

A Study of Political and Emotional Parallels in Post-Independence India with Reference to Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*

Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh (1969) transforms the turbulence of post-independence politics into a mirror of private emotional disarray. Through irony, psychological realism, and multiple perspectives, Sahgal exposes how fractured personal relationships echo the fragmentation of India's democratic ideals. Sahgal reveals how dysfunctional personal worlds correspond to the dysfunctional ideals of a democratic India. In seeing the connection between spousal battles in marriage, political rivalries in politics, and ethical disillusionment in ethics with a unified vision in a novel on power and patriarchy, this paper will proceed to interpret the themes in Sahgal's works using Jasbir Jain's feminist perspectives on Sahgal, Makarand Paranjape on the post-Nehruvian politics of chaos in Indian politics, and R.K. Dhawan on Sahgal's ironic narrative mode.

Keywords: *Political Turmoil, Emotional Disintegration, Philosophical Introspection*

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Citation: Sindhu, S. (2024). A Study of Political and Emotional Parallels in Post-Independence India with Reference to Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*. Ganpat University Journal of Applied Research in Social Science & Humanities, 13 (1 & 2), 40-44.

Introduction

Nayantara Sahgal occupies a distinctive position among post-independence Indian English novelists for her ability to blend the psychological with the political, the private with the public. Her novel *Storm in Chandigarh* reflects India's struggle to reconcile the ideals of independence with the realities of political degeneration. The political turmoil surrounding the bifurcation of Punjab and Haryana serves not merely as a backdrop but as an allegory for moral and emotional disintegration. Sahgal demonstrates that the corruption of power inevitably penetrates the intimate structures of family and identity.

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, political breakdown and personal alienation are intricately connected. The bitter rivalry between Gyan Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab, and Harpal Singh, Chief Minister of Haryana, (who were friends and colleagues once, but are now forced to make menacing gestures. Chandigarh, the joint capital of the Hindi-speaking people of Haryana and the Punjabi-speaking people of Punjab, is the scene of action) is less ideological than egotistical—a clash of personalities that mirrors the deterioration of democratic dialogue. As Makarand Paranjape, Indian novelist and poet, observes, "Sahgal's world is one in which political anarchy manifests as personal disarray" (*World Literature Today*, 1994). This degeneration from political principle to personal vendetta is mirrored in the domestic sphere through the fractured marriages of Inder and Saroj, and Jit and Mara. Their emotional sterility reflects a larger cultural paralysis.

Inder's dominance and Saroj's emotional estrangement form a microcosm of patriarchal and political authority. His assertion of power within marriage parallels the authoritarian tendencies of India's political class. Saroj's gradual self-awareness becomes a metaphor for resistance—an act of reclaiming moral agency in a landscape of submission. Jasbir Jain rightly argues that Sahgal's heroines "internalize the nation's quest for freedom, though their battleground remains the home" (*A Companion to Indian Fiction in English*, 2004). Thus, Saroj's rebellion against Inder's emotional tyranny resonates as an allegory of India's attempt to free itself from inherited authoritarian legacies.

Sahgal's narrative strategy deepens this correspondence between personal and political turmoil. She employs irony and multiple perspectives to expose the instability of truth and the hypocrisy of those in power. Chandigarh, the planned capital of two divided states, becomes an ironic symbol of imposed modernity—a city conceived in geometric order but seething with moral chaos. The architectural perfection of Chandigarh contrasts sharply with the disorder in human relations, suggesting that rational

planning cannot suppress the deeper currents of violence and ego. R.K. Dhawan aptly observes that Sahgal uses irony not as a stylistic ornament but as a form of political resistance.

The figure of Vishal Dubey, an intelligent administrative officer, the protagonist, who has been assigned the task of bringing out an accord between the two warring faction and to restore peace and harmony among the people of Chandigarh, the principled bureaucrat, embodies Sahgal's ethical vision. Sent to mediate the conflict between Punjab and Haryana, Dubey finds himself caught between Gandhian idealism and pragmatic cynicism. His reflections on the moral vacuum of contemporary politics echo Sahgal's own disillusionment with post-Nehruvian leadership. The Home Minister, a remnant of the Gandhian era, contrasts sharply with the self-serving leaders who now wield power. Gandhian values of openness and accountability—'no stealth, no furtiveness, and therefore no shame'—represent a moral ideal that Sahgal nostalgically upholds against the creeping decay of political ethics.

Through Dubey's perspective, Sahgal demonstrates that the failure of leadership is not simply a matter of politics; the erosion of Gandhian integrity mirrors the loss of empathy and conscience in personal life. The novel's intertwined narratives of political violence and emotional sterility converge in a unified moral vision: both stem from the same inability to balance power with compassion.

Sahgal's vision transcends political reportage and becomes philosophical introspection. Historical conflict, for her, becomes a study in moral crisis. Her characters are not victims of circumstance but rather participants in a collective failure of conscience. The violence that erupts in Chandigarh—both political and psychological—is a manifestation of suppressed guilt and moral fatigue. The storm, therefore, is not only outside but also inside, raging within individuals and institutions alike. The novel's symbolic geography, the cityscape of symmetry and tension, reflects India's unfinished modernity, progress masquerading disintegration. Sahgal's irony cuts away the veneer of rational progress and realises the perpetual chaos beneath it.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Sahgal's writing has brought these—moral, political, and emotional—elements together. The message of the novel defies any opposition or separation of the public and private worlds, postulating instead that it is the same moral failure that operates within each domain. The deceptiveness of post-independence India is revealed to lie not in its politics but in its failed marriages and ruined ideals. The

world of Sahgal's characters operates within a discourse of freedom, but it lacks its content. This juxtaposition of the emotional and political failure of a generation of characters, then, not only conveys Sahgal's concern for women's roles but also states her overriding theme: that it is only emotional truth which can remain untouched by moral and political deceit.

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