

## **“The Existential Quest of Nayantara Shal’s Female Characters struggling with“ The Problems of Personal Emancipation – Storm in Chandigarh.**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Her fictional world is people as usual with men of destiny and the women behind them leaving on more or less equal terms. It is against this backdrop of imminent paralysis of the ordinary modes of leaving in an atmosphere; sur charged with emotion and define by violent attitudes that Vishal dubey under takes to restore balance and sanity to men and women in chandigarh. Sahgal concentrates in this novel on the artistic values, of violence in the content of political events as well as ordinary human relations.

The novel opens with the Union Home Minister statement: “Violence lies very close to the surface in the punjab”. Very soon we discover that the violence refer to is indeed many – faced. Its political manifestation is but one of its many cunning expressions. Thus for instance, the “Emotional” violence situation as when inder obsessively suspects his wife fidelity or as when Leela, Dubey faithless wife this past six years, mulishly rejected the intensity of Dubey’s love for her but always deserves to retain the social advantage of being his wife.

Nayantara Sehgal is a child of Gandhijis India who is born at a time “when India was being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into the one of light”. Nayantara Sehgal admits that she belongs to the “obstinate igoistical breed” of writers who make the world a reflection of there own conditions. Her fictional world is so transparent that the critics could locate proto types for a number of characters of her novels. A clean intermingling of history and fiction can be discerned in Sehgal’s gradually journey from her first novel to A TIME TO BE 1957 upto her latest one WHEN THE MOON SHINES IN DAY. She rights about politicians and bureaucrats in realistic and reliable. Thus, her in born talent and genius where stibulated by the milieu she was born in that merely a birth in such an illustrious family as that of nehru, make one a good political righter. She is the master of uncanny.Insight into the in the most recesses of the human mind particularly feminine mind besides a deploying understanding and faith in the progress of nation inspite of all the obstaclies. This is what constitutes the calibre in her novel. Her linguistic competence, stylistic devices, and gradual development of character or sufficient to compensate that amorphons structure of her novels, K.R.SRINIVASAIYENGAR AVRS,

“Sehgals feelings for politics and her command over English is rather more impressive than her art as a novelist”.

Her views of women would the value she attaches to freedom of an individual and that of nation, the futility of violence all these are reflected deftly in her novels.

Stereotype has come to mean “anything that repeats or duplicates something else without variation; hence something that lacks individualizing characteritics”. But this term is inadequate for discussion of Nayantara Sahgal’s women characters, because it suggests that her female character reappear over and over again in identical form. Though many of the women share similarities, they also have idiosyncrasies which they do not share with others, that is what makes them individual. In spite of their individualizing traits Sahgal’s female characters are conditioned by a ferocious cult which assoatesfemale with “Virtue” thus enjoining upon her never to leave home. Because leaving home constitutes an offence even in circumstance where home means humiliation, persectution and injury. It is the sanctified impenetrable dust that shrouds on artificially preserved, rather than a living heritage”.

The wxistential quest of Nayantara Sahgal’s frmale characters has, to be judged against the backdrop of an heritage whre in a woman’s taken as a “sex object and glamour fir, fed on fake dreamy if perpetual youth, lulled into passive role that requires no individual identity”. But Rashmi in This Time of Morning revolit against conditioned passivity, asserts her individually by leaving a marriage that had become an emotional wasteland. While the author “was still struggling with the problems of personal emancipation”, her ficitonal Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh leaves her unreasonable and unfaithful husband, and Smirit in the The Day in Shadow achieves her freedom despite a whole horde of children. These female characters, beside leaving home, move “out of the virtuous stereotype that starts with compulsory virginity and ends with one or another form of sari”.

The present paper is an attempt to discuss how the female characters in *Storm in Chandigarh* wriggle out of the strait-jacket of virtuous stereotype, and emerge as individuals. This is brought out clearly in the portrayal of far from ideal marriage of three young couples-Vishal-Leela, Inder-Saroj, and Jit-Mira. No doubt, the novel under study chronicles the tempestuous tale of a city torn by the divided political loyalties, it vividly portrays the young hearts broken up by compulsions of matrimony and call of new-found love. Vishal, a young civil servant, gets inadvertently involved in the private lives of estranged couples. Married to Leela who radiates health, vivacity, a mood of bubbling gaiety, Vishal tries to reach the person in her, "the friend with whom one could be made in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself" but she leaves him empty of the reality of herself.

Their marriage "turn out to be a vanishing search for communication"[23] because mutual "infidelity" was something at the core of their dreams and longings that proves "fatal to fulfilment through marriage". [70] After bearing the tortures of remorse with which his relationship with Leela abruptly ended due to her death, Vishal then strays accidentally into the region of Gauri's natural, luxuriously feminine bounty. She is married to Nikhil Ray, an industrialist, but madly in love with Vishal who could leave her with ease and come back to her with the certainty of a welcome" because everything about Gauri, discovers Vishal, is "lovely and languid and opulent".[19] As she passes warm and pliant into his arms, she has no pretention about her virtuosity, she calls herself a "social butterfly with positively no interest in life beyond my own comforts and pleasures".

While Gauri derives comfort and pleasure in her extramarital affairs, Saroj suffers under the brute male heel of an uncompromising and fickle husband, Inder Mehra. They are two entirely different kinds of people. Inder is man with a confident, muscular grace, radiating energy, a product of the "he-man school", while his wife belongs to the "sphere of intense, sharpened sensibility". When these two people with diverse ethnic background and temperamental incompatibilities get married, it is but natural, comments Gauri, that "every effort at growth on the part of one can look like an act of betrayal to the other". It is not Saroj's assertions that fracture her marriage but the nasty fact about "the other man, the one who had known Saroj before he had". The revelation continues to haunt Inder and fills his mind with revulsion against Saroj, a situation reminiscent of Hardy's Tess who suffers for her loss of chastity. As a result, Saroj forfeits the "right to radiance the day she had told him of her first experience and been branded sinner". Thought in normal moments Inder absolves Saroj of her "fault", he cannot however, exercise the ghost of the other man and blames her impurity. Saroj suffers abjectly, but in order to make living with Inder possible. She surrenders to the terms and conditions that had "ancient tribal, male roots". Though she might be considered used, solid, and unfit for marriage, Inder loves her, not as a person but as a possession, thus under-mining the genuine basis of conjugal bliss that flows from I-Thought relationship. His attitude sounds anachronistic in the setting of the novel because, in spite of his Westernization, Inder turns out to be a prisoner of and outdated male cult which clearly demarcates "the roles of men and women". But sex with Saroj comes easily and satisfactorily to him but even that costs him effort to make it, for it calls for his lingering attention and demands that he gives her part of himself for a while for no specific reason. That kind of companionship has always been difficult for Mira, just as to take a walk with Saroj becomes, "a meaningless expenditure of time" because of his keen absorption in his Weaving Mill.

So, Saroj, like most of her like, remains "the subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self-expression had not even begun". But with the advent of Vishal Dubey in their home, Saroj begins to "believe in her purity". Like Dr. Lydgate in *The Middlemarch*, Vishal becomes a liberating agent for Saroj as he tells her that it is "life's precious obligation to rebel, and humanity's right to be free". Influenced by Vishal's views, Saroj understands that within the desirable woman, behind the eyes, the mouth, the breasts, there was a struggling, imperfect human being to be valued for her own sake. Struggling out of the blind alley she is in, Saroj finds her way out by renouncing "her begging bowl and with her capacity to be broken", feels familiar warmth and security enveloping her in the circle of Vishal's arms, and learns to "live without pretence". The new awareness prepares her to "leave now because this was not home" but a prison where she was incarcerated physically and spiritually. By moving out of Inder's house, Saroj moves out of the virtuous stereotype which consigns a woman to perpetual humiliation, and denies her self-expression.

Unlike Saroj, Mira suffers from an acute sense of emptiness in life. Slenderly feminine, she possesses strength and resolution, and wants all the world's "a perpetual seeking beyond her own safe domestic frontiers". Her marriage with sweet-tempered and considerate Jit has its share of estrangements and misgiving, but their differences dissolve in the compromising disposition of her husband. As Jit is away to Delhi to attend to his business, the howling loneliness assails Mira. She begins to take stock of her situation and wonders if the man she had met at a party and married eight years earlier was, after all, her destination. The privacy of her thoughts is ruptured with the arrival of Inder who has developed a peculiar intimacy with her. As he guzzles down two "drinks", she enquired about his wife's "extramarital talk" with Vishal. Disgusted with Mira's audacious but candid remark. Inder thinks of times when such things could not be spoken, or even thought. He discovers to his horror that "women talk behave like men". But Mira who had been brought up and educated in

foreign countries, is remaking that now-a-days women" just behave more like human beings and less like possessions".

A person who is characterized by her independence, resolution, brilliant education and deep awareness, Mira is unable to diagnose the cause of her discontent. Jit is also seized of the problem and looks for ways to bring Mira's unhappiness to rest. Maybe, he thought, it has something to do with the chemistry of their character, but is mistaken. In fact, Mira needed at times to be "pried loose from her attitudes, shaken into yielding" but the sweet and "soft" Jit lacked the coarser grain of behaviour that could have accomplished it. It is this coarseness in Inder to which Mira is drawn, in spite of her obvious dislike for his manners. But trying to know Inder is like walking on a soapy surface, and Mira does not wish to make love to a mystery. Above all, she wished intensely that she does not live "two lives". The duality of it tears her asunder. However, as they sit down clinging on the sofa in Inder's office, in a terrible, longed-for intimacy, a frantic thought flashes through her mind. With an effort she struggles up as Inder clasps her, but she wants him to meet more and get to know each other, rather than stumble into love-making. This encounter exposes Inder to a new realm of awareness. He experiences a strange but exquisite thrill in such things, an aimless fever drops off him, and he recognizes a new feeling, respect that was missing in his relations with women. Mira's love had allayed the sharp distinction between bed and not-bed that lay buried in Inder's consciousness. Though this self-induced process, Mira finds an answer to the storm rising in her against placidity, against the belief that everything went on and on uninterrupted and unchanged.

Through the portrayal of Leela, Gauri, Saroj and Mira who enact peculiarities under the "facade of fidelity" Nayantara holds on brief for their attitudes. Yet focussing on their action and inter-action with others, the author holds a mirror to the society that subjects its women to worst type of inhuman exploitation and perpetuates the myth of her otherness. Leela, Gauri, Saroj and Mira define themselves through their revolt against the obsolete ways of the world, and experience the thrill of emancipation in their flight from the virtuous stereotype that has been thrust on them since patriarchal times.

Storm in Chandigarh deals basically with the problems of political tension and violence originating from its being : Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states – the Punjab and Haryana. Yet, the theme of tradition and modernity is quite discernible in it, though not in very subtle terms. The characters in the novel behave like moderns and the same time do not isolate themselves completely from the tradition. The blend of tradition and modernity can be observed in their attitude to morality, education, eating-habits, man-women relations, attitude to love and even architecture.

Modernity in India is often confused with the western style of life. What conforms to the western ways of dressing, eating, drinking and social get-together is regarded as modern. It is civilization that we attach importance to. The people in Chandigarh, drinking room society consume whiskey and relish late night dinners. To look modern Mira flirts, smokes and drowns herself in wine. Women characters in this novel no more like to remain confined within the four walls of their houses. They prefer to go to picnic and parties to relieve the burden of boredom and monotony. Mira telephones Saroj to complain that she is "sick of this crisis talk" and suggests that they all should go on picnic to pinjore gardens. They don't hesitate to take whiskey in the company of men. When Inder invites Vishal Dubey to drink, Saroj says "I'll have one too". She feels fussy when she is suggested to avoid alcohol during her pregnancy. This culture change is also manifest in their attitude towards guests. When Dubey tries to decline politely Inder's invitation to take him along to his friend Ajit Sahni's house, Saroj intervenes to say, "It'll be perfectly all right this is Chandigarh". Her emphasis on the name Chandigarh speaks volumes of the modernity of Chandigarh society. Indian people have adapted themselves to the domineering role of English language.

Finally, Sahgal arrives at the concept of the "new woman". K.C. Bhatnagar indicates that Sahgal, becomes an apostle women on the lines of the new woman in the West, the freedom to choose her own life partner. The new Indian woman of whom Bhatnagar mentions, is not yet born, according to Sahgal, she is her dream. The writer eagerly awaits such a woman who would confidently take decision, fight against those forces that are resolved to kill her spirit. Centuries of subjugation have created a stunted growth of woman in India. Thought in ideology she is metaphorically called a "goddess" and in Sanskrit the well-known axiom goes thus, Gods dwell in the place where woman is worshipped, yet in practice male chauvinism has deliberately reduced her to a mental cripple. Sahgal has portrayed all her women, major and minor, as dependents on male friends, companions it for their survival.

The modern must emerge out of this culture. Therefore, the long road of development that lies ahead beckons her incessantly. She observes the ultimate aim of a novelist, that lesser than the truth be told. Thought truthful exhibition of situation and people, her vision of a thoughtfully developed human being a world citizen, intelligent and loving, is voiced vociferously.

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