



UGC Approved Journals

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



Editor-in-Chief

Volume V, Issue V May 2017

www.ijellh.com

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ISSN :2455-0108

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(INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ONLINE OF SCIENCE)

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**SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND MORAL VALUES IN SAHGAL'S A
SITUATION IN NEW DELHI**

Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is a social and political novelist par excellence. She is well-known for her outstanding ability of coalescing artistically social, political, and personal events and incidents. Even a cursory reading may reveal that they depict the scene of the Indian politics from the last episodes of the freedom struggle to the disintegration in the mid-Seventies, in a sequence, the occurrence of the events. The narration of the contemporary political conditions in her novels is saturated with keen awareness of some elementary ideals and principles to which the author was dedicated. She has set her stories in a well-known historical situation in order to protect these primary values or to show her sadness on their absence. The present paper endeavors at exploring the social, political and moral values in Nayantara Sahgal's novel A Situation in New Delhi.

Key words: Emergency, Freedom for Women, Illegal sexual relations, Liberty and progress of women, Political beliefs

Nayantara Sahgal is a social and political novelist par excellence. She is well-known for her outstanding ability of coalescing artistically social, political, and personal events and incidents. Even a cursory reading may reveal that they depict the scene of the Indian politics from the last episodes of the freedom struggle to the disintegration in the mid-Seventies, in a sequence, the occurrence of the events. She affirms that politics is deeply ingrained in her personality, in her

“bones and morrow” and in her “emotional and intellectual make up” (Ramachandrai 70) to such a high degree that she cannot be a silent viewer of the incidents influencing and upsetting the dynamic and fundamental human concerns. The narration of the contemporary political conditions in her novels is saturated with keen awareness of some elementary ideals and principles to which the author was dedicated. She has set her stories in a well-known historical situation in order to protect these primary values or to show her sadness on their absence. The social environments appeal in all their different capacities. Their presentation is neither superficial nor a shabby, gloomy and lifeless commentary by a literary historian. Incessant growth of dishonesty, multiplying problems, reduction in voluntary desire to decide strictly, and permanent dreams surrounding to the temporary representation of the views and feelings and interest of the common people could only destroy the very foundation of the democratic edifice. This paper aims to attempt the analysis of social, political and moral values in Nayantara Sahgal’s novel *A Situation in New Delhi*.

The novel *A Situation in New Delhi* exposes the private life of ministers who take undue advantage of their public positions. The ministers were not serving the public but rather they posed to be their masters in disguise. The prime minister’s past was quite depressing. Being unsuccessful in the entrance exam for Foreign Service he had opted to join politics and eventually the ministry though “the mastery of facts and figures had never been in his line” (P- 106).

When the minister’s wasteful extravagance is revealed to his personal servant Bahadur, he also becomes lavish in expending money. He gets implicated in a dishonest dealing of exporting crates of Scotch whisky obtained at low rates through personal acquaintance in a foreign embassy. The episode costs an adverse effect on the reputation of the ministry and the national government which has already declared the use of alcohol illegal in its crucial political meeting.

The novel also attacks the lethargy, apathy, and incompetence of the authorities accountable for the shocking and disgraceful conditions of the hospital where the minister for petroleum Sardar Sahib has been admitted for treatment of some ailment.

The government gets criticized for having adopted a socialistic agenda but not giving due consideration to the liberty and progress of women.

Even after having been in power for twenty five years, the ruling party has ignored taxing the section of the society which possessed taxable property. The custom of property being transferred to ladies was designed on different lines. The property was divided on the basis of monetary consideration and distributed among kith and kin in order to avoid tax payment.

Sumer Singh's father was bent on transferring his property to charitable institutions but finally he passed it on to his wayward and undeserving son, his legal heir.

Simriti's divorce document reveals a monetary arrangement showing scanty regard for a woman's dignity and freedom and underscoring the society monopolized by its male members. Probing made in the novel for exposing the working of the judiciary also unveil to the subjugations of the female sex and deprivation from getting fair treatment in any way.

Deplorable conditions of the society in the sixties are featured in the novel *A Situation in New Delhi*. It hints at the political circumstances before and after the emergency. Instead of highlighting the silent suffering of the people, the government endeavored to conceal it. "There is a general drift in the direction of more control over newspapers, films, books and so on, more censorship"(P- 5-6). By a ruthless exhibition of force and through marking "intricate maps of burns" on the bodies of those had the guts to criticize the indifference of the government, the officials in power tried to suppress and frighten the discontentment of popular views.

The western countries' passive indifference to the newly born democracy has been skillfully illustrated in the novel. They assumed that a democratic government would not be successful in a country which has many religions, diverse cultures, and several political groups which "led the chorus prophesying chaos instead of supporting (her) Herculean labors". (P- 129-130) Conforming to similar policies they echoed and forecast disorder and confusion instead of patronizing Indira Gandhi's massive efforts. Now they wish to co-operate with the subduing measure of the government apparently with clever comments. "It is an Asian country and therefore we can't apply our yardsticks here" (P- 107). "These people need a strong leader." The indifferent attitude of western countries towards democracies in the third world has genuinely recorded in the novel. They are inclined to dwell on moribund thoughts and deny to scrutiny the situation carefully, and render assistance when required.

A Situation in New Delhi narrates the after effects of the tenure of a famous prime minister, Shivraj, who has monopolized the political and national scenario for ten years. He surrendered the luxuries and comforts of his noble and esteemed family and joined the struggle for India's Independence. Now, after his death, a well administered country begins to disintegrate. The political merits and principles inherited by Devi, Usman, and Michael have become useless, and have lost their validity for the political party. The young politicians who miss no occasions to help them materialize their self-interest appear strange to them, and they wonder if they are the same young men who had received the primary knowledge in politics from Shivraj. The significance of

Shivraj's political beliefs has become irrelevant and obsolete after his death. The elite group of English speaking young people represents the new diplomatic faith of compromise. It is frequently made explicit to Devi that her views are antiquated and that she is no longer a member of pleasure seeking group. She becomes isolated in the House. In this context it would be most sensible for her to observe silence but this she would not do. She cannot resist speaking on law-making issues. She is then ridiculed by the frivolous young Mineral and Metal minister who favored the members of the House who are timed apes. She realizes that there is a solid working obstacle, and a unanimous opposition against her. She feels a strange isolation. "The party, the great sheltering party under whose tutelage she had grown, was now an entity outside her.....she did not belong with the new aristocracy"(P- 106). The party which had protected and guided her till now seemed to have turned against her. She feels to have been excluded from elite family.

Usman feels to have been placed in a similar situation. With his obstinate and unrelenting heart and mind he had joined as the Vice-Chancellorship to implement some basic changes in the functioning of the University but he is being forced to recall the expulsion of three students who had been expelled for rape. The alleged students attack and molest him physically. The politicians interfere in every law making decisions and create confusion for him.

Michael, a foreigner is also disappointed with the new political structure. He had come to India to write a biographical account of an important democratic leader whom he revered as his hero. He discovers to his surprise that a sea-change has taken place in the country, "this is something new .When I was here you could write anything you liked, photograph any slum". (P- 92) Under the guise of prohibition, even the slightest criticism or offensive writing is banned from publication. A government official to whom literature is incomprehensible has to give a clearance to the publication of his biography. He is also being informed that a politically powerful person is writing that biography and hence he is not being given the clearance for publication.

Other insignificant characters also experience frustration and feel misplaced in the existing political organization. Rishad and Suvarnapriya become terrorists. Nadira becomes an opponent of Hinduism whilst poor Kirti satisfies her frustrations by occasionally relating her desires and hopes and emulating Indians of before Independence period.

Nayantara also pioneers the enigma of rebellious discontent and lack of restraint among the students due to the impractical and unattainable policies and programmes of the government. She had repeatedly indicated in her previous novels that violence, a powerful monster, would pose threats to the administration. The novel also admonishes that a strict government will lead the country towards

dictatorship that would further generate the problems of violence.

Devi is a complete woman endowed with glamorous and sensible qualities required to reveal her fully developed personality as the novel evolves. However, she is incapable of doing anything better than concentrating on various parties, attending sophisticated multicultural lovers, and continuing a superficial though friendly relation with her only son Rishad. When Michel interrogates Devi and asks her, "What outlet is there, for instance, for Rishad?" She replies, "I don't know what you would do in his place?" (P- 92) The candidness of a seasoned woman like her cannot be justified especially when she holds the post of Education Minister. She ignores the savage and damaging strife by the students in the university in which the Vice-Chancellor gets his one eye gouged. Next morning, he is seen lamenting about the air-conditioner rating highly about its allegorical importance. Normally, her phone would keep ringing till midnight making her ready and alert to tackle eventful situations she is worried and concerned about more than inviting her son over a relaxed breakfast, "Can you tell me something about it?" (P- 19)

On the political level, she is an attractive puppet who lends refinement and glamour to Shivraj's parties and is gratified by the fact that Shivraj has urged her to be happy. She personally suggests and offers no political ideas but simply echoes the views of Shivraj. When Usman Ali refuses to become the Vice-Chancellor, a grieved and a dismayed woman entreats him to assist her. Usman Ali accompanies him after leaving the job. Her mind is perturbed and she muses fickle mindedly "But it is peculiar at forty four to find yourself stripped of your fabulous past and your limitless future. Suddenly you are nothing. Even what I have in the present in the way of my reputation- something that people recognize and respect will be blotted out the day I walk out of this house". (P- 62)

In spite of all her talk, Devi is a typical domesticated Indian woman who needs a church always to lean on and when Shivraj dies, she would need Usman's body and soul who makes love to her when she lies in her bed. Mourning for her husband Ishwar, she only knows to shimmer in white clothes and talk tiredly of her glorious past. Even in her love affairs she is neither honest nor mature, nor unselfish. Ishwar's bed is still warm in her warm when Usman Ali occupies it. When Michael asks her about her lovers, she answers in an ambiguous way which didn't quite seem compatible.

Devi gets romantically attracted towards Michael. She praises when asked by Michael to give few details pertaining to her liaison with him, she offers none.

Michael is yet another dummy character who is tied by the string the modern ruler has stretched around his sister's neck as marriage between the two is improbable. A famous reporter meets the well informed sister of an influential politician and their only attainment was a nefarious

dash over how to have illegal sexual relations without having any liking. The lady does not wish to enter the generally accepted custom of marriage tie. The paramour boy comes back to marry and divorce twice. He puts on physical weight due to mutual satisfaction not due to his mental achievements of writing three biographies. As he reads the news of Shviraj's death Michael breaks down and plans to go to India to write his biography. Ironically, he returns to make love to Devi.

Lydia and Nadira are ladies who indulge in illegal sex during "the day and have no other occupation but linger on in bed for the rest of the twenty four hours" (P- 33). They both are opposites to Devi in being unhappy married women in contrast to the happy widow enjoying lustful physical affairs with the partners of the former.

Sahgal focuses on social political and moral values in her novel A Situation in New Delhi. She concentrates on the value of violence in the context of political events and ordinary human relations.

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