

## **Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh: A Tale of Interpersonal Incompatibility**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Literature makes a significant contribution in understanding the complex structure of interpersonal relationships and human behavior, by providing an imaginative impression of socio-cultural and political systems of human life. The study indicates that due to lack of trust, love, and understanding, the institution of social relations may become degenerative and result in dissonance. In the presence of modernity, even, sometimes the traditional conventions may result into incompatibility. The novelist mainly explores the plight of women in such conditions. The fundamental purpose of this article is to study interpersonal incompatibility prevailing in human relationships, in the backdrop of an unresolved clash in social and political systems, as depicted in Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh (1969).

**Keywords & phrases:** Incompatibility, interpersonal, social and political system, dissonance, disharmony, modernity, conventions.

### **Introduction**

In traditional Indian culture, marriage is considered to be an eternal sacred bond. Indian women, being proud of self-sacrifice, imitate the role of Sati-Savitri. They remain passionate, dedicated, and compatible to give selfless love, but were slowly mourned as silent victims. Even the Indian traditions are rich in introducing an ideal and intimate husband-wife relationship in a very noble way. The relationship of love and sacrifice between Harishchandra-Taramati, Rama-Sita, and Satyavan-Savitri is a guiding principle of the transforming Indian society. Within the yardstick of Indian values, these couples are the role models that others can follow.

During the pre-independence period or rather pre-modern era, the relationship between men and women were generally simple and noble. The novel by R.K. Narayan, *The Dark Room* (1938) reveals the traditional role of women. Despite the rigidity of marriage at that time, despite the disharmony of marriage, women were still in the bondage of marriage and were proud of self-sacrifice. Ramani's wife, Savitri rebelled and left home after she learns of her husband's relationship with his office colleague, Shanta Bai. But returned back home, after she realized the ill consequences the disharmony that may impact her children. The image of Sita-Savitri embraced during this period made women faithful to their husbands.

At the time of independence struggle in India, as women and men worked side by side, the relationship between men and women gradually gained equal status. They were considered equal partners in the struggle for the nation's freedom. The incredible impact of Mahatma Gandhi roused women, as portrayed in the novels written during that period. Novels like Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), K. S. Venkataramani's *Kandan*, the *Patriot* (1932), Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1957), R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) give a glimpse of women's active participation in fighting for the nation's freedom.

Post-independence, the status of women in Indian society has undergone tremendous changes. This is especially due to the education and successive work openings, which put women at the cutting edge. Indian women wanted to maintain their individualistic identity, which led to self-conflict, disharmony, turbulence, anxiety, and marriage breakdown. The female characters in Nayantara Sahgal's novels, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), and *Rich Like Us* (1985), were portrayed as trying to maintain their individuality, which unfortunately led to interpersonal incompatibility. According to Meera Bai, "as an individual with feelings and ambition, a woman is involved in a complicated, demanding, and exhausting relation, which makes her the 'subject' in the novels of female writers" (1996, p.20).

The modern woman finds it extremely hard to change in accordance with the old customary traditions. She no longer tolerates the dominion of her male companion. In order to protect her rights, personality, and status, she goes through a difficult path. In doing so, she sometimes crosses her own limitations. As observed by Santosh Gupta, "this desire for spiritual and financial independence poses a strong threat to the traditional family and social structure, as women find it increasingly difficult to adapt to traditions and expectations of them" (1991, p.219).

### **The Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships**

In interpersonal relationships, the two participants are interdependent, where the behavior of each affects the other. Compared to the other forms of interpersonal relationships, the husband-wife relationship occupies an important position. It is the source of all family relationships. Husband and wife are the two major pillars of the institution of marriage. The strength of interpersonal relationships is determined by the degree of amity, love, passion, intimacy, and commitment between them. They require equal love, respect, and support of each other. For meaningful coexistence, this relationship must be cherished and cultivated, by maintaining peace and harmony between them. It is the relation of love affection, concern, and trust rather than that of submission and enslavement.

For the family to function smoothly and for the betterment of the social order, a woman should be viewed as a man's equivalent and regarded accomplice. When a woman does not find equality and love, she feels herself trapped, betrayed, and caged in marriage. Along with this, she tries to make her marriage successful but without the similar inclination of her husband, she again fails. She tries to restore her entity by separation and breakup but again gets shattered after seeing the brutal face of social conventions for a divorced woman. As Arrindell & Luteijin comments: "similarity in personality between partners can predict for marital stability and quality, and is a contributing factor subjective well-being" (2000, p.630). Interpersonal relationship with its distinct qualities, like satisfaction, commitment, sacrifice, compromise, etc. is a prevalent part of human experience. Murray observes:

Relationship satisfaction is an indicator of whether the relationship is being successful and provides stability with the individuals involved. When individuals are satisfied with the direction in which their relationships are headed, they are able to continue the development. When individuals are not satisfied with their relationship, it often leads them vulnerable and open to hurt and disappointments (2000, p.600).

Interpersonal compatibility demands mutual psychological adjustments. "Commitment enhances when individuals experience relationship satisfaction and they invest significant or multiple resources in the relationship" (Sacher & Fine, 1996. p.23).

Compromise is an integral part of every relationship. Absence of care, compatibility, love, and trust often develops misunderstandings, annoyance, and serious troubles in any kind of relationship. Interpersonal incompatibility refers to the conflict in relationship that creates tension, and personal animosity among people. Incompatibility, arrogance, mistrust, suspicion, hatred, infidelity, annoyance, and misunderstanding have been found to be the frequent reasons that weaken relationships. These negativities create a huge gap in interpersonal relationships, especially between husband and wife.

Various aspects of interpersonal relationships have clearly been described in the literature and these are changing from traditional heritage to more complex roles in modern times. Feminists have been quite vocal regarding incompatibility in marital relationships. Simone de Beauvoir talks about the male-female perspective of marriages. The connotation of marriage has a different meaning to a man and to a woman. She observes that, for a man, marriage signifies loitering around with many mistresses; while for a woman, it signifies all the suffering, harm, and humiliation to be tolerated silently at home.

“She has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage ... but man, being transcended towards the universal as worker and citizen, can enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and extramaritally” (Beauvoir, 1983. p152).

Indian English women novels have wonderfully expressed interpersonal compatible and incompatible relationships. The fundamental purpose of this article is to provide the predicament of interpersonal incompatibility between the male and the female characters of Nayantara Sahgal. Furthermore, Nayantara Sahgal's feminism in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) mainly revolves around the depiction of various aspects of a discordant husband-wife relationship. As in this novel, the depiction of the male-female relationship also seems so natural and real and is beyond the impulses of feminism. Hence, Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* seems to be the best choice to achieve the identified purpose.

### **Political Incompatibility**

*Storm in Chandigarh* is primarily a novel that intertwines Sahgal's political and personal concerns in the context of the historical event of the partition of Indian Punjab in 1966. The scene is set in the city of Chandigarh, the capital city of the newly established states of Punjab and Haryana. From the beginning, there was tension and trouble between the two newly established states of North India. The chief minister of Haryana, Harpal Singh and the chief minister of Punjab, Gyan Singh highly criticized each other, holding an entirely divergent stance. The Union Home Minister appointed Vishal Dubey, an ICS officer, to bridge the gap between the two conflicting chief ministers. Although such an attempt was not successful, Vishal was called back to Delhi, after the death of the Home Minister.

The novelist seems to focus on the degradation of human values in the contemporary political environment of postcolonial India, which ironically heralds the end of the Gandhi era. Sahgal brings to the notice of her readers that the hunger for power and money are the real motive behind people joining politics. She writes: “...Majority of the people are inspired and guided by the crude instincts, hunger, sex, power” (*Storm in Chandigarh*, p.55). This novel seems to be a struggle between noble ideas and evil instincts, as also, conscience and integrity against immorality and vested interests.

Leaders like Harpal Singh, who respect the Gandhian values and also practice them in their personal and professional lives, unfortunately have to suffer miserably due to selfish and unethical opposing political forces like Gyan Singh. Harpal Singh was driven by a nationalist vision, symbolizing secular and ethnic unity, representing higher expectations of people and thus, accepted the division of Punjab under political pressure. On the other hand, Gyan Singh gained cheap public popularity by emotionally blackmailing them and by applying all evil means to immediately gain power. Harpal Singh even did not hesitate to choose violent means and money power to realize his vested political interests.

The Union Minister symbolizes the Gandhian values of integrity, truth, nonviolence, and justice. Seeing the deadlock between the two chief ministers and fearing its severe outcomes, he instructs Vishal Dubey to visit Chandigarh and to peacefully resolve the problems between the two states. Home Minister, driven by the spirit of national unity, believes in the larger integrity of the nation and is in fact an institution that signifies: “...a single fierce allegiance to India and the invisible regard of an electorate far wider than the one that regularly elected him to parliament” (*Storm in Chandigarh*, p.127).

At the end of the story, the death of the Home Minister symbolizes the death of the Gandhian era, which stood for freedom from fear and sacrifice for the nation. So far as the aspirations of the people of Chandigarh are concerned, they symbolize a “second chance, a starting from scratch” (*Storm in Chandigarh*, p.55), but they receive a severe blow because of the failure of the efforts made to bring a peaceful environment between the leadership of Punjab and Haryana. In view of this, the plight of Chandigarh is not different from other parts of India which face the same problem of dearth of right people to inhabit this modern city.

### **Marital Incompatibility**

*Storm in Chandigarh* offers a juxtaposition of the interpersonal world of politics with the personal world of relationships. Duality and deception are common in political relations as well as in marital relations. In the present novel, Sahgal explores the harsh reality of society that a woman can be happy only if she willingly accepts the traditional image of a wife and a mother created by patriarchal society. But it is also a reality that a woman has an independent existence of her

own. In the institution of marriage, both the partners play an equal role, no one can be considered as superior or inferior; both need equal love, respect, and care. But unfortunately, the reality is entirely different, society always expects more love, sacrifice, care, and loyalty from women.

The characters in the novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* sway between the two worlds, one is to fulfill them on the superficial level without crushing any of the seven vows of marriage, and the other is to fulfill their inner satisfaction, making oneself completely liberated, so as to discover their paradise filled with earthly desires. "The spouses in this novel live together under the same roof but they are separated by a gulf of loneliness, and emptiness. Sahgal believes that physical togetherness may not always lead to mental and spiritual oneness" (Singh, 2016. p16). Her characters have an empty shell marriage. The interpersonal incompatibility happens to be the most dominant subject in the novel, depicting the husband-wife alienation resulting from lack of communication, extramarital relationship, existentialistic problems, and temperamental irreconcilability. The entire story revolves around four couples as portrayed in the novel, viz. Inder-Saroj, Vishal-Leela, Jit-Mara, and Nikhil-Gauri, each having their own issues and, thus, none had a perfect relationship.

The novel narrates the enduring of marital challenges, in addition to the political and societal upheavals. It portrays the life of Inder, who runs a textile factory in Chandigarh and his wife, Saroj. Although they are in wedlock for four years and have two children, there is no passionate exchange between them. Sahgal brings to the fore-front, the stifling marital experience existing between both the partners. In particular, the author features those marital mistakes that lead to detachment. In this novel, the characters have no sincerity, sensitiveness, emotional attachment, or loyalty in their relationships.

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal describes how the demeanor of despotism devastates the amicability of conjugal life. Marriage, which firmly needs the adoration and confidence of both the accomplices, can fail in presence of doubts, frustrations, and dissatisfactions. Saroj, the central character of the novel, has encountered an unforgivable blunder. Before her marriage, she had her first sexual experience with one of her companions, though after marriage, she has been loyal and dedicated to her husband, Inder. Her legitimacy to Inder and her genuineness in the marital affiliation may be estimated by that she even admitted about her pre-marital sexual experience, wanting to be totally withdrawn from her past. But this admission actually doomed their marital relationship.

When Inder comes to know about Saroj's pre-marital relationship, he starts tormenting her. Furthermore, Inder himself enjoys an extramarital undertaking with Mara, however, love and fulfillment are not very predominant in this undertaking. Essentially, Inder is a character who consistently denies the individualism of a woman. He considers women as a one whose endurance depends just with the assistance and backing of a male companion. Here, Sahgal portrays the pitiful circumstance of Saroj attempting to exhibit her adoration and friendship towards her husband but she fails to do so.

Sahgal basically projects the whole male patriarchy system, who considers women as sex gratifying object one side and on the other side; they charge the duty to run their house and children separately. It has been assigned the first duty of a married woman. Anyhow if she fails to do the same or requires the support and co-operation from her partner, she is marked as incapable, incompetent, and incomplete. Her whole identity will be judged only by these works. De Beauvoir states the same:

Even the primitive societies that are not aware of the paternal generative role demand that woman have a husband, for the second reason why marriage is enjoined is that woman's function is also to satisfy a male's sexual needs and to take care of his household. These duties placed upon woman by society are regarded as a service rendered to her spouse: in return he is supposed to give her presents, or a marriage settlement and to support her (Beauvoir 1983, Pp.149-50).

Inder tries to control Saroj and her behavior by imposing certain set of rules on her. But Saroj is a kind of woman who is quite aware to her identity. She cannot find love and harmony in her marital knot, as well as she fails to provide the same to her husband. Inder blames her for everything. So Saroj's promiscuity becomes the major reason of separation between the two. He even treats his children as if they were non-living objects. De Beauvoir further remarks:

Woman is not concerned to establish individual relations with a chosen mate, but to carry on the feminine functions in their generality... In regard to her erotic fate, two essential consequences follow: first, she has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage; sexual intercourse thus becoming an institution, desire, and gratification to the interest of society for both sexes; but man, being transcended towards the universal worker and citizen, can enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and extra-maritally (1983, Pp.156-157).

As the pre-marital affair of Saroj turns to be the reason of the failure of their marital relations, her pursuit of sharing naturally drives her closer to Vishal, whom she finds more obliging and thoughtful. Sahgal here tries to convey a lesson to her readers that extramarital affairs are not the solution to marital disharmony. In fact, it increases the pain, frustration, loneliness, and guilt in the lives of individuals. As Sahgal comments in the novel:

The man in Inder has not learnt the fundamental principles which can sweeten marriage and transcend the trivial sexual prejudices and resultant emotional turmoil. That is why he is symbolic of defeat and despair in absence of communication, and sincere companionship to accommodate each other's needs and interests (Storm in Chandigarh, p.121).

After disappointment and shocked by her husband's duality, Saroj starts taking interest in Vishal Dubey, a frequent guest to their home, whose presence consoles Saroj. Inder projects his code of morality on this issue also, as the interference of any other male in Saroj's life is intolerable for Inder.

The relationship between Leela and Vishal cannot be termed to be cordial at any time. There is little account for the reason for this estranged relationship – maybe it is an incompatible relationship lacking the mutual understanding desired to inculcate a marital relationship into bliss. They were limited by marital knots yet neglected to keep up the conjugal rights and commitments amidst all chances.

She was dedicated to the cult of conformity, to observing forms that his most intense pleas had not been able to penetrate. The whole mindless mess going on down the ages with never a shaft of new light on it. Men and women contorted into moulds, battered into sameness, the divine spiritual spark guttered out... Somewhere under the sun there must be another way to live, with relentless honesty, where the only cruelty would be pretence (Storm in Chandigarh, p.25).

Vishal and Leela remained unfamiliar to each other, throughout their lives. Vishal has a weighty feeling for living with Leela without adoration. In the wake of enduring the torture of regret, his relationship with Leela unexpectedly finishes because of her demise. Vishal's matrimony is a disappointment. As he is a widower, he has a sense of fulfillment with Gauri, businessman's wife who thinks arranged marriage to be a safe haven. However, she builds up a relationship with Vishal, which relies just on sex.

The next major couple in the novel is Tamara (fondly called Mara) and Jit. Mara has a Russian background and after marrying an Indian husband, Jit, she decides to settle in India. The relationship of Jit-Mara is filled with sweetness of love, however their relation is too sweet to be practical. Mara searches for something bitter to vary her taste. Mara has some fancies that Jit is unable to understand and fulfill. Hence, "She wanted some man to drag her by the hair to submission, bring her to a gasping shuddering climax in sex, and brand her personality with his own every waking hour. Jit knew as he thought it that it was not true" (Storm in Chandigarh, p.120).

Being childless, they are suffering from some emptiness in their lives. Mara's marriage with the grumpy and caring Jit has all sorts of estrangement and worries, but Mara's problem is not fleshy, it is mental. In order to seek proper communication Mara comes closer to Inder. When Mara learns that despite her best efforts, she cannot realize the needs of Inder, she ends her relationship with Inder.

Nikhil and Gauri is another couple in the novel, who suffer from marital incompatibility. Nikhil is rich, liberal, and cherishing – but Gauri establishes an adulterous affair along with Vishal. It is hard to comprehend whether it is the physical fascination of Vishal, any inability of Nikhil, or simply an effort to break a mind-blowing monotony that drives this relationship. Nonetheless, regardless of this extramarital association, there is no instability in the between Nikhil and Gauri. They have an apparently happy marital life and the novelist has not either affirmed or disliked the relationship of Vishal and Gauri on part of Nikhil. Vishal considers Gauri as an individual filling the desolation made by the death of his wife, Leela.

Even though, their relationship is quite complex, Gauri leads a simple life, just like “a cup of tea first thing in the morning. Love. A message from Jenny Souza” (Storm in Chandigarh, p.15).

### **The intricacies of the extramarital dilemmas**

The characters in the novel are seen at a dilemma between modern trends and traditional outlook of life which is clearly presented through their attitude towards love, morality, education, and man-woman relationship.

Vishal Dubey's marriage to Leela eventually failed and after her death, he is reveling in furtive gratification in a sexual association with Gauri, wife of Nikhil, a Delhi-based businessman and a friend of Vishal. While in Chandigarh, Vishal establishes another relationship with Saroj, Inder's wife. Inder, on the other hand, has a secret and sexually prone relationship with another woman Mara, Jit's wife. Inder and Jit are friends and both are in business. At the end of the story, Mara comes back to Jit and Saroj leaves Inder and goes to Delhi to live with Vishal whereas Inder is left alone.

While the relationship between Gauri and Nikhil could be termed as one filled with understanding, giving space to each other – thus depicting an almost liberal relationship as far as its depiction in the novel is concerned. Saroj represents the oppressed woman with a disturbed marital relationship. The relationship between Mara and Jit could be termed as somewhat unfulfilling probably because of the absence of a child. Mara has been portrayed as a smart, good looking, intellectual woman who is troubled by a void in her life. Though she runs a school, she does not seem satisfied running it. Thus she seems to be suffering from monotony in life and indulges in a relationship with Inder to break this monotony.

The two parallel parts of the story highlight the importance of human values in politics and personal life and are perfectly intertwined through the logical connection of Vishal Dubey. “The deterioration that had set in the quality of public life ... is bound to influence personal and private values” (Sankar, Kamaraj et.al., 2018. p3). As a political novel, Storm in Chandigarh focuses on the degeneration of human values in the existing political environment of the country which at its root level indicates an end of the Gandhian era. Lone remarks: “...the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity, and absence of pretense, selfishness, and self-centeredness” (2015, p.1).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it can be emphasized that in Storm in Chandigarh, Sahgal's approach to presentation of her points of view is fictionally creative and artistically convincing. The writer has successfully depicted the reality of Indian political state of affairs in the late sixties that highlight deterioration of moral values in public life, with its related effects on personal and private values. The novelist explores the plight of women, to cope with a wrathful lover and suspicious and indifferent husband. In the present novel, Sahgal also exhibits how partners try to find love and harmony outside marriage. The novel is a satire on those partners who fail to provide love to their counter-parts but ready to shower it outside marriage. The study indicates towards the fact that the institution of interpersonal relations can shatter due to lack of trust, love, and understanding. Sahgal advocates a relationship based on mutual communication, companionship and equality. As marital incompatibility springs from lack of harmony and trust, sometimes it is the traditionality of society which results into incompatibility and frustration in interpersonal relationships. Although marriage has the power to provide much happiness, it also has the capability to ruin lives. The novel throws light on the fact that political, social, and personal lives are not watertight compartments and each one leaves its effect on the other. The moral degeneration of personal life gets reflected in society, and passes on its effect to politics, if the person concerned has political inclinations. There is, in fact, an interchange of values among them. Thus, Storm in Chandigarh pleads for compatible relationships in all spheres of human life – social or political - in which understanding, companionship, morality, liberty, and equality perform a significant role.

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