situation of the country. The Home Minister tries to understand the conflict between Punjab and Haryana, in terms of the earlier issues Punjab faced, like boundaries, electric power, and water. But his understanding is skin-deep whereas the quarrel between Gyan Singh, the power hungry narcissistic politician and Harpal Singh, the vacillating and passive Chief Minister of Haryana, is the real problem to resolve. Sahgal clearly shows the first generation patriotic leaders of the independent India have failed the nation by allowing power hungry politician Gyan Singh to become part of Indian National Congress. (Jasbir 9)

Sahgal describes the emergence of the Chief Minister Gyan Singh as an unconquerable force in the national politics. During the Partition of India, he simply exploited the fear of the public by transporting the people to the safety zone. He soon finds that politics would give sizable opportunities for him. Since he knows that salacious savagery has significant role in the election campaigns, he abuses and oppresses the public immersed in anxiety. Eventually, he accomplished in dividing Punjab into two states only to fulfill his ambition of becoming the Chief Minister of Punjab. Sahgal proves conclusively the narrow mindedness of Gyan Singh and his arguments.

According to Sahgal this is the violence of attitude which brooks no concord and discord all but one solution. Gyan Singh never shows any respect for the individual. He tries to change the situation so he denigrates satyagraha, the sacred weapon of strength and showdown. Harpal is forced to retire from active politics. Dubey therefore understands that the clash between Harpal and Gyan is a dispute between pragmatism and idealism. He also realizes that people have not improved from the cave period as they are in total ignorance about what happens to each other. As a result the power hungry individuals like Gyan easily acquires power.

Sahgal has also showed how the society is divided into classes. There is unequal distribution of wealth which created a gap between poor and rich. Inder, a businessman, who thinks only about performance and productivity, could not empathize with the workers who revolt against the canteen food imported from America.

Problem of Political Upheaval and Violence Originating from Chandigarh

The novel *The Storm in Chandigarh* primarily deals with the problem of political upheaval and violence originating from Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, Haryana and Punjab. The people who have come to Chandigarh to earn their livelihood brought with them their own customs, beliefs and ideas. This created a cultural storm and a new type of society has emerged in Chandigarh. For example, people were forced to adopt the English language because of the prominent role of it in Indian society. This is the outcome of the colonization and it is an important feature of the modern Indian society. At the same time, people have not completely disregarded the native languages. The love for their native language is shown through the acceptance of Punjabi. By the efforts of traditional people like Gyan Singh who desired to call his native place in the language of their ancestors has resulted in the formation of Hindi-Speaking States. At the outset, the weak national unity was further deformed by the Indian leadership who delayed the formation of the new states. Another traditional feature of Indian society is people can easily be tempted to fight against to one another in the name of religion and language. Mrs. Sahgal analyses the importance of values on political and personal planes in the post-independence India in *Storm in Chandigarh*. Every culture has its own eternal values and everyone of the culture seems to live by following the values. A wild search for

values is undertaken by individuals and nations when there is an internal or external threat to their values. The search becomes intensified when the threat is bigger.(Sahgal 5)

Post-colonial Indian Psyche

The novel also explores the complexity of post-colonial Indian psyche from the socio political and personal levels. Colonialism is presented as recurring factor that has affected the Indian people outwardly and inwardly, though the novel shows it as an indefinite presence in India. A change in socio economic structure of the country was brought about by the colonial rule and in order to legitimize it spread the superiority of human individual.

The novel deals with the situation on perspective of different categories of people corresponding to the different attitudes. One of those who are in their appetite for power carried forward the plan for their imperial rulers. They proved even more cunning and dangerous for they appealed to the same turned them against the Gandhian ideologies and conventional values of integrity and harmony of the subordinating principles to individual ambitions. In this novel, this is portrayed on political plane by Gyan Singh the Punjab Chief Minister, brutally unprincipled man though adept with a strong and impressive personality and inspiring voice. The second group included of those who were opposed to the opportunist attitude , but apprehending is serious proportions preferred to stay passive, because to them also their political interest were no less dear. In this novel, the group comprises Harpal Singh, the balanced Chief Minister of Haryana. The Third group is of that elite class of Indian talented youth who in spite of their skill to analyze the traditional values in the light of changing times and their rational attitude failed to strike a stability between established convictions and the world around as they were in sizable in number. This category is represented by Dubey. (Jasbir 12).

In a nutshell, *Storm in Chandigarh* shows Sahgal's profound concern for the fast vanishing consequences of Gandhian philosophy in political and social life. The novel studies historical not merely fictional and traces the development of annoying political culture percolating upwards from the states to centre. Sahgal accomplishes not only analyses the political issues of the late sixties, but also the political mood and intrigues of the post-

independence era. She also accomplishes greatly in exposing the narcissisms and parochial attitude of bureaucrats and politicians.

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