

Portrayal of Gandhian Ideology in Nayantara Sahgal's Novels

Dr. Garima Sanjay Dubey

Asst. Prof.

Malwa Institute of Technology,
Indore M.P.

Article History: Submitted-11/07/2021, Revised-10/08/2021, Accepted-14/08/2021, Published-31/08/2021.

Abstract:

Gandhi the name, the character has been influencing the world so far. The world has tested the relevance of Gandhism many a times and found it effective for all time. The magic, the charisma of Gandhi is so prevailing that no system of government can deny it. The perpetual quest of humanity for peace, justice and equality is getting sturdier, the need is more strapping. The world is full of technology, arms and equipment, the capitalist system, the increasing gap between haves and have not's and above all the decreasing morality, character and dignity in politics and society again turn the world towards the universal values of simplicity, compassion, kindness, honesty, modesty, truth and universal brotherhood i.e. Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam. This research paper will throw a light on the relevance of Gandhian Ideology in this tough time.

Keywords: Gandhian Ideology, Non-Violence, Freedom, Indian Politics, History, Humanity. As it contains five novels so the abbreviated forms of the novels are Plans for Departure (PD), Mistaken identity as (MI), Lesser Breeds as (LB), A Situation in New Delhi as (ASND) and Rich Like Us as (RLU).

Gandhi as a politician may face some questions, but Gandhi as a soul, Gandhi as a human, Gandhi the follower of humanity is beyond any question. His Indian values of Ahimsa, Satya (Truth), Brhamcharya Celibacy, Seva (Service), Daya Karuna (Kindness), Samanvay (harmony) cannot be denied by anyone.

In this difficult and transitional time Gandhian Ideology needs to revive again. The novels of Nayantara Sahgal have a strong influence of Gandhism, and she has portrayed that ideology through her characters.

Gandhian Ideology affects the choice of themes, the art of characterization, weaving of the plot and even the use of language in many novels of the pre- and post-colonial

novelists. What is, however, not so apparent is the deep relationship between the Gandhian thought and the writer's idea of good and evil as implied in Mrs. Sahgal's novels. Whatever her mode of depiction of the Indian social scene, her worldview got modified or extended by Gandhian thought according to her predilections. Mrs. Sahgal presents Gandhian ideology with her personal views; she has an admirer's view towards Gandhi at the same time she has critic's view for non-violence.

Nayantara Sahgal, as a part of the first family of India got so many opportunities to analyse India and Indian politics and history. Through this process, she naturally analyses the Gandhian values and Nehruvian vision. She uses Gandhi, in her novels, directly not as a figure or character, but her characters are strongly influenced by Gandhi. In *Plans for Departure*, she doesn't deal with Gandhian ideology directly, but her characters clearly show the Gandhian attitude in their doings. Anna and Henry Brewster project the Gandhi factor in *Plans for Departure*. Anna is the Danish narrator whose conscious acts as the medium of perception for the reader. Her broader vision and unprejudiced outlook afford a clear perspective of the happenings at Himapur. She is, very informally attached to every one and to the Indian attitude. Anna, the Danish assistant of the Indian scientist Nitin Bose, is far from superiority complex and prejudice, and refuses to conform to the rigid formalities of a memsahib's life. Her informal ways and humane attitude, freshness of mind and openness of out look provide a sharp contrast to Stella, and suggests a might have been partner for Henry.

Likewise, Henry Brewster, a British officer in India, is a good personality, and feels anxious when he is forced to perform any brutal act on the behalf of British crown. He is transferred to Himapur as a punishment, his wife Stella does not like the place and spends most of her time with Pryor family at Lucknow. Henry Brewster represents the benevolent breed of Britishers who loves liberty and goodwill without any prejudice.

Albert Memmi, in his famous work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, distinguishes between the colonizer who willingly adopts the role of usurper and the one who rejects the colonial ideology. To quote Memmi, "If every colonial immediately assumes the role of colonizer, every colonizer does not necessarily become a colonialist." (Memmi 19) The colonizer who refuses to conform to the rigid mould of the imperial value system, either withdraws silently or remains to fight and change the conditions around. By deliberately choosing the difficult path, he alienates himself from his own fellowman. He invites their antagonism either by open rebellion against their mode of life or implied criticism of their code of values.

Henry Brewster, such a man, who is alienated from both sides. He is very much

upset with the case of Khudiram and the fundamental reasons of mutiny. He doesn't like the British imperialistic view of treating Indians as animals. His report on Khudiram Bose's hanging gives the proof of his empathy and fair play. See:

"Henry had written cautious creed recommending policy change, suggesting everyone was not an assassin and whole population could not be treated with suspicion. He had implied the heart of the matter was an equal relationship, and it would only come of mixing." (PD 71) Again his discussion on mutiny reveals his attitude, he says, "There was ghastly savagery on both sides. Making soldiers use cartridges greased with pig's fat was an incredible disregard of their religious feeling." (PD 101)

Tilak's main criticism of the moderate leaders was that, they were elitists who feared that if the common people would start participating in the Freedom Movement; leadership would slip out of their hands. Tilak on the other hand, had immense confidence that he would be able to arouse the Indian masses and involve them in the political movement. Swadeshi, boycott and national education, showed people an effective way of expressing their resentment against the British rule. That's why the biographers of Tilak have described him as the apostle of civil revolt, and 1901 to 1918 is known as Tilak era. Gandhi used his methodology of freedom and made it a unique and charismatic method of protest with the touch of non-violence. Anna and Henry behave and believe in non-violence of Gandhian ideology.

Gandhian values have formed the basis of Nayantara Sahgal's approach to problems, both political and personal. Their attraction has been for her mainly threefold - their reliance on tradition, consideration for the individual, and dependence on moral values. The Gandhian revolution was unique in its choice of non-violence as a method of resistance.

Gandhian revolution, which began when, one man decided to take a stand against injustice and tyranny and called for a change in the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. When Gandhi was forcibly thrown out of a first-class railway compartment, he realized the injustice behind it. He also realized that a violent reaction to this kind of injustice would be self-defeating and likely to lead to more suffering. Violence could be suppressed and lead to a feeling of uncertainty and fear. Not so, non-violence, which was unobtrusive in its initial stage and which demanded a complete change of outlook thus, going beyond its use as a political weapon to become a way of life.

Non-violence was Gandhi's weapon for winning freedom as it was for the earlier leaders. But to it, he added a new meaning and a new significance. He philosophized and idealized these and other allied terms to the farthest possible extent. For example, non-

violence meant for Gandhi a deep faith in love for all, whether friends or enemies, a complete dissociation from evil and abstention from such brute reaction as retaliation or revenge. As for non-cooperation for Gandhi, it was only a new name for suffering. It was to him an acid test of people's sincerity, because it required silent sacrifice. He thus gave the new name Satyagraha to non-violence, non-cooperation. Passive resistance for Gandhi was a restraint undertaken voluntarily for the good of society. Swaraj also meant to Gandhi something more than mere political independence from foreign rule, it was a state of being in which all people live in peace and harmony, getting rid of fear, helplessness and other evils.

It was the coming of Gandhi to the Indian political scene. He had lately returned from South Africa, and then joining the Congress, looked for the first time to the economic condition of the working class and tried to heal their economic ills. Thus, he soon became the doyen of the vast masses of the Indian people. Identifying the economic interest of the peasants and the workers with the national cause, Gandhi drew them into the vortex of the National Movement soon. In Nayantara Sahgal's opinion, "No single fact had done more to reorient the thinking of an entire nation than Gandhi's semi-nakedness. It had shifted the political spotlight from town to village, jolting the town-dweller into an awareness of the peasant's existence and plight."(Sahgal, *From Fear Set Free* 25)

Gandhi was able to evoke a tremendous response because he was "rooted in the same soil, nourished on the same simple diet, reared in the same beliefs and virtues by the same standards as ordinary people" (Sahgal, *From Fear Set Free* 73).

"He had no wish to discard tradition or outlaw religion, or to impose alien standards. His emphasis was on the pious rather than the purely religious aspects of life." (Kumar 91)

The movement had a non-political appeal in its call for self-employment and self-reliance and sought to raise the quality of life. Moreover, Gandhi's call for women to take part in the movement brought them the much-needed equality of opportunity in social and political life. Gandhi's contribution to the Indian Freedom Struggle cannot be compared with any other leader. His Civil-Disobedience, Quit India Movement, Salt-March to Dandi, Satyagrah, working for Hindu-Muslim harmony, his emphasis on the upliftment of the oppressed low castes of the Hindu society, all are remarkable for its uniqueness.

The whole approach of non-violence and truth was a challenging one and shifted the emphasis from money and ambition to sacrifice and renunciation. Suddenly the success attained within the framework of British India was reduced to insignificance. From being a question of earning one's living, it became one of earning it with self-respect and dignity, Gandhian methods promised fulfillment to men as human beings.

"The genius of Gandhi, Nayantara Sahgal feels, lay in his awareness of people. He never forgot that the nation consisted of persons." (Jain 9)

In *Mistaken Identity*, characters and events reflect the effect of Gandhi. Some characters are Gandhian in their values, morals and political and social methods. They work for the welfare of human being but at the same time, other characters question the validity of non-violence and communal-harmony too.

In prison Bhushan's mate Bhaiji belongs to the Indian National Congress. He believes in Gandhian ideology and for him being in jail for Freedom Struggle is an honour, "Every Indian must get used to going to jail. Let it become our national profession." (MI 20)

On the other hand, Pillai is an anti-Gandhian in his tone, Pillai condemns Gandhi's trade union. He says, "Workers don't need advice from Gandhi and his mill-owning capitalist friends." (MI 35)

Likewise, Bhushan opposes Gandhi's view and says, "Gandhi makes no sense to me at all. Goes on bleating about Hindu-Muslim love but a Hindu-Muslim marriage should send him on a fifty day fast." (MI 36) It shows author's diverse approach towards Gandhian ideology.

Bhaiji and other Gandhians believe in sut-spinning, and wearing Khadi, they think that, if Civil -Disobedience had not been stopped in between, the country would be in better position. Bhaiji believes in Gandhi's view on Economy like Swadeshi and Cottage Industry plan, "The India of Bhaiji's dream is a country of vegetarian capitalist and rural handicrafts. A few machines such as sewing machines, that won't corrupt the economy or the moral fibre, will be welcome. They'll make way for leisure but not too much of it silk, wool and cotton will be spun in cottages." (MI 65)

Comrades represent Nehru's view, Oxford scholar Nehru wanted to develop India with hi-technology and industrialization: "The comrades' India is going to be forged out of steel, concrete and electricity, glorified by nuts and bolts... It seems entirely possible that men and women will turn into machines." (MI 70)

Social upliftment was another Gandhian ideal. Gandhians were adept in spinning sut from Charka. In *Mistaken Identity*, they donate their yarn to their 'fallen sisters'. They teach them spinning. Khadi becomes a symbol of patriotism and Gandhivad for them.

Gandhi puts his faith in the quality of the people who are involved in the task of nation building. Nayantara Sahgal uses the Gandhian tricks. According to her, Gandhian values are not the quality of intelligence, but the quality of morals. Social change can be meaningful only when the human being is not bypassed and remains the ultimate concern.

Factories and economic plans are not an end in themselves. For Gandhi and his followers, revolution was neither a class war nor a religious crusade; it was also not a road to personal ambition. Something of Bhaiji has rubbed off on Yusuf and though out of all political ideologies discussed, satirized and laughed at. Gandhism is presented as the weakest through the pathetic life of Bhaiji, but Bhaiji despite all his limitations comes through as a man of integrity and honesty. Above all, he is a man of tolerance. Both Bhushan and Yusuf learn from him. The monomania of one and the conversion of the other add up to a great deal. Each, in the way he knows best, moves out of narrow concerns.

Most of Mrs. Sahgal's studies deal with the functional role of Gandhi and see him as a potent force behind the National Movement. Weaving the story around a young English teacher Nurullah in the imaginary city of Akbarabad in 1932, *Lesser Breeds*, her latest novel looks at non-violence during the Freedom Struggle till 1968, raising loaded questions like, is non-violence a lunatic's fantasy? Has it got any place in the world as it still is? Did it ever work in India? Shall we know about it?

Gandhian values affect Nayantara Sahgal's writing in so many ways, mostly because it is an answer of many folded questions of personal and political life. Nayantara Sahgal refers to it as the, "most fearlessly active force, because its basic requirement was the human being cleansed of fear and hate, willing to suffer and renounce reward, a human being fully conscious of the "grandeur" of human life and human effort. Non-violence did not base itself on material resources but on the strength and courage of men backed by the personal character of Gandhi who identified completely with the ordinary people of the country." (Jain 9)

During the ten years from 1932 that Nurullah stays with the family, Akbarabad educates him in many ways, leaving him opposed and resistant to non-violence. At the centre of the movement is Nurullah's host the charismatic Nikhil (Bhai) as his friends and supporters call him. Nikhil is a man who would by his honey-tongued gentleness manage to guide an elephant with a hair, but who spends a major part of his adult life in prison because of his involvement in the non-violent movement.

Gandhi believed in "love will disarm the enemy", it has stirred Nurullah, see: "If the enemy realized you have not the remotest thought in your mind of raising your hand against him even for the sake of your life, he will lack the zest to kill you." (LB 41-42)

Nikhil believes in Gandhi's thought that non-violence is not defeat or submission; it is the soul's unvanquishable strength and power. Gandhiji also wanted to see that India would recognize herself. She has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above any

physical weakness, his saying "Strength comes from an indomitable will", awakens the sleeping soul of Nurullah.

Lesser Breeds depicts the later phase of the early Gandhian Age averted by the Quit India Movement of the early forties. It dramatized the lives of young people lost in political confusion of the independence struggle. However, Gandhi is not a character in the novel, but characters are inspired by his ideology, plunge into the fire of revolution against the aliens.

Mrs. Sahgal presents her beliefs and suspicions, "It was absurd to think one could shake Europe's unshakeable arrangement of the world by the twist of a lip, the flick of an eyelid, by tone pause or inflection, using the only weapons left to people who have no weapons." (LB 62)

Mrs. Sahgal does not give lucid picture of Gandhi; she only gives a glimpse and her stance towards Mahatma is so unclear. She neither commends nor condemns him. She only adopts an ambivalent posture. Gandhi is overtly introduced into the history. *Lesser Breeds* is an epic reclining of India's Struggle for Freedom from the late thirties to the partitioning of the country in 1947 and till 1968. It explores Gandhiji's ideology of non-violence vis-à-vis man's violent urge for blood. Nikhil is a true Gandhian created by her. As Jeroo says, "he can spend his life with luxury and glamour but instead of it, he chooses to fight for his country's poor and downtrodden and fights for freedom" (LB70).

Nurullah questions on non-violence, "is ahimsa going to change anything? What use is non-violence? The question is answered by Nikhil: "what else have unarmed people got?" According to him, non-violence is a great education and greater human experience and it will bring change definitely. Pete Ryder, a research scholar researching for non-violence and its importance in 1980, says that, "he is very much attracted by this unique mode of protest. He has a very romantic idea about Ahimsa that it is like Saraswati, an underground river, now hidden, but it always presents in Indian culture and Indian consciousness".

Pete Ryder shows the famous words of Albert Einstein, he wrote for Gandhi in 1944:

"Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." (LB113)

However, at the same time, Mrs. Nayantara Sahgal shows a critic's view on non-violence through Eknath. Mrs. Sahgal explores the possibility that non-violence is the fantasy of one man which may or may not have worked, "Nor did Ahimsa put an end to violence... Good old-fashioned war was waged against Ahimsa and Ahimsa did not escape war's legacies and tragedies, war's prisoners, its wounded and its killedNo lethal weapon wielder stood back and said this man before me is unarmed so I will not strike." (LB114)

In *Lesser Breeds* Gandhi and Nehru occur an indirect presence, we see them through charismatic Nikhil, a nationalist leader who is deeply involved in the Civil -Disobedience Movement, so willingly incarcerated for the courage of his conviction, for the strength of his soul. The voice of Nikhil is the voice of Gandhi. In Nayantara Sahgal's works, Gandhian values are more pervasive and less explicit. In *Plans for Departure*, *Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds*, through Anna, comrade Yusuf and Bhaiji and Nikhil Mrs. Sahgal embodies their emotional urge for freedom of the country. In *Rich Like Us* and *A Situation in New Delhi*, she depicts the deterioration of the political standard around the beginning of the 60s and 70s. *Lesser Breeds* is an epic definition of the first phase of the Indian Freedom Movement to the freedom under the charismatic leadership of the loin clothed Gandhi, who shook the century old pillars of British rule in India.

Bhai says on the question of violent act against Britishers, "I'm the wrong man; I have been delivering another message too long.... "Teach grant, Hand out, what has imperialism's vocabulary to do with us?.....Now you are telling me we must turn our backs on the movement that galvanized us in the first place and order out people to resort to violent struggle." (LB208)

History justifies that Indians have never been imperialistic. India is a country where Ahimsa has been a basic sanskara of our lives. On this account Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru very interestingly describes the character of other countries of the world in his book, "This tender-hearted man can nevertheless view animals in intellectual abstraction, when he reflects on how different countries have adopted different animals as symbols of their ambition or character - "The eagle of the United States of America and of German, the lion and bull dog of England, the fighting cock of France, the bear of old Russia. He asks, 'How far do these patron animals mould national character? Nor is it surprising (he comments with obvious pride) that the Hindu should be mild and non-violent, for his patron animal is the cow." (Nehru 108)

Nayantara Sahgal presents most authentically the state of the Nationalist Movement for freedom in all its varying manners. Through the perspective of Nikhil, Robinda, Nurullah and Eknath, the reader has a firsthand account of what every awakened Indian thought at that time. World War II was generally considered democracy's war against fascist aggression. The hope was that British fighting for democracy, would not deny for India the same. That precisely was the reason why the leaders of the Nationalist Movement despite their awareness that the champions of freedom abroad were the eaters of freedom in this land, offered full co-operation in the war-effort.

Owing to the lack of precise strategy, people's frustration was bound to turn violent. The novel captures picturesquely the nationalistic favour of the villagers in hoisting the national flag and the inhuman manner in which the red turbans attack and fire at them. The authenticity of such a picture can readily be verified from a perusal of any authoritative volume on the history of the period. Majumdar, Raychaudhary and Datta have this to say about the movement:

"According to official estimates, more than 60,000 people were arrested 18,000 detained without trial, 9210 killed, and 1,630 injured through police or military firing during the last five months of 1942." (Majumdar, Raychaudhary, Dutta 75)

In fact, as the action in the latter half of the book shifts to America, Mrs. Sahgal makes us aware of the fact that Gandhi's ideology of non-violence and non-cooperation affected the lives of individual and communities all over the world, in ways that couldn't have been envisaged. Edgar, the American journalist and writer, of the book "Empire", believes that non-violent movement is effective. His sister Leda changes her job after Hiroshima-Nagasaki tragedy to oppose the violence.

In *Lesser Breeds* Mrs. Sahgal shows the impact of Swadeshi Movement on Nikhil's family and his followers, Ammaji sends her hand spun clothes to Khadi Bhandar where Gosiben is a superintendent. Nikhil and his family have changed their living according to this movement; they don't use any British goods.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger says, "Novels whether written in English or in the regional languages have likewise exploited the magic of Gandhi's name and presence, but seldom is the Gandhian role subsumed in the fiction as a whole, Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part; on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel into a biography if he is given a major (or the central part). The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly." (Iyenger 372-73)

This technique to present Gandhi is followed by Mrs. Sahgal in all her novels. Though she is very much influenced by Gandhi, yet at the same time a different aspect of non-violence is given through Eknath, who is a strong headed, shrewd young man, though fights for freedom, but has a negative approach towards non-violence. He wants to get freedom through some other means. As he says:

"It was impossible to ignore Ahimsa, unreal though it was, since it was happening around them... It was violence that made a mark which accounted for all history being Europe's and Europe being master of the world" (LB 42)

Again, he says:

"Non-violence is a great experiment; conceded Eknath, 'so was that fellows who flew too near the sun and crashed down in cinders.....we need to get ourselves some military training." (LB 44)

Novel ends in year 1968, when Eknath and Nurullah comes to Geneva to represent the Indian views on disarmament. As India in 1948 takes a decision of non-alignment with that reference, they have to put their views as Eknath says:

"As disarmament does...we and the other seven of our group set out a proposal for a comprehensive test ban, a freeze on missile materials, a ban on the use of nuclear weapons and a steady reduction of weapon stocks." (LB 361)

Finally, it shows the return of Shan from America, and later her stand for election to the country's first parliament and makes her triumphant way in politics. Nurullah and Eknath represent the Indian point of view of love and peace for the world. Otto Schelling is very much distressed after the World War II. He had a stroke and now recovering from it. At the end, Nurullah thinks about the history of Akbarabad, he thinks that this is a city of religious harmony, because Akbar the great founded it and paved the way for a new tradition of religious harmony.

The end of this novel is very optimistic. Nurullah says, "The time has come to put aside the sad and sordid history of all nations and begin again as equals. A plane silvered by the moonlit Alps is soaring high above their peaks and crests through Europe's night skies to Asia." (LB 369)

Mrs. Nayantara Sahgal says on the question of American war against Iraq, "Though people say non-violence is dead in the country which gave it back its independence, but I would say, a gradual opinion is growing among people for it. Non-violence is not an answer but the answer to install sanity in today's society."(Sahgal 21)

Lesser Breeds is an endeavor that hoists question about non-violence, peace and oppression as pertinent today as in past decade. Gandhian ideology is the centre of the novel.

The major part of this book tries to show how Gandhian ideology of non-violence acted as a catalytic agent in the growth of the National Movement of India. It emphasizes the perspective on the condition of man in Indian society that Gandhian ideology provided. For the first time in the history of Indian philosophy Gandhian ideology presented man not as member of a closed tribe or a caste, but as a member of the entire human community, sharing the sufferings, and predicament in modern society.

In *A Situation in New Delhi*, influence of Mahatma Gandhi is presented through the

thoughts and actions of the three major characters, Shivraj, a dead leader believes in Gandhian ways of rule and does accordingly. Devi, a follower and Shivraj's sister, though works not as an active force but follows the path, which his brother has shown to her. Third and the most active character is Usman through whom Mrs. Sahgal has characterized the real meaning of Gandhian factor.

Mrs. Sahgal's major concern is to analyze the political situation with freedom and related values and with the responsibility of the middle-class intellectuals towards society. She is aware of the immense task of preserving and continuing the democratic processes in an underdeveloped country where food is generally more important than freedom. It is in this realistic context that she chooses to emphasize the role of the leaders and the intellectuals. Democracy, in India is for more a matter of faith than of convenience and it is the integrity of the leaders and the intellectuals which in the end is going to weigh the balance one way or the other, to make freedom meaningful as a way of life.

Mrs. Sahgal feels that the main threat to freedom lies in a fragmented and one-sided approach to it - when the leaders and the masses alike feel that it can be realized only in one aspect at a time as an economic or a personal freedom. In *'A Situation in New Delhi'*, she deals with so many threats to freedom - violence and narrow regional loyalties, unscrupulous leadership, and political inertia. Violence she feels, arises out of selfish, narrow attitudes. "It is perhaps natural for people to turn violent when idealism and integrity have yielded to unscrupulous ambition in national life." (Sahgal 3)

She criticizes agitations, bandhs and Satyagrah, which are ordinarily indulged in by people who have submitted to mob psychology blindly and unthinkingly. Naxalite Movement in *A Situation in New Delhi* shows this category of mob. This is a distortion of the Gandhian methods of Satyagraha, for this lack both the purity and the spirit of sacrifice, which marked Gandhian resistance. "Sahgal is willing to concede as Usman too, that the belief in non-violence was confined only to the few, perhaps it can not serve us usefully anymore." (Sahgal 3)

But if this so then it is time to look for a new ideal and a new way of life with which people can identify themselves, but this search should be related the reality of our own situation and not borrowed from others. As Usman says:

"The only way Sahabano, the state owns the big guns. Any confrontation with it, if it's to succeed, must be non-violent. There never was another way. Besides, do you realize it's the only way most people in this country understand and will give their allegiance to?" (ASND 16)

Gandhi was able to evoke popular response because he had identified himself with the common people of the country and had not attempted to either discard tradition or out laws religion.

Meenakshi Mukharjee observes, "No discussion of Indo-Anglian fiction dealing with the Independence Movement would be completed without an assessment of the function of Mahatma Gandhi," (Mukharjee 61) and how does Gandhi functions? He functions as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality and a benevolent human being. Gandhi seems to have had a profound impact upon the philosopher and writers.

Non-violence for Nayantara Sahgal is far more a comprehensive attitude than being merely a political weapon. Gandhian values and methods have not outlived their utility. In fact, they are of greater relevance in the present context. Non-violence, Nayantara Sahgal says:

"An active and a powerful force, it may have been ineffectively used on occasion, e.g. by a misuse of fast, and the like, but it remains a potent force if used in an organized way."(Jain54)

In *A Situation in New Delhi* Usman represents the writer's view. Only Usman has the courage to do what most people in power unable to do. He resigns but this does not mean that he accepts defeat instead; he frees himself from the position in power in order to provide direction to the student agitation. What had been true for him and his generation may not be true for the next. He grasps the reality of the situation and seeks act accordingly. He feels that though the young could be indifferent to what went on around them, each would, if inspired endlessly deprive and punish himself for a bigger cause:

"Individual penance for individual salvation, never mind what happened to the world or our neighbor. It was not his particular way, but it was a way that was how progress and change might be brought about here, by touching the individual readiness for hardship, the personal desire for sacrifice."(ASND 58)

With an unusual depth and understanding, *A Situation in New Delhi* provides an authentic account of what goes on in the whirl of Indian politics after independence. Violence that was so common a feature on the national scene during the sixties captures the attention of Mrs.Sahgal and becomes her central concern in this novel. The novel evidently deals with the corridors of power and the problem of visible and invisible violence. India which had vowed to adhere to the Gandhian order of non-violence is portrayed as a country where confusion, disorder and chaos is wide-spread, where people have turn to be a furious, stone-throwing, factory burning mob. By juxtaposing the situation in the country in 1947 and the

one during the post -independence period, the writer draws an appalling and bleak picture of the present where politicians, with blinkers of self-centeredness on their eyes, have become oblivious of their responsibilities towards the country and its people.

In this novel, Mrs. Sahgal shows the fast-fading impact of Gandhism in political and social life. To the challenge posed to it from rootless, alienated intellectuals, like cabinet members, and corrupt debased people like Minister of Minerals and Metals, is added a new dimension to the novel.

Usman, through his commitment and involvement makes Devi to realize the importance of the spirit that has been dwindling since independence. As he realizes that violence spreads only because it is tolerated, he suggests Devi that there is a need for taking a stand against the violence. He also knows that the government and its law and order paraphernalia cannot establish peace through violent measures. According to Mrs. Sahgal, it should be erased by means of an action described by the 'Bhagvad Gita', non-attachment, duty unallied to reward.

Usman also believes that freedom is not just an isolated political achievement; it should become a habit of mind or a way of life. He teaches both Devi and Michael that it is necessary to overcome fear as otherwise; none can practice Ahimsa to perfection.

In *A Situation in New Delhi* violence is no longer juxtaposed with non-violence, but instead, despite its inclination for self-destruction, emerges as the creative force primarily because it can bring about radical change and shake up the situation which appears to be so rigid and restrictive. It also recognizes the presence of violence in the Indian situation camouflaged by the non-violent Gandhian ideology. In this novel, Gandhian values of non-violence are indicated only through the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University - Usman. It is Usman, who feels that some action has to be taken before violence engulfs everything.

Both vigor and compassion, reason and emotion are required and one without the other is either dangerous or futile. Usman in his own turn comes to grip with a situation in the only way he can by making an effort to give a direction to the resentment and boredom of life, and by putting his trust in human material. In all this - the men and the action - the dividing line remains between a strong moral impulse and the absence of it. In Mrs. Sahgal's novels, compassion is not to be understood only as emotion but as a more comprehensive quality. "It is not even pity or sympathy or involvement in the ordinary sense. It becomes understanding of human nature, which recognizes the law of change and growth; it is also a refusal to champ down everyone to a uniform code of behavior. Compassion includes the capacity to become involved at a human level; it is a rational approach to an emotional

situation. Those who lack it are obtuse in many other ways, they are insensitive to the spontaneity or joy or the fineness of life. They are limited in their humanity and this conditions their approach to life." (Jain64-65).

One may ask what was it in Gandhian ideas that left so abiding an impression on Nayantara Sahgal. Gandhian ideology lent her novels a frame of references. It linked her to the soil. It took her to the roots of Indian culture. It created a social awareness and helped her to creatively interpret the social reality. It made her look at man as a social animal, an individual with his responses and reactions. It sent her searching for a national identity. It enabled her to share her intellectual journey through modern western ideas back to the re-interpretation and renewal of the life of Indian tradition. Thus, Gandhi helped not only to recharge the political life of India but also to reorient Indian literary values.

In *Rich Like Us* Gandhian values and morals are vindicated through Sonali, her father Keshave Ranade and Kishorilal, and Rose is also Gandhian for her love for poor and crippled beggar.

Mrs. Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* though mainly deals with Emergency period yet there are glimpses of historical facts from Indian Freedom Struggle. It would be worthwhile to note that in all of her novels, the Gandhian issue dies away due to sentimentalization of Gandhian philosophy or to the prominence given to the protagonist's involvement in love or to the overlapping of the stock theme of East-West confrontation. In *Rich Like Us* Gandhi is not presented as a figure but as a thought, experiencing through her characters. Keshave Ranade, Sonali's father, is an I.C.S. officer who is highly influenced by Gandhian ideology. Dialogue between Ravi and Sonali gives an example of Gandhian thought;

"...and wasn't that what Gandhi had done, pack off an empire with an antique idea instead of an atom bomb? And half naked in his middle-class, middle-caste skin, he'd taken human rights a hundred years ahead in two decades without a glimmer of class war."(RLU 124-125)

RLU deals with the period of thirty year after independence. Independent India had seen the reign of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Sashtri, and then Indira Gandhi. This novel presents the reign of Indira Gandhi. In each successive novel, the retreat from Gandhian ideals in the contemporary political situation seems to be more final particularly with the reference of *RLU*. Nayantara Sahgal is aware that if the spirit of the Mahatma Gandhi survives anywhere in the world, it is certainly not India. The reasons for the distancing from Gandhian ideas are many, amongst them the hold of orthodox religion which has undermined secularism. Mrs. Sahgal with a clever and imaginative use of the actual historical happening

of the 1970's leads the principal characters of the political sub-plot to a climactic point.

Rich Like Us, shows the author's deep concern for the fast-fading impact of Gandhism in political and social life. Nayantara Sahgal succeeds eminently in exposing the politicians and bureaucrats on whom rests the change from imperialism to freedom, but today they are divided on account of nauseating hypocrisies.

The first Gandhian in the novel is Lalaji, Ram's father, who did not like the Britishers because of their policy on Economy, Ram says:

"He doesn't see why Indian cotton should be sold back to us at enormous prices as English cloth. And when we have trees loaded with fruits why should we have only Cooper's Marmalade in the shops." (RLU 41)

Ram and Zafar's friendship is another example of communal harmony. Secularism and socialism were the prime motto of Gandhiji.

The projection of a contrast between two conflicting political ideologies is an obvious strategy of the novels of Mrs. Sahgal. The novel presents the confrontation between Gandhism and Industrialism; former is represented by simple Sonali, her father and Kishorilal, the latter by young and corrupt youth like Dev and Ravi Kachru.

By juxtaposing the corruption and the Gandhian ideology of the political world, the novel provides an insight into the working of politics explores and examines the consequential problems that this country with the freedom is likely to encounter the political freedom of the country means many things to many persons.

Kishorilal is another Gandhian figure he thinks a secular state needed a Muslim bicycle. Mahatma Gandhi's war against the untouchability is as important as freedom. Kishorilal is in a sanitation business and he thinks that these bathroom accessories will play a very remarkable role in the war against the untouchability. He is very much amazed by the name of the stink carrier, "Harijans" the people of God. Kishorilal's humanistic attitude towards the victim student reminds the kindness of Gandhiji. See:

"I have this fear, he be patiently explained, of the gates clanging shut behind me and the boy remaining here, perhaps for years, so I can't go till he can come too."(RLU 271)

Dev's loose sense of morals, his dishonesty and cruel disregard for the sentiments of Ram and Rose seem to receive moral sanction in the peculiar political climate of the Emergency period. He is close to the power of the central government and malpractices like forging Ram's cheques-against which Rose raises her feeble voice-prove to be part of the established order of the day. Through all these demoralizing experiences, Rose emerges as one who positively affirms the worth of humanitarian sentiments. The climate of the imperial

era does not change her even on the surface; she is singularly free from racist feelings of white superiority. Her heart goes out to the Indian servant Kumar and the handicapped beggar, and the poor laborers. She is an agonized soul struggling to preserve her cherished human values in a corrupt world where forcibly sterilizing old servants or handicapped beggars and manufacturing cars in a bottle factory pass for social reform and industrial advancement.

Rich Like Us does not deal with Gandhian ideology rather it shows the decaying of Gandhian ideology. Lalaji was no more; Ram's paralyzed condition is a symbol of things having gone wrong. It is almost as if all the good qualities of men have been emasculated, paralyzed or rendered impotent. Ram is helpless so were Sonali and her father, helpless and ineffectual. Ranade retreats into a little private world of memories and failed idealism and when the Emergency is declared, it acts like a catastrophe, which releases his hold on life. Another of the same kind of Kishorilal, Nishi's father, who has allowed his need to earn a living and support a family of five daughters to overcome his political and intellectual interests. Indifferent to the new policies, if not directly hostile, he finds himself in prison, a confinement which is further narrowing down of his life. The Emergency swept out every ideological value. His story throws a light on the real horror of the Emergency for it doesn't allow any mirrors, reflections, or images.

Ravi Kachru, a young officer, who has owed for the service of country, becomes opportunistic, believes in dynastic rules and a supporter of the abuse of power and politics. Dev represents the ministry of independent India, self-seeker and corrupt class of the country. Rose's murder is the zenith of the process of murdering Gandhian values everyday, only a hope at the last pages that Ravi realizes his fault and turns again towards Sonali i.e. idealism, Gandhism or good values and moralities.

Thus, *Rich Like Us* does not directly deal with Gandhian ideology but it represents the need of Gandhi, it represents, that Gandhi is relevant at every age and behaviour against Gandhian values, will destroy the morals and dignity of the country and humanity as well.

Since Gandhian emphasis on the role of the individual provided a new perspective to the creative writers, it is relevant to examine here certain statements of Gandhi, which unequivocally shows the importance of the individual in his thought. Individual freedom alone, he argued, could make a man surrender to the service of society:

"No society can possibly be built on denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as a man will not grow horns or a tail, so will he not exist as a man if he has no mind of his own." (Gandhi 2) At the same time Gandhi always perceives man in

society never in isolation from his social milieu, "He maintains that willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society enriches both the individual and the society he is a member of." (Hutchinson 113)

These humanitarian values of Gandhi are presented in all these novels. Nayantara Sahgal projects the Gandhian ideology with a practical manner, and establishes its universal relevance as well.

Works Cited:

- Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*. May 1939. Cited in *Gandhian Thought and Indo-Anglian Novelist*. Ed. Rama Jha, New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1983
- Hutchinson, Francis G. *India's Revolution*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Harvard Uni. Press, 1973.
- Iyenger, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. Asia Publishing House, 1973.
- Jain, Jasbir, *Nayantara Sahgal*. Printwell, Jaipur 1994.
- Jha, Rama. *Gandhian Thought and Indo-Anglian Novelist*. New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1983.
- Kumar, R. *Gandhian Politics: The Rowlett Satyagraha of 1919*. Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Majumdar, R.C. Raychaudhary, R.C., Datta, Kalinkar. *An Advanced History of India*. Macmillan: London, 1963.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. New York: The Orion Press, 1965.
- Mukharjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction*. Arnold-Heinemann: New Delhi, 1971.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Allied Press, 1965.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *A Situation in New Delhi*. London: London Magazine Editions, 1977.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *From Fear Set Free*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Lesser Breeds*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Pub. India, 2003.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Mistaken Identity*. Harper Collins Pub. India, 2003.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Plans for Departure*. Harper Collins Pub. India, 2003.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Rich Like Us*. Harper Collins Pub. India, 2003.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *The National Circus*. The Sunday Standard, April 10, 1966.
- Sahgal, Nayantara. *Point of View: A Personal Response to Life, Literature and Politics*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1997.