
New Vision New Values

Dr. Nandita Jain

Assoc. Professor in English Lit.

Govt. College, Sanganer,

Jaipur, Rajasthan.

Abstract

The paper proposes to highlight Nayantara Sahgal's two novels' *Rich Like us (1985)* and *A Situation in New Delhi (1977)* with dominant women characters I.A.S. officer Sonali and Education Minister Devi respectively. Sahgal speaks of new humanism and new morality. The paper examines the shift in the sensibility of the author from the shackles of bondage to the air of freedom and freshness.

Keywords: National Consciousness, New Emancipated Woman, Affirmative values of Life.

Nayantara Sahgal, the daughter of Mrs. Vijay Laxmi Pandit and the niece of Jawahar Lal Nehru is a novelist who writes in the stream of national consciousness. She treats consistently the concept of freedom so fundamental to the peace and progress of the human spirit. With political confrontation, social evils and individual conflicts there runs an undercurrent of humanistic concern in all the novels of Sahgal. **M.K. Naik in A History of English Literature** asserts that "her fiction is all pre-occupied with the modern Indian woman's search for social freedom and self-realization".

After centuries of tough struggle, there emerges a new emancipated woman in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Her Woman persona's voice resounds in the society, she can carve her own destiny independently achieve great heights and is fearless of ostracism. Gone are the meek silent suffering role-models that sulked in the dark corners silently. There are no thwarted ambitions or wishes. Sahgal's women are an extension of Anita Desai's characters. Their cherished dreams are fully realised. The woman in her fiction realizes the status of eminence and power in the patriarchal world. They are vocal.

Sahgal in her celebrated novel **Rich Like Us (1985)** brings about the political ambience of the Emergency (1975-77). The story encircles around a young Kashmiri lady Sonali topper in the I.C.S. She fulfills the wishes of her very ambitious I.C.S. father. This young woman retains the integrity she admired in her father and refuses to bend to the demands of an authoritarian government. Sonali studious, capable, introspective and forthright suffers numerous setbacks in her career and personal life. Her less able peers achieve success by dubious' means. Her sister asks her to "move with the times".

Sonali is a person of forceful manner, firm handclasp and unbending strength. She fights what she feels is injustice on the spot, and is not bashful about voicing her opinions. Her iron faith in truth and justice is pure -unmixed with the alloys of hypocrisy and greed. Her sublimated ideas of honesty, strict principles of integrity and righteousness project her image as an ideal public servant. However, sublimated and refined our theories may be, the practical, dishonest world is a contrast where people emerge more successful than the honest and truthful.

Sonali, the impartial I.A.S. officer, led away by her sentimental idealism that was nurtured by her father, deep down her roots right from the birth, could not accommodate in the new ambience of dishonesty, power and politics. Made of strong metal and mould, which is not amenable to any influence this woman projects the ideal officer India requires. She believed like her father that strict discipline should be maintained in the services and officers should not bow before the authoritarian hierarchy in the bureaucracy.

Sonali gets the post of Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Industry Unaware of the secret deal between the minister and a foreign collaborator about the setting up of a fizzy drink factory. She writes an unfavourable note on the file because the project so unimportant for the country is wasteful of precious foreign exchange. Sonali does not know that the project is the tip of the iceberg. It is really a cover up for the import and storage of car parts required for the manufacture of an "indigenous" car by the Prime Minister's younger son. Sonali is promptly transferred to her home state on a lower post and her successor, Ravi Kachru an old friend of hers takes over as Joint Secretary. The factory is quickly established of course not without the payment of a lot of Indian and foreign money to the Minister who receives it through his daughters in law. The honest Sonali, unsure of her responses to this midnight knock at midday withdraws from the elaborate game playing ultimately, she resigns.

Sonali's resignation is an alarm for all civil servants that the bureaucracy must be kept separate and apart from the sordidness of politics. If civil servants do not bow down but remain true to their service then only there can be little chance for corruption, pressure of the hierarchy and misuse of power. Sonali becomes oblivious of her demoted status and plunges herself whole heartedly in the study of medieval India. The strength of an individual like Sonali is demonstrated by the fact that the oppressive environment can only repel but not change her.

Sonali chooses to construct her life in her own way. She is against the conventions of marriage and is not made to get into the rut of the family ties and the ritualistic ceremonies. Her's is not at all a question of a woman wanting freedom to be an individual, for she is already one. Her choice is to be an active impartial administrator. Her critical eyes that survey the faults and atrocities during the emergency clearly show that there is self-respect in this woman who knows not bend in the world of men. She is the kind of woman who is supposed to have "man's mind and who disappoints the flirtatious and the flippant". (*Rich Like US*, Pg 170)

A Situation in New Delhi (1977) projects the image of powerful assertive woman, bearing command in the arena of politics. Devi forty-four years old, the most intimate follower and the sister of the Prime Minister. Shivraj, is invited to be the education minister after his death.

The men in politics while inviting must have thought that a woman can be a puppet in their hands in the new realm of politics and power.

She stands strong with optimism. They were least aware that she had a mind of her own and would dexterously use the position of authority and command. This beautiful lady a widow, a mother of nineteen-year-old college going son, now in her early fifties takes up the reins of the office in her strong hands & it is her strength and Composure that makes her competent enough to get through any strenuous situation. Wielding power and authority, this lady turns strong and faces all anarchic tendencies like her son's restlessness, the Naxalite connections, the bomb explosions in the theatre etc. and gathers force with the help of Usman her right hand. "She has no inhibitions. She smokes, she drinks." This is the new woman of Nayantara Sahgal confident and optimistic.

As a humanist Sahgal accepts new human values and finds that women have put up with the facade of pretence to maintain their position in the polite society. Sahgal's women assert independence and are no longer women cornered in a world which does not provide for self-expression. Her forte is that of successful and women in eminent position in the political arena as the bureaucrat I.C.S. Miss Sonali (Rich Like Us) and the education minister Devi (A Situation in New Delhi). Both of them trample over the myth of woman's dependence over man and the impossibility of life without man.

Modern and liberal in outlook Sahgal protests and shuns the passive role of woman. She believes in "new humanism" and "new morality." In each of her novels she sees a new vision, rules that are not stagnant but made on convenience. Her life vision is intensely based on this new morality with profound respect for the affirmative values of life

References:

- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Storm in Chandigarh*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988.
- Naik, M.K. *A History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1982.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Rich Like Us*. London: Sceptre edition of Hodder and Stoughton Paperback Ltd., 1987.
- Jain, Jasbir. *Nayantara Sahgal*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1978.