

Nationalistic Fervour As Reflected In The Major Novels Of Mulk Raj Anand, Manohar Malgonkar And Nayantara Sahgal

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Yasha Walia*

Almost all the novels of Nayantara are political and her concern with humanistic values is also political. It can also be said that her concern with politics is a humanistic concern because in her works both are inter related and equated. Nayantara stands for the new humanism and a new morality, according to which a woman is not to be taken as a mere toy, an object of lust and momentary pleasure, but man's equal and honoured partner. The novels of Nayantara present the reality of the contemporary political scene. They not only analyze the present trends in all their human details, but also foresee in which direction the political wind blows next. It can be asserted that it is her responsibility to the society that she chooses to discharge through the writing of politically conscious novels. Dr. Manmohan Bhatnagar comments, "Nayantara Sahgal's novels present obviously a chorological account of Indian politics from the last phase of the freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in mid seventies. She herself explains that politics is embedded in her "bones and marrow" and in her "emotional and intellectual make up, to such an extent that she can no longer remain a mere passive spectator to the happenings with a far reaching fall out affecting vital human interests. The account of recent political events in her novels is imbued to the core with an acute consciousness of certain basic assumptions and values to which

**Researcher*

the novelist is committed and it is more by way of enshrining these fundamentals or bemoaning the absence thereof that she goes about setting her stories in a historical recognizable locale. The millieu invoked in all its diverse dimensions is neither mere window dressing nor the dull, drab and soulless account of a historian.”

The very first novel of Nayantara Sahgel entitled ‘A Time To Be Happy’ published in 1958, is a political novel. It deals with the political events of India. It is set in the immediate pre and Post – Independence era. It is a story of the upper middle class people struggling for achieving and then tasting the pleasures of independence. Its scene is mainly of Sharanpur, a commercial city of medium size. It gives glimpses of the stirring of forties and the early fifties. The society, which has been described, is undergoing radical changes. Although, by implication it is political novel, yet its fore ground is always occupied with individuals, their lives and the atmosphere in which they live. The great events in New Delhi also take place but they remain in the background. The chief characters of the novel are the narrator the members of the Shivpal and the Sahai families. The narrator, young and then the middle aged man is the only son of a rich and flourishing family. He becomes a staunch Gandhian and sweeps into the non-cooperation movements. He himself narrates his own story of plunging into the national movement.

“Gandhi’s national movement was nearly as young as I was in those days, and it was natural that I, of recently awakened conscious, and it, of a new born, throbbing vitality, should have been drawn together each seeking the other’s strength. For me it was the clarion call that drew me out of my adolescent confusions and threw open my future course, where as it in turn sought me out eagerly, for it was a growing thing and had need of many like me if it would expand to naturity. Its leader was

just a name to me, for I had never seen him , but the words he spoke about village, India, her desperate plight, her crushing burdens of debt, seemed to echo in the urban tragedy, I saw all around me. Though later I worked in the villages my first arousal was to the city's needs."

The novel creates a realistic picture of pre and post independence era. Sohan Bhai, a Gandhian freedom fighter recreates for us the calamitous famine in 1943 in Bangal. The Quit India Movement enters the novel indirectly through the happenings in the lives of two minor functionaries in the novel. The narration in its meandering course creates a society marked by segregation of communities, discriminations against Indians, servility among the rich and well-set people. Through the narrator and Sohan Bhai, one can learn of the all encompassing movement launched by Gandhi to arouse and uplift the people. The message of Gandhi as presented in the novel cuts across simplistic sociological, political or spiritual formulations. Equally note worthy is the sensing of the political climate in post independence India with an unscrupulous scramble for power. It also describes a covert strain of the rising trends extremism, fundamentalism, obscurantism and populism. There are also ceaseless campaigns against the evils of drinking, meat eating and getting vaccinated against disease.

The characters can be divided in to two groups. The first group includes those who have been brought up in the old, traditionally, conservative mould. They are suspicious of all change, refusing to shift off; they remain unaffected, by the tumult of ideas all around them. And in the second group, there are those who find no escape from some in kind of immediate adjustment with the new pattern of living, slowly evolving and replacing the old. The character of Sanad undergoes a sea change. He is acutely conscious of the political and social forces.

He is drifted in to the spate of nationalism, learns Hindi and spinning, and is thinking of switching over to the “dhoti kurta” style of dress. All these activities of Sanad are noticed with grave concern by Mr. Trent, the manager of a British firm, wherein he is employed. Sanad’s inner conflict and adolescent confusions are depicted with uncanny accuracy. When normal pressurizing tactics fail, he is invited to Calcutta for a face to face talk, where he boldly tells the authorities of the firm that nothing was wrong about his activities; and that the steps he had been taking were only to familiarize himself with his own country.

This novel gives a comprehensive description of the then society- particularly the upper society. It presents the Shivpals, the Sahais, their loves, opinions, acts and experiences and even other individuals around them. It also introduces us to some wonderfully understood British officials and their lives, as well as to a few hapless Indians trying to be more British than they really are. It is a political novel based on humanistic values. It raises some problems, which are discussed very seriously. Shyam Asnani gives a very appropriate appraisal of the themes and problems discussed is related in this novel, when he writes –

“The problem discussed is related to, and springs out of the slowly evolving socio-political situation in the country in those turbulent times; the theme of adjustment to a shifting political panorama in a country struggling to be free. Life is a series of adjustment- outer as well as within one’s own self, - the later is rendered difficult, even frustrating and causing undue tension, when one order is in death-throes, and slowly and painfully-yielding place to a new, unknown reality introducing confusion and chaos, outer and inner.”³

It also describes the Indian attitude towards life and morality. Kusum grows up in the liberal atmosphere of the Sahai

a clerk in Sanad's office is guided by his Brahmin origins and a false sense of social prestige. He refuses the job of the salesman because it will seriously affect his chances of good matrimonial alliance. There are others who are its silent victims and willingly accept their fate, Bihari, the peon in the narrator's office, Prabha Mathur who accepts her husband's second marriage. The men-women relationships and attitudes towards marriage, divorce and other related issues are governed by traditional faith and traditional scriptures.

Writing about contemporary India, Nayantara Sahgal reflects the changing social conditions through her characters and through their aspirations and conflicts. Most of her major women characters are married. It is within marriage that they seek self-expression and fulfilment as individuals. Personal relationships reflect both the changing social conditions and the conflicts of the individual mind. In the depiction of these relationships, Nayantara Sahgal does not display any contempt or superiority. She is concerned with the welfare of women. She leaves no stone unturned for the noble cause of women's liberty. She stresses that the women should be treated as the equal partners of men. They should be given proper opportunities to make a mark in their life. Her women characters clearly express the candid attitude of Sahgal towards sexual relationships. She is of the view that women are not slaves of men, they have the identity of their own.

India has traditionally been a land of peace, plenty and prosperity, life continued with poise and poignancy. Traditionally the history of India found a comparable parallel in the flow of Ganges. Ganges has been attributed a divine origin – the heavenly river cascading to earth to purify the vast tracts of land on which the carcasses of the vanquished army of Bhagirath's ancestors lay. As Ganges has periods of turbulence during rainy season, Indian History also witnessed great changes – many monasteries

housed great ascetics, temple abounded, and vicious battles were fought on its banks. Indian history is replete with tales of valour, patriotism, spiritualism and religious fervour. Equally abominable are the traitors and atheists, who populated the pages of History.

History is not presented evangelistically nor is it lacking in scholarly underpinning. No doubt it is the interaction of public and private lives that interests him. All the historical figures are in the right places, on the right dates, doing what they actually did, though conversations are mostly made up. Yet, for all this documentary authenticity how alive and immediate everything seems.⁴

How relevant the comment appears in Malgonkar's novels like the Men who Killed Gandhi. The Garland Keepers or The Devil's Wind ! His fiction contains a nostalgic yearning for the past as in a sentimental elegy for the vanished splendours of the past.

Malgonkar's second most distinctive characteristic as a novelist, after historical perspective, is his perception of the Socio-Political situation of India. His novels A Bend in the Ganges, The Princes, The Men who killed Gandhi bear witness to Malgonkar's acquaintance with the social reality. He may not deal with or glorify the misery or poverty as it never happens to be his forte. He admits that he does not concern himself about things like poverty which he never experienced.

The Social life of millions of Indian centres round the dustbins of great cities. Granted, But mine does't and for me to write about it would be as insincere as a white man writing about a Negro riot.⁵

As biologically human body is a complex phenomenon so is human existence, in sociological terms. Man has to live adjusting himself to his surroundings. This process of

adjusting himself to his surroundings. This process of accommodation itself is but a change towards something involving a conflict both with external phenomena and internal; thus conflict becomes the quintessence of human existence.

Rousseau has prudently asserted that man, though born free, "everywhere is he in chains." The chains are invisible conventions and traditions that a society imposes on individuals. Man is a social animal ruled by instincts and memories and fallibilities, attitudes and aptitudes, illusions and harsh realities. The social institutions, social groups, directly or indirectly lay certain choices and conditions before him. Schools and disciplines conditions his life so that he may not be entirely instinctual. There are certain moral, legal and social obligations, so as to ensure the individual's allegiance to social organization, which guarantees certain rights and privileges to its members.

Even individual member of a society, then, is required to sacrifice something in order to ensure a uniform conformity. Individual as a consequence is torn between personal gratification and social approbation. This inevitable schism, the irreconcilable contradiction inherent in social life is what the sociologists call a conflict situation. Robert C. North asserts that :

Conflicts take place between individuals , between individuals and organizations or groups; between an organization, between distinct organization or group, between an organization and one or more of its components, or between component parts of a single organization or group. A conflict emerges whenever two or more persons (or groups) seek to possess the same object or occupy the same space or the same exclusive position or play incompatible roles or maintain incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes.

Modern science and technology have assisted man in making his life worth living. Material prosperity or mundane excellence does not preclude the possibility of conflicts, antagonisms and adversities. By nature, man is possessive and sentimentally clutches on to what he acquires.

Other members, less fortunate through accident of birth or ability to manipulate, are forced to look upon the successful with envy. The hut-dweller, for instance, develops dislike for the neighbour occupying a palace – which in terms of sociology is a potential conflict situation. Evidently, everything under Sun is proper stuff for conflict.

Prosperity finds its adversity is certainly true of social situations. Wealth evokes envy, virtue gets tested and beauty causes rivalry. Man gets wound in the coils of desires and demands. The rivalry for possession, for ownership, for glory or achievement are potential states for developing conflicts between individuals or groups.

‘Conflict results from competition between at least two parties. A party may be a person, a family, a lineage or a whole community, or it may be a class of ideas (where in human mind takes fancy into the divine dance of delight and dualism), a political organization, a tribe or a religion. Conflict is occasioned by incompatible desires and aims and by its duration (that) may be distinguished from strife or angry disputes arising from momentary aggravations and the evolutionary frame of reference of most primate studies leads to consideration of conflict and aggression as part of the species and their specific pattern of adaptive behaviour with the result of long term evolution of the species. However, the radical cycle of change inherits the biology of aggression.

It is imperative for survival in any competitive situation

to be ruthless and vigorous and aggressive, victory ensures survival through a change in the original conditions and it paves way for a new order based on new ideals and priorities. The conflicts in society inevitably lead to establishment of a new order, by dethroning an older and ineffective system.

Social Conflicts assume various forms of competition over the control of resources or advantages desired by others where actual physical violence might not be involved.

Gone are the dreams of the mid 20th century functionalists who neglected conflict in favour of a unitary conception of society and culture which emphasizes social integration and the harmonious effect of common values.

Conflict was seen as pathological than the normal state of a healthy social organism. Some sociologists in the 50's and 60's attempted to revive what they called The Conflict Theory against the dominant functionalism of the time.

It is a self proven dictum that the sense of protest is the key-stone of the arch of social realism, simultaneously it is equally true that protest cannot exist unless there are two forces of equal strength and one intermediate theory, which is an apple of discord between the two contending extremities; this, at least is the pivot upon which Marxist theory of life as a struggle for existence rotates; the validity of this hypothesis is proven, when the tea-planters are compelled to form a union and raise their voice against exploitation; however, this can only be possible, if Marxist economic theory is analysed in the light of his concept of surplus value, which begins, thus:

The wealth of modern society, whatever its form, is the product of human labour. The value of all commodities is constituted by human labour and can be measured in human labour-time. But the means of labour are land and capital and

these essential means are the property of a special class-the bourgeois. To this class the proletariat is compelled to sell its labour-power for a wage which represents the average subsistence necessary for the workers and for the children required to keep up the supply of labour. The labour of the proletariat, when utilized and organized by the capitalist, produces a value greater than the wages paid for it. This is the surplus value of labour, and the growth of capitalism depends upon the appropriation and accumulation of this surplus value in the hands of owners of capital alone. Thus the history of modern society is the story of the struggle between these two classes-the capitalist which absorbs the surplus value and the proletariat which produces it.⁶

When it comes to the application of Marxian philosophy to Anand's craft of fiction, the middle path becomes distinctly visible as the *via media* is sought through Gandhian solutions, in accordance to which the destiny of the poor can be improved not through violence but through ethical means; the novelist himself accepts it when he says in *Apology for Heroism*: "I was somewhat saved from the blind acceptance of all Marx's strategic actions. . . I had come to socialism through Tolstoy, Ruskin, Morris and Gandhi, imbued with the sense of this doctrine as the embodiment of an ethical creed, in so far as it was a protest against misery, ugliness and inequality."⁷

The novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* echoes it when the labourers form a union to raise their voice against exploitation and Gangu, Narain, Gorakhpuri and Bhutia become the torch bearers of the infuriated mob and approach the Manager Sahib to protest against their exploitation by the tea-plantation's managerial personnel, as Anand describes:

The coolies crawled away towards the Manager's office.

The bright sun shone upon them and blackened their swarming forms, till they looked like an army of ants proceeding along the dusty road among the areas of parcelled green. . . 'I shall tell the Burra Sahib all that Dilawar Sahib told us', said the Bhutia coolie, [leading the procession] with a glow of power that surged uneasily in his frame (Two Leaves and a Bud, pp. 203-04).

The disruption of Indian economy and disintegration of Indian society in terms of the gulf between the borrower and lender is caused by the evil of typical usurious system in which Shylock's pound of flesh undergoes a cancerous growth of tissues, which becomes the harbinger of a chain of deaths from generation to generation based upon the theory of multiplication of interests; it is so horrible that the generation may undergo the final extinction, but the yawning of interest goes on expanding for ever, as Saros Cowasjee observes:

The landlord, the money-lender and the lawyer make up the vicious trio by whom most of the peasants are caught. Unable to pay rent to the landlord because of bad harvests or owing to expenses connected with their children's weddings, the farmers go to the money-lender. . . The debts multiply, land is mortgaged to pay the rent, the poor harvest itself a result of small holding, primitive methods of farming and uncertain monsoons hardly yields enough to pay for the seeds and the interests owed to the money-lender. The rent finally falls into arrears, and the lawyer enters the picture. The farmer is evicted; if he is lucky, he becomes a mill hand or joins the army.⁸

This view is corroborated by what happens in Two Leaves and a Bud, when it becomes evident that the political system, dominated by the British judicial system and law governing the Indian sub-continent, is found bestowing favours upon the oppressor viz. the landlord, it being an altogether different matter that, although Gangu, apparently, is not a borrower, yet,

crushed under the rolling machine of the law of the British government, he has to suffer the consequences of the loan, his brother had taken from Seth Badri Dass, against mortgaging the land and hut; this is what has been recalled to the memory of Gangu, when the poor peasant has migrated from his native village to Assam, in order to earn bread and butter:

And he [Gangu] wished his brother had not mortgaged it with the land. But what could he have done to avert its being confiscated, since the hut as well as his three acres were part of the joint family property and Lala Beli Ram, the Vakil, had told him that as the law of Angrezi Sarkar stood, the debt incurred by one brother or family was binding on another? 'Strange', Gangu thought. 'How the interest on my younger brother's mortgage piled up, so that all my three acres and my hut as well went just as a gift to Seth Badri Dass (Two Leaves and a Bud, p. 31).

Prof. Anniah Gowda, with a view to dismantling the realistic edifice of the novel, goes to the extreme of declaring that Anand's arguments, antagonistic to the concept of capitalism, are grounded on incorrect hypothesis, and goes on to prove that as, Anand's argument assumes that it is possible to conduct a big undertaking employing hundreds of men, and to continue paying wages and other expenses, without disciplinary methods; that is without bullying or fines, without paying for the risk run by the investor in opening up the wilderness, and without great inequalities as between managerial and menial labour.⁹

Not only this, what the learned scholar fails to understand, is that Mulk Raj Anand is not against discipline but against the lack of discipline, which appears to be a one-sided affair, for the Britishers never impose it upon themselves, and consider it as their birth right to kick and flog the coolies, to derive immoral sexual pleasures with non-resisting women workers; the brutality and apathy is let loose, when the underpaid workers are

condemned to live in dirty rooms with no sanitation and to die of cholera and malaria; this makes Prof. Gowda to change his opinion, when he tries to look at the novel with an aesthetic and literary point of view; he remarks: "In politics it may be right to exaggerate one's case to depict one class of people as villains and another as injured innocents. But it is not right in literature, and if a novel presents people in this exaggerated way, or in any unrealistic way, it is the critic's duty to be severe with a novel."¹² Even in this modification, Prof. Gowda loiters beyond the title allowed for a critic and does not keep in mind that a critic is merely an interpreter and a constructive and counselling judge, not a literary hangman like Dr. Johnson, whose views now have become an object of mere ridicule.

The concept of social realism as a sense of protest with reference to *Two Leaves and a Bud* enters quite a strange sphere and phenomenon, when G.S. Balarama Gupta analyses Anand's rejection of the theory of Karma and God; on one hand, man as the dispenser of his destiny is enfeebled as a mere tool, and on the other Karma becomes synonymous, not with Action, but with what is written in Fate and which is beyond obliteration; at least this is what Gangu is destined to suffer and suffer; a dumb sufferer, whose muteness, while it tries to resist, is transformed into an eternal silence with the shot of Reggie's bullet; as Gupta observes:

Anand's rejection of the theories of Karma and God is also in evidence in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Gangu is a fatalist like Munoo. His deep-seated belief in karma is shown to be largely responsible for his apathy. Poverty and fatalism overpower him everywhere and stifle all his capacity for revolt. He is naïve enough to account for all his miseries in terms of karma. For instance, when he is dismissed by Croft-Cooke's chaprasi he is deeply chagrined, but he feels that it is a reward

for the misdeeds of his past life. Even the death of his wife by malaria is, in his view, a blow struck by God. Thus, Anand shows that the Indian peasant's ignorant belief in fatalism and God are to be rejected, and it is for his own betterment that he should see that the cruelty of a few men in position around him is the cause of his troubles, and not God or Fate. The novel is, in fact, a fierce denunciation of man's cruelty to man. As Dr. Havre says, "There is nothing more horrible in this universe than the cruelty of man to man." The events of *Two Leaves and a Bud*, a ghastly tragedy, prove this. Anand suggests that tenderness alone can change this.¹⁰

When the corollary of shattered ambition is aggravated, the propagandist like Mulk Raj Anand is bound to become a pessimist or a person who sees the dark side of life; the consequence is that in the infernal region, created by the locale of *Two Leaves and a Bud*, 'light never comes that comes to all and the wished morn delays'; this is seen when the revolt of tea-plantation labourers is mercilessly crushed by Reggie Hunt and the novel is on the path of becoming a bleak and black novel. Anand describes the revolt thus:

The crowd was uncontrollable, gesticulating wildly, Men joined their hands in humility or raised their arms menacing, swearing, cursing and begging. 'I will shoot you all' Reggie roared, 'I will shoot you all if you dare to lift a hand or foot . . .' 'Strike them,' he yelled to the wardens, 'Strike them'. And with his lips tight, and his head strung into wooden hardness, he rode his horse into the thick of the crowd, trampling on the men, women and children and pushed and grovelled and run in utter confusion. The frightened mob screamed and rushed and grovelled and run in utter confusion. The frightened mob screamed and rushed in frantic dismay, but he rode straight at them. . . The wardens rushed upon the stricken coolies, and dealt blind, and haphazard

blows in all direction. . . till their blows had tired their hands (Two Leaves and a Bud), pp. 193-95). The reign of terror and death is let loose, a coolie's killed, Dr. Havre's sympathies for the coolies go unneeded and Reggie shouts at the revolutionaries:

Hands up! Hands up! Pointing his revolver at the ring leaders. Warders, march these men back to their houses. Take them off before I shoot them all! The warders came forward and began to drive the men with the barrel ends of their rifles. . . they dug the ends of their rifles into them still more menacingly. Some of the crowd had already turned and ran. The rest fell back stumbling, shrieking, hysterical craven and defeated (Two Leaves and a Bud, pp. 205-06).

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