

ISSN: 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Vol. 3 Issue 3 June 2017

Impact Factor 1.854

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

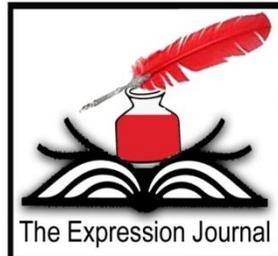
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The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 1.854)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S NOVELS DURING THE COLONIAL INDIA IN THE LIGHT OF HER FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal has been active on the literary scene both as a creative writer and a political columnist for more than two decades. She is the only one to interrelate and strengthen the journalism and creative writing by a common concern. Her work has a strong realistic base that reflects the changing values of the society. Born in Allahabad in the family of Nehru, she is the perfect blend of political and social life. Nayantara Sahgal is not only the inspiring spirit of today but also a glorious figure of tomorrow. Her novels highlight her psychology with many shades – as a woman, as a nationalist, as revolutionary, as a politician and many others. She has gained the reputation as serious writer with tremendous potential. This paper is an attempt to focus upon her fictional works in the light of her feminist consciousness during the Colonial India.

Key-Words

Nayantara, Columnist, Feminist, Creative, Revolutionary, Colonial.

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Vol. 3 Issue 3 (June 2017)

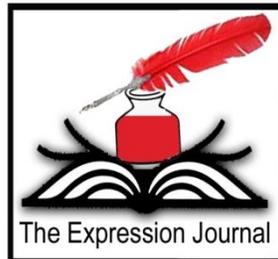
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During the colonial rule in India, there was an awareness of the need of improvement in the condition of women and the idea to impart education to women was revived for this purpose. Several missionary schools and later girls' colleges were opened in various parts of the country. Nayantara Sahgal is the leading practitioner of the political novels in India. In all her novels there are political feelings as well as feminist thought. 'Rich Like Us' published in 1985 is her best novel. It presents the real picture of India during the period of Indira Gandhi. There are five major characters in the novel who presents the colonial India in different shades. Rose, a cockney girl comes not because of philosophical consideration but because she is passionately in love with Ram. She is vibrantly receptive to life with no feelings of race or colour and establishes deep sounds with Ram's first wife Mona. Kishorilal, another original character, the middle class shopkeeper is struggling to make both ends meet. Sonali is quite different from the stereo type of woman found in Indian English fiction. She is an intellectual, educated at Oxford who tops the list in Civil Service Examination. Sahgal's Characters present the psychology of the contemporary society through her. Above all she, "*loved all the wonderful people with whom she lived – vital people who breathed in an exciting aura of goals and ideals – people who gave her happiness*".¹

'The Day in Shadow' gives a sensitive amount of the sufferings of a woman in Indian society when she opts to dissolve a seventeen years old marriage. After divorce, she faces the problems in the society which does not recognize a woman's identity apart from her husband. Simrit, the heroine of the novel faces the unsolvable problems. Sahgal writes – "*She was clinging to a balustrade at the very, top of the building, within reach of the sky, when her fingers were wrenched loose, one by one and she was hurled to the pavement below the*

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*queer thing was that no one took any notice of her fall. The pain leper like things detached itself from her and walked beside her to the end of the pavement, the end of the road and beyond*². She is an extraordinary genius of modern literature. She has presented the feminine sensibility of her time very beautifully. Her novels present obviously a chronological account of Indian feminism from the last phase of freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in mid seventies. She herself explains that feminism is embedded in her *"bones and marrow"*³ and in her emotional and intellectual make upto such an extent that she can no longer remain a mere passive spectator to the happenings with far reaching fall out effective vital human interest.

'A Time to Be Happy' is set in the immediate pre and post independence era. The novel is small but telling strokes creates an authentic picture of those tumultuous plays. Sohan Bhai, a Gandhian freedom fighter recreates for us the calamitous famine of 1943 in Bengal. The murky note strict in the novel regarding post independence scene is reformed as one finds all canons of decency and decorum overthrown in the unscrupulous hunt for power. *'Disorder was Just around the corner, always and no motley crew of parliamentarians would succeed in opting with it anymore that picket fences would stem a deluge'*⁴.

The development of post colonial literature goes through several stages. It is possible to trace a correspondence between the development of national or regional consciousness and that of the postcolonial literatures. During the imperial period the educated elite identified itself with the imperial power and produce writing in the languages of the centre. These first tests in the colonies were often produced by the representatives of the imperial power itself. The colonial system of education reinforced the idea of British superiority feminist prospective are also of great relevance to post colonies and both feminist theories overlap and inform each other. The 'Storm in Chandigarh' is a fictional story of Post colonial India. It is the culmination of the populist parochial obscurantist forces brought to a head by the government policy of the linguistic reorganization of the states of the Indian Union. The novel traces the growth of abusive political culture percolation upwards from the states of the centre. In almost every novel Sahgal has a central woman character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs. Saroj is like Rashmi unhappy and unable to find a reciprocal involvement in her marriage. Inder, her husband is not only from a different culture background but a different kind of person altogether. Saroj who has been brought up in an atmosphere of freedom and trust has grown up to expect equality. She is puzzled by India's violent reaction to an affair she has had before her marriage. She tells him about it in all her innocence but this is for him the beginning of a nagging suspicion. He considers it to be a serious moral lapse which has sullied their whole relationship. Inder believes himself to have been wronged. Her act, he feels, has no place – *"In an order that clearly demarcated the roles of men and women unless that venerable order was breached, trampled and mocked. He was maddened by it. When it came over him he sat*

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looking at Saroj with a revulsion that had ancient, tribal male roots.”⁵

‘A situation in New Delhi’ is set ostensibly in the sixties. But in its capturing of the desperation and the urgency of the situation, it suggests the immediate pre and post emergency. There is a general drift in the direction of more controls even newspapers, films, books and so on, more censorship. She played down some of the roles in view of the thematic totality of the work they figure in it would certainly be hazardous to over emphasized such resemblance and thereby over simplify matters. In the novel the relationship between Usman and Nadira follows almost a similar pattern with one basic difference unlike Uma and Leela. Nadira is in love with her husband and wants to reach him and the failure of their relationship is not due to limitation of their individual natures. Nadira is both beautiful and desirable but Usman’s need is for a different and of woman one with ideas. Usman, however had always gone beyond the merely physical in his relationship. It appears to him to be the final irony this had not happened with his wife who remained so determinedly a body Usman blames himself.

Wherever he might have succeeded with Nadira he had failed. May be she had created an Islamic fortress around her imprisoned herself, a princess in a tower. But he had failed to ‘reach her, and the failure was his.’⁶

We have considered her novels from various post colonial and feminist prospective. We have tried to apply different post colonial and feminist theories to analyze the novels in their light. I have also tried to trace the evolution of Indian feminism and considered some important regional as well as Indian English writers who have dealt the women’s problems. The question whether her novels are the same stories told again and again in somewhat different ways will also have to be considered. In all her novels she uses political chronicling for a perspective analysis of the political process and the participation of women. What is perhaps her singular most achievement is her perspective depiction of the colonial period. She gazes the real position of the time so minted that ever mere straws in the present air spring in the view as token of typhoons in store – *“It is a tribute to her as a feminist novelist that she could sense and show the danger in the new trend years before the country had actually experienced the culmination of such a trend”.*⁷

Thus, we see that she has presented the society of her time in her novel one after another. She is a great woman novelist of feminine sensibility. Her mood, temper thought and vision all are inclusive in her art of feminine ethos. As a mother, beloved, companion, wife, novelist she has enriched the art of novel. We can see many sidedness of feminine sensibility in her novels which represents the true cultural heritage of colonial India. Thus she has presented the Indian society of colonial period with feminine perspective very beautifully.

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