

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S *STORM IN CHANDIGARH*

Dr. O. Kumara Swami

Asst. Professor of English,

Malla Reddy Engineering College for Women (Autonomous),

Hyderabad, Telangana State. India

Email id: kumaraswami.o@gmail.com



Dr. O. Kumara Swami

Article Received: 17/05/2022

Article Accepted: 21/06/2022

Published online:27/06/2022

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.10.2.243](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.10.2.243)

Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the few post-Independence Indian English novelists who are not apologetic about using the English language as a medium of communication of truth as they perceive it. While she does not deliberately inject so-called Indianisms into her writing in English to make it more Indian English than it naturally is, she is not ambiguous about her right to use whatever tool she considers is best suited for her fictional purpose.

Nayantara Sahgal's novels are meaningful as chronicles of a larger narrative - Indian English fiction. The works of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and a host of other novelists is meaningful, to me, as part of this ongoing and evolving "big" story. Simply, we are all a part of one big story or protonarrative, our own "little" stories adding to its totality. We are not only a part of it, but also, in our own ways, making it happen, altering it in trying to understand and define it, in relation to ourselves. This big story is the story of the growth and development of modern India, starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century and continuing down to the present day.

Key words: tradition modernity struggle violence morality normalcy society

Introduction

Like all stories, the story of the development of modern India has some key themes. These themes recur in all narratives on modern India. They are ways of organizing the contents, of making sense of the multiplicity and diversity, of imposing some order on the chaotic plenitude that inheres in the story of modern India. Some of them are: colonialism, nationalism, partition, independence, regionalism, communalism, revivalism, westernization, Sanskritization, science, religion, caste, urbanization, feminism, capitalism, socialism, and so on and so forth. These themes constitute the

keynotes of most strands of this big story. We see them being played out again and again, not only in fiction but in our daily lives.

One such big theme is "tradition and modernity." This theme seems to hold a lot of explanatory power because of the peculiar social formation prevalent in India. When measured against Western standards, we are a "traditional" society; measured against our own past, we are "modern." This tension, conflict, and struggle between what we have inherited and what we wish to become recurs in our lives from generation to generation. In fact, one way of characterizing

modern India would be by considering it a society in transition: a great tradition, as Robert Redfield put it, modernizing itself. In other words, the story of modern India itself is a tradition-modernity story. Every novel, every poem, every work of art in modern India, then, either explicitly or implicitly, is one version and articulation of this big movement of our culture and nation. The tradition-modernity paradigm therefore defines our culture, and our culture in turn determines the thematic parameters of the texts which it generates through various authors.

The theme, "tradition and modernity" seems to hold a lot of explanatory power because of the peculiar social formation prevalent in India. When measured against Western standards, we are a "traditional" society; measured against our own past, we are "modern." This tension, conflict, and struggle between what we have inherited and what we wish to become recurs in our lives from generation to generation. In fact, one way of characterizing modern India would be by considering it a society in transition: a great tradition, as Robert Redfield put it, modernizing itself. In other words, the story of modern India itself is a tradition-modernity story. Every novel, every poem, every work of art in modern India, then, either explicitly or implicitly, is one version and articulation of this big movement of our culture and nation. The tradition-modernity paradigm therefore defines our culture, and our culture in turn determines the thematic parameters of the texts which it generates through various authors.

Tradition and modernity are as automatically opposed to each other. There is a tradition of modernity itself as there is the potential for modernity and change in tradition. Likewise, tradition is as not necessarily evil.

The climate of ideas that one encounters in her fiction holds up freedom as the seminal concept that motivates all the characters and stimulates the action in the novels. It must be said, however, that freedom in Sahgal's fiction is not the declaration of political independence with or without violence, the end-product of a revolution or the result of conspiratorial concentration of troops, or the

consequence of political assassinations and massacres; it is usually a deliberate choice or communication with one another or self-identity or courage of conviction the fearless expression of one's personality or simply 'being' itself. In Sahgal's system of values, the human being is the nucleus of social dynamics. Freedom, Peace and Progress are mutually related concepts and resultant factors. Thus, for example, when freedom is the input in the context of the individual consciousness the output is the dialogue, or communication or discussion. On the other hand, the individual dialogues or discussions result, in the social context, in a sense of belonging and commitment to the well-being of one another. The condition of peace is thus to be perceived as the product of common weal and concern for one another. Progress in the sense of economic growth, prosperity, productivity and social development, is really the output of the collective commitment of countless individuals. Hence the emphasis on the freedom of the individual self in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal has reflected the turmoil in life through the political drama. The novel is a proof her clear thought, vision and maturity. It gives an insight into the life of high ups and delineates the frustration among the young couples in dramatic terms. Sahgal shows apt competence in handling the delicate situation. Her artistic effort succeeds in a reliable and competent treatment of the city.

Modernity in India is often confused with the western style of life. What confirms to western ways of dressing, eating, drinking and social get-together is regarded as modern. Nayantara Sahgal also touches tradition and modernity in terms of ethics and morality. Ethics and morality have been given distinct identities and meaning by the modern educated people like Trivedi and Vishal Dubey. For instance, Dubey would not subscribe to what is commonly understood as morality. Trivedi suggestion that Dubey might believe in free love, and that sort of thing makes Dubey laugh. He, while declining his inclination towards free love, declares that he does not accept the established ideas about morality.

The novel opens with the Union Home Minister's statement: "Violence lies very close to the surface in the Punjab." Very soon we discover that the violence referred to is indeed many-faced. Its political manifestation is but one of its many cunning expressions. Thus for instance, the 'emotional' violence that a husband can cause to his wife, or vice versa, can create an equally explosive situation as when Inder obsessively suspects his wife's fidelity or as when Leela, Dubey's faithless wife, dead these past six years mulishly rejected the intensity of Dubey's love for her but always desired to retain the social advantage of being his wife.

Sahgal's concentrates in this novel on the artistic value of violence in the context of political events as well as ordinary human relations' the confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is more significant than a mere "clash of personalities"; it is, more fundamentally, a conflict of ideas: the cult of violence and the creed of non-violence. Gyan Singh, who symbolizes the former, is a political murderer in league with the very devil for money and power. His moral turpitude and political rascality date back to the partition days of 1947 and continue to shrink and shadow his conscience even when he occupies the highest democratic office in the Punjab. As success is the measure of a man's political worth, he achieves it by hook or crook, though many of his opportunities have been rather fortuitous. An uneducated truck driver, to begin with, Gyan Singh has played successfully, if unscrupulously, the roles of a political campaign-manager, ironically enough, for Harpal himself on an earlier occasion, and of an industrialist; and now is the Chief Minister of the Punjab. Gyan Singh is a megalomaniac whose visions of grandeur and glory and supreme strength have to be realized only in a negative fashion. A call for a general strike is his characteristic way of demonstrating strength. As Dubey says:

What Gyan plans is a demonstration to show the strength of his demands. He'll call it off once he makes his point. It's a political trick, not a mass movement.

In contrast, Harpal Singh has always counseled caution which continues to be his watchword in his career. A stout-hearted integrationist, he is the political counterfoil to Gyan Singh in all matters. He is easily altruistic where Gyan could be cynically egoistic.

Expertly integrated with this theme of political violence, menacing the normalcy in the states of the Punjab and Haryana, is the theme of social hypocrisy and domestic disharmony, caused by the desecration of the sanctum sanctorum of the individual self by the meretricious values of pretence and snobbery. The cult of violence raises its ugly head in the form of male dominance in the domestic sphere. Marriage then ceases to be a union of hearts and a communication of kindred spirits but becomes rather an atrophied institution lacking love and understanding – the essential ingredients of a happy marriage. This is precisely the problem of Saroj who far rather than loves her husband. Saroj whose innocence and freshness and maternal pulchritude remind Dubey of the "dew on the grass" is a victim of male tyranny. The temperamental incompatibility of Saroj and Inder finally leads to a complete breakdown of communication between them, despite their two children and Saroj's pregnancy. Inder's unrefined consciousness sharply contrasts with the highly developed sensibility of Saroj who at first fears him but later decides to rebel against her jealous husband in order to vindicate her radical innocence and to liberate herself from the conventional hoax of unilateral marital obligations.

The knowledge of Saroj's pre-marital sexual curiosity so maddens the animal in Inder's that he brutally beats her. While this kink marks the end of their relationship it opens a new vista of possibilities for Saroj and Dubey whose credo is to live openly and freely and unpretentiously. Thus Dubey "accepts" in toto what Inder's summarily rejects owing to his own personal limitations Inder's affair with Mara gives him the much indeed, although temporary, respite and response from the violent upheavals at his factory site as well as from his domestic tension. But in the end, he like Gyan Singh must learn perforce to live from crisis to crisis largely of his own making.

Jit and Mira, childless though they are, are better paired than Inder and Saroj. Mara's brief affair with Inder exerts a good deal of emotional pressure on Mara especially because of her still existing tenderness and affection for Jit. Brought up in the comparatively free environment of Europe, Mara has a fully blossomed individuality unlike Saroj. The problem of Mara is, nevertheless, more psychological than physical. She, a Hindu by birth, feels alienated from her own cultural past and feels actually odd or exotic in the modern environment of Chandigarh. "The people she knew had become clues to India, to be fitted together to make some sense of the fog of her inheritance." Although her maternal instincts are satisfied, if not fulfilled through her school for children, her alternate pulls of attraction to and repulsion from Jit and Inder are probably not entirely unrelated to her natural masochistic tendencies, the softness of Jit contrasting with the hardness of Inder. She realizes, none the less, the utter futility of "trying to build" something with Inder and saves her marriage just in time to the utter dismay of Inder.

Nikhil Ray is a good-natured cuckold and his wife, Gauri, is in her own words "a social butterfly" with a generous attitude in the high society of New Delhi. She has been amusing herself with an affair with Dubey when he has to go away to Chandigarh apropos Union Home Minister's assignment. But her liaison with Dubey finally ends when he accepts responsibility for Saroj and her unborn child.

Narayantara Sahgal's artistic exploitation of the cult of violence in politics and inter-personal relations comes off successfully towards the end of the novel, despite the dictum of E.M. Forster that "Nearly all novels are feeble at the end." The novelist rounds off the political action in the novel with the death of the Union Home Minister and dexterously winds up the whole plot with the arrival of Saroj and Dubey in Delhi where they establish instant communication between them. Thus the novel ends not "feebly" but positively:

He went back to his old office, dialed Gauri's number, and asked for Saroj.

The denouement has dual significance. First, Gyan Singh calls off the General Strike following a day of sporadic violence involving Harpal Singh who gets shot amid the milling crowds of emotionally over-wrought workers and Inder who is manhandled by the invading army of workers of his mills. This in itself would not have been adequate to round off the political action and reaction in the novel. Hence the dramatic use of the perfectly plausible and universally valid cause for the cessation of all activity, namely, Death, the inexorable finality in the business of living, for the resolution of the political crisis. Secondly, Dubey returns to Delhi because of the death of the Union Home Minister while Saroj goes with Gauri to New Delhi in order to wait the birth of her own baby, away from the stifling and soul-killing company of Inder. Dubey's departure from Chandigarh is like the disappearance of a human catalytic agent so far supplying "the oxygen of understanding" to those who need it. The storm in Chandigarh thus blows off when Gyan Singh calls off the strike – a gesture of peace from a violent-tempered man; and when Harpal Singh gets shot and wounded – a symbolic act of self-purification in the Gandhian tradition; and finally when the Union Home Minister, the only surviving Gandhian in the Union Cabinet with his restraining voice, suddenly dies – an ineluctable tranquillizer of Nature. Sahgal's creative sensibility infuses all these disparate elements of the final situation into a supremely satisfying artistic composition in this novel. The result is, therefore, not what Forster might have feared a "feeble" novel but an imaginative illumination of the immense possibilities in all walks of human life.

The absurdity of the juxtaposition of the narrowness of vision and the catholicity of outlook heightens the intensity of the dramatic conflict in terms of art; which is why Sahgal's choice of Chandigarh as the locale for her novel is singularly appropriate. Having chosen the scene of action, Sahgal scrupulously observes the classical convention about the unity of place. She then fills her fictional landscape with a variety of human characters whose inter-action with one another in the red-hot crucible of time ensures the observance of the remaining two unities of time and action.

Conformity then is not morality: nor convenience is. Female chastity and male chauvinism are equally inadequate to define it. Dubey develops into a man of great moral stature by simply being himself without any civilized cant of hypocrisy and pretence. This needs colossal moral courage to be free and fearless in order that communication of understanding and love becomes a positive reality here and now. Dubey's commitment to the inviolability of the human self is what Nayantara Sahgal offers in this novel as yet another variation on her general theme of Freedom as a fundamental value.

In her descriptions of the social atmosphere, Sahgal has few peers and she captures the picturesque Punjabi style in English as competently and successfully as a Mulk Raj Anand does. Thus, when Dhan Singh sneers at any less efficient motor truck driver:

That son of a sow's sister doesn't know an engine from an ox.

So is her surrealistic style as impressive as her similes and imagery strung and strewn throughout the novel. One example should suffice:

The bus was empty. A street lamp, its orange glow diffused by fog, hung framed like a detached eye in one window.

Conclusion

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal shows her artistic maturity by focusing our attention on the issue, freedom from various points of view, in so far as she projects it simultaneously at the political and personal levels and effects the equivalent of freedom in the form of comradeship through the characters of Vishal Dubey and Raj, respectively. The Indian novel in English as represented by Sahgal's unquestionably authentic fictional correlatives of the tempo of traditional Indian life in the citadels of power in Delhi and other modern cultural centers in India and abroad has not only come of age, but has established itself in the mainstream of the national literature of modern India. While Sahgal's fiction is proof of positive of the realistic trends in the contemporary Indian English novel, her own

technique is impressionistic and naturalistic. She has both creative capability and communicative competence of such a novelist, as evidenced by the interpretation of her two novels from the perspective of tradition and modernity.

Works Cited

- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Storm in Chandigarh: A Novel*. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970.
- . *A Time to be Happy*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1975.
- . *This Time of Morning*. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970.
- . *The Day in Shadow: A Novel*. New Delhi: Bell Books, 1973.
- Asnani, Shyam M. "East-West Encounter in Nayantara Sahgal's Novels," *Commonwealth Quarterly* 3 (December 1978). 188-198.
- . "The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal." *Indian Literature* 16, Nos.1-2 (Jan & June 1973). 36-39.
- . "Form and Technique in Nayantara Sahgal's Novels." *Literary Endeavour* 1, No.3 (January 1980). 41-50.
- Chinneswararao, C.J., "Nayantara Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi: A Study*." *Commonwealth Quarterly* 3 (December 1978) 154-161.
- Hirst, Mary Hooper. "Nayantara Sahgal." *New Circle (India)* 18, No.3 (Nov. 1972) 5.
- Iyengar, Srinivasa K.R. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 2000.
- Jain, Jasbir, "The Aesthetics of Morality: Sexual Relations in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal." *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 6, No.1 (January 1978) 41-48.
- Jussawala, Feroza, "Of Cabbages and Kings: *This Time of Morning* and *Storm in Chandigarh* by Nayantara Sahgal." *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 5 No.1 (January 1977) 43-50.
- Kohli, Suresh. *Nayantara Sahgal and the Craft of Fiction*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1972.