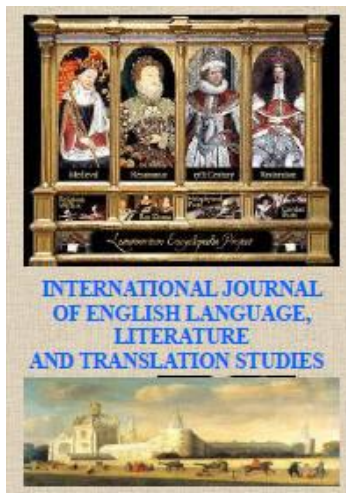


GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY-ITS IMPACT ON NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S THINKING

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ABSTRACT

Sahgal's message is adequately perceptible in all her novels until now. The Impact of the Mahatma was natural on her work as she had grown up in the halo that surrounded him. In the distracted whirlpool in which India finds herself today Gandhi is as relevant as he was during the Raj a period which coined him. Love, Truth, and Ahimsa are cardinal requirements of a man for peace and progress. He has been accepted as a world leader and his teaching cannot be categorised as closed dogma. Indian novelists in English have attempted Gandhi to the level if a Messiah, but Sahgal has retained the real, practical, not mythical Gandhi in her novels. Congress leaders were highly impressed by the content of Gandhi's teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal's novels remind one of the Gandhian ideals, not merely because they were instrumental agents in restoring freedom to India, but because today their relevance is increasingly felt due to violence erupting everywhere.

One of Sahgal's thematic pre-occupation has been her faith in non-violence. Socialist thinkers of India like Jawaharlal Nehru and Ram Manohar Lohia were under great impact of Gandhi's time-tested ideals. In an age strained by violence, rigging in elections, the Ayodhya nightmare, degeneration from community consciousness to communalism, with democracy facing multiple threats, where an erring system is broadening the gulf between the rich and the poor, it is required that Gandhian ideals be implemented with and honesty.

Sahgal adheres to Gandhian principles in every novel. The narrator in *A Time to be Happy*¹ a thoroughbred disappointed his father by not falling in line and taking up the family business. The glaring disparity between plenty and poverty around the factory in Sharanpur disgusted him. Ruskin and Gandhi appealed to him due to their concern for the persevering labourer. Sharanpur labourers also suffered due to lack of awareness on the part of their employers. The narrator had not seen Gandhi in person, but his charisma had lured him to a great extent, India needed many more genuine Gadhians who would not capitalise on his

name for certain ends, but practice it sincerely and spread it in those corners where people have abandoned him or have just idolised him without understanding the real meaning of the Mahatma's message.

If by spinning Gandhi was preparing a nation for freedom, then the British Raj was just waiting to see the miracle. Tom, like his countrymen, was often reminded of Edmund Burk, who compared with a ripe fruit which fell into the lap of a country when the latter was prepared for. As far as India was concerned the transfer of power hardly mattered to the teeming millions on the street neck deep in earning their daily bread. Surprisingly, Tom had overlooked the fact that Gandhi had reached the deeper chords of those millions already out of whom sprang devoted Kuntibahens and Sohanbhais. Even Sanad, a product of the elite class ultimately discovered himself through spinning. The Triumph of Gandhian ideals, thus, is beautifully depicted by Sahgal.

Sahgal devotes one chapter to Gandhian ideology in her next novel *This Time of Morning*². Kailas, the freedom fighter, is a strong exponent of Gandhian doctrines, an arch enemy of Kalyan Sinha, the political opportunist. British rulers gave democracy in India, but it is Gandhi who added the touch of humanity to it. Kalyan learns the hard way that his corrupt motives succumb to defeat while Kailas is invited by the Prime Minister to be the chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

The underlying disgust at the insane violence erupting in Punjab is the indication of Sahgal's attachment to Gandhian cult in *Storm in Chandigarh*³. She portrays the veteran Home Minister, "last surviving figure of the Gandhian era" who realised wisely that he was as antique in the new crop of politicians breeding on mercenary pond power exerting chairs. The novelist defines Gandhianism in these thought provoking words, "Gandhian politics had meant open decision, the open action. No stealth, no furtiveness and, therefore, no shame. Every act proudly performed in the sunlight." Vishal Dubey, the protagonist mused over such thoughts and was happy to note that in spite of the darkness all around there were believers like his associates, in the cult of non-violence.

Smith's friend Raj in *The Day in Shadow*⁴ also had discerned that post-independence politicians capitalised on Gandhi with Christ and was disappointed to discover that while the latter behind the legacy of the church to follow, Gandhi could only give political pigmies inflated with power. There were ministers like Sumer Singh, who were highly impressed by foreign dealers and regarded Gandhi as old fashioned Sumer pondered while thinking about the fantastic progress of the Russians, "It was time to bury Gandhi and write a new page of Indian history. The winds of Asia had Changed the old connections belonged to the garbage can." But Gandhi had meant much more than the spinning wheel. He was a symbol of strength and determination.

*A Situation in New Delh*⁵ is once again a saga of violence as the worst of corroding factors in the health of a nation. Rishad and his companions had no faith in Gandhian ideals, hence they turned in the reverse direction, adopting Naxalite methods to bring in change. His dreams were brutally shattered when his leader Naren died in the explosion. SwarnaPriya, his beloved, becomes, the source of his enlightenment when he realised that life without peace could be ugly. A more pathetic death was not possible for Rishad victimised by bomb blast.

Sahgal turns a new leaf in her novels when *Plans for Departure*⁶ projects her faith in Gandhian ideals through a foreigner Miss Anna Hansen. Henry Brewster also had noted that the 'Company Bahadur' was following an extremely misconceived idea of dominating India through violence. The bomb-blast by Khudiram Bose had proved an equally violent reaction from the English authorities. There were people like Marlowe Croft, who adopted a sweeper boy and renamed him as Jeremiah in order to make the child feel he was human. But the orthodox locals vociferously objected to this good gesture. Unconsciously Croft was implementing Gandhi's ideas of upliftment of scavengers whom the latter called 'harijans'.

Sonali, very significantly, voices Gandhi in *Rich like Us*⁷. Then she decides to resign from service, because she could not compromise with dictatorship masquerading as a democracy; she says "When the constitution becomes null and void by the act of a dictator and the armour of a modern state confronts you, satyagraha is the only way to keep yourself respect." Emergency, which is backdrop of the novel, was in itself a denial of Gandhian values. C. Vijayasree refers to the theme in these words:

"Using the post as a point of reference, particularly the Gandhian age, when love of freedom truly flourished, she contrasts it with troubled seventies in India and demonstrates convincingly that the Emergency has put Democracy in danger".

Nishi's father, is arrested, though innocent, because he could not flatter the then leader in power. Such incidents abound in the novel when it is repeatedly emphasised that post-independence politics in India did not even remotely Ghandhian norms and the country paid a heavy price for violation of those norms.

Freedom is not just political freedom... it is essentially a personal and individual freedom, the freedom Tagore wrote about "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high". This was exactly what Gandhi preached. An individual could develop only in a fearless secure milieu and become fearless himself.

Gandhi is estimated from different angles in *Mistaken Identity*⁸. Bhaiji, the devoted freedom fighter, is a towering personality, who commands respect among jail mates. The trade unionists had no faith in the methodology of Gandhi. They pointed out he had demoralised his own party by calling off the Civil Disobedience movement. They firmly believed that Gandhi's influence is waning. The India of Bhaiji's dream is a country of vegetarian capitalists and rural handicrafts.

B.A. Patham says: Erick Erickson holds that violence is not natural to man. Gandhiji demonstrated that aggressiveness in man can be better dealt with by non-violence.... The message, the writer wants to pass on to the readers, is that courage is involved in taking a stand against tyranny and injustice.

Sahgal's message is adequately perceptible in all her novels until now. The Impact of the Mahatma was natural on her work as she had grown up in the halo that surrounded him.

In the distracted whirlpool in which India finds herself today Gandhi is as relevant as he was during the Raj a period which coined him. Love, Truth, and Ahimsa are cardinal requirements of a man for peace and progress. He has been accepted as a world leader and his teaching cannot be categorised as closed dogma. Indian novelists in English have attempted to raise Gandhi to the level of a Messiah, but Sahgal has retained the real, practical, not mythical Gandhi in her novels. Congress leaders were highly impressed by the content of Gandhi's teaching.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi had derived inspiration from several sources, such as Tolstoy, Ralph Thoreau, Thomas Carlyle, and the Gita, but 'Satyagraha' as a practical weapon to solve certain problems was his original idea. India requires it as an alternative to elitism and industrialism. Austerity, equity and justice are time-tested goals that can save the country from total destruction. This is the overall idea one gets from Sahgal's novels. Thus Gandhian ideals, the search for one's identity and communication between individuals are the prime concern of Nayantara Sahgal in her poignant novels.

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