

## **Picture of Common Man in Storm in Chandigarh by Nayantara Sahgal**

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### **Abstract**

*Nayantara Sahgal, one of the prominent Indian English writers, has been regarded as a prolific political novelist and columnist. Naturally, it is due to her upbringing in a political family being daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, niece of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, where Indian politics was the only thing and earlier who remained in the mainstream of freedom fighting. Almost all female characters express their struggle for self-realization and freedom, though in the shadow of political commotion. Along with feminist subjects, she gives the glimpses of Gandhism, historical movements, and a description of elite class. But she, though a few places, describes the commoners very lively. They are the common man of all time.*

*Storm in Chandigarh describes very vividly the working style of the roadside shopkeepers, workers, their daily routine, car garage, night truck traffic, the drivers, the refugee camp, the campaigning hustle-bustle during the elections and the attacks of one community on the others, etc. The novel witnesses an intense understanding of Sahgal about the commoners, though she doesn't have first-hand experience of all these.*

### **Keywords**

*Dhaba, Cattle fair, Janab, Dupattas, Jharan, Baniya, Thana, Khaki, Turban, Saree,*

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*Picture of Common  
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At the beginning of the novel, Sahgal describes the enormous trees, sides of the road, flowery trees in the center of the road, crops near the road, of sugarcane and chilies dried at an old house. Very impressively Sahgal accounts restaurants and the mending shop's structure, details of crockery in which the tea is served at the 'Dhaba' near the road. She as a witness of local shops tells minutely about the repairing shop of the bicycle, lying on the ground, a person pumping its tube and the cattle fair. She describes the hard-working labor class of Haryana and Punjab and no beggar near the road. She, with insight, presents 'the eyes of the children who stare at the engine of the car with observing eyes and their hopes:

The boys who clustered round his car did not have the dull, the incurious stare of those who have long since withdrawn themselves from their environment, nor know the incomprehension of people gazing at a rare sight. These children were familiar with the machinery and its manufacturer. They looked at the car as if they were measuring its capacity and performance, comparing it with others they had seen, and even anticipating ownership of such a car one day. Eagerness, attentiveness and greed lighted their faces, all emotions living men experienced unless hunger contorted their vision or hopelessness destroyed it. If there were any people in India worth giving loans and assistance to, and who had repaid them with hard, productive work, thought Dubey, it was these-and yet they were the ones who least needed help, who would always, of instinct and vitality, help themselves."(1)

Expansion of the road witnesses development of Chandigarh. Sahgal describes the lake and the site of hills very beautifully. The value of Chandigarh is addressed more than the capital.

The novel gives an acute picture of the sufferers affected by the partition of India and Pakistan. The plight of Harpal's father who runs a provisional store and has great attachment from his motherland, does not want to leave the place where he passed his life, is of the people who faced the bitterness of partition. Domestic leaders' advice to the people to stay at their homes and run their business, as usual, expresses the nostalgia of the people. People were running to a safer place but his father decides to stay at the shop. The scene of loot and common houses at this place, presents commonly occurrences of such incidents during partition. The scene of a gathering to cheer and listen to their newly elected chief minister of Haryana is so realistic. It gives the picture of the common mob either of that time or present. They looked very happy as they don't have any problems in their lives. They have 'garlands and banners in their hands are talking loudly and after the speech starts, seem very curious to listen to their leader and to respond to Harpal Singh, laughingly. The scene of the election office is very vivid that presents frequently in the country;

the national songs keep airing on the loudspeaker. Their preparation for campaigning , appears as it is happening just before the eyes. The minute observation of the the the writer seems very acute:

A group of workers squatted in a corner of the verandah with cups of tea. In the yard, a boy was whistling as he fitted a loudspeaker to the handlebar of his bicycle. He looked up at Harpal. .

‘Here, would you talk through this thing? I’ll hold the bicycle.’

Harpal cleared his throat and said tentatively, ‘Vote for Harpal Singh.’

‘Very nice,’ said the boy. ‘Those fellows at the corner hurt you heard you.’

He took a dirty rag from his pocket and wiped the mudguard of his cycle carefully.

...’ D’you think you’re going for a joy ride? Gyan blasted the boy.

‘Stop flicking that *Jharan* around and get on with the announcement of the meeting.’

‘Going, going,’ chanted the youngster peaceably, folding the dirty rag with care and putting it into his pocket. He mounted his cycle and waved.

...Have to get workers who own bicycles, and kids like that one, for the jobs of announcement and distribution. That kid has just bought his bicycle. It gours it as if it were the National Treasure. (2) The fight between the loudspeaker boy and other and later with Gyan, presents the incidents appear for sometimes in the news another time not:

‘Where has that kid and his crowd got to? They should have been here by now.’ The boys had taken out posters earlier in the evening. He nodded, satisfied, as he is a group of boys struggle in and stand pressed against a rope barrier at the back of the enclosure.

...He was with us, Gyan, when we were pasting the posters at the station, and then a gang that was trailing us kept tearing them off and we got into a fight and ran away from there.

‘Wasn’t he with you when you run?’

‘I don’t know. We just ran.’ ‘In the yellow light from the dais the boy’s face looked pallid..

‘All right, what did you do with the posters?’

‘We dumped them outside the station. That’s where we were when the fight started. Sorry, Gyan-’

...At the station, they found one poster, ripped down the center, stuck fast to the outer wall. Others lay in shreds below it. A stack, still neatly tied, lay in the road.

There was a double row of hutments near the station. They had come up at the time of the Partition and in these five years had taken root. Rusty corrugated iron sheeting had replaced the original flimsy hardboard in the makeshift permanence of shattered human beings. At this time fires were lit behind every one of them and the smoke and smell of cooking rose above the huddle. Gyan rattled the sheeting at the far end of the row, demanding entry. voices argued inside making up their minds, till a woman came to the entrance, her dupatta covering half of her face...In the shadowy room, he looked immense, his arms hanging loosely by his sides, his body rigid. The men went on eating. Gyan kicked away the brass plate. The man leaped to his feet. In the second before they locked in a fierce struggle Harpal thought it uncanny that the woman did not scream...She began to moan only when she saw them down on the floor, Gyan astride the man, his hands in his hair, pounding his head again and again on the ground in a repetition of carnal savagery. (3)

After the loot the fire at the place, reflects the chaos in that area and then deadly rush to save a life in the mob and hullabaloo shows commoners very well:

He did not know if the scream came his lips and became part of the chaos in the street, or if it stayed and burst inside him in an intolerable explosion of raw grief and pain. He knew that he ran wildly in the direction others were running, his only thought to escape the full impact of what had happened to his father and mother. He pushed his way hysterically through the the dense crowd at the bus depot, empty, he could see, except for a single-vehicle. Panic filled him that he would be left behind, never get away from the funeral pyre that had once been his home. He found himself panting and sobbing in a clearing in the crowd and was brought to a dead stop by more than the knowledge that the man facing him was in charge of the bus.(4)

Sahgal portrays the character of the bus conductor taking too much advantage of the chaos very truly presents the inner instinct of taking advantage of the opportunity of a common person. He was not thinking about saving the lives, even of himself rather his mind was thinking about the profit he was going to earn and he was performing his work of selecting the persons into verse bus very very analytically:

The man, about his own age and massively built, looked immeasurably older in the uncanny contrast he presented the men and women beseeching his help. There was nothing in his appearance and manner to suggest that the town behind him was a death trap and the people surrounding him fleeing for their lives. He might have been about to a conduct a sightseeing excursion. He did not seem to hear the pleas or see the frantic, fumbling fingers untying coins from corners of sarees and dupattas, the creased rupee notes held out in worn hands. He was briskly selecting the better

customers, the merchants who had been able to rescue their money boxes from the wreckage of their homes, and relieving them of their saving as he admitted them to the bus.

‘The man had said levelly, ‘ I am driving the bus. and Harpal had not noticed the distinction till later. The man had measured him coolly against the clamoring, bad ragged crowd, asked for his purse, noted its contents, put them into his pocket, and said, ‘alright, get in.’(5)

The confusion of Harpal in the bus, fully packed with the passengers in which he was unable to move, shows the coercion of normal persons who were in the position of ‘nothing can be done. When he comes to know that the bus was going to Delhi. Again the scene of getting the passengers out of the bus gives true picture of normal passenger in any bus:

Two hours later they were in Delhi and the driver emptied his passenger load like vomit into a street corner of the old city where Refugee is set in mobile as hope marks on the pavement. (6)

The scene where the mill workers complain about the quality of the food shows the laborers and workers of all times when their unions try to fight for something or any demand. They inform me that they were not going to work if their food quality was not going to be satisfactory. Their faces were full of anger. All the workers are talking in a thundering voice:

‘You wanted to see me?’ One of them stepped forward.

‘We are not satisfied with the canteen arrangements.’

... ‘There are stones in the wheat flour,’ said Nahar Singh.

... ‘We are told this rubbishly wheat shipped from America. it is the waste which is fed to the pigs over there,’ said Nahar Singh.

... They, were all talking and shouting at once.

... ‘we will not work if we are not fed.’(7)

Inder tries to handle them easily and tells them to look into the matter. But very angrily they record. Their reply suggests what happens normally in the matter of any normal man, the wheat market, and government’s storehouses :

In the babble, Inder no longer knew who was doing the talking. Nahar Singh had stepped back among the men and Inder was facing a solid wall of hostile faces. He wanted to look squarely at them but there were too many of them, reminding him of an intelligent, menacing animal straining at a leash that might snap at any moment.

...Where will you look ? In the government *godowns* where the rubbish is

stored till it loads and the rats get at it before Does it reach us? Into the banyas storehouses where it is stacked while people starve?.(8)

The commoners, again, are authentically presented once more as ‘demonstrators’ at the agricultural institute, the previous year. When a police officer who was at ‘thana’ that time, did not try to handle the mob of the agitators rather he opened fire in which six of the demonstrators and two policemen died and fifteen of the agitators were injured along with the policemen.

A man who was sitting with so many others waiting for the meeting with Harpal, who is charged with doing violence with his wife expresses the image and concept of common man of all times:

The one at the far end held his attention. Hair oiled flat, abnormally large liquid eyes, a dark face composed into an obsequious respectfulness, it was the kind of face one often saw in government offices. Dubey wondered what his normal expression was, deciding that he beat his wife, pampered his children and made money without too many scruples. He was probably a pillar of local society and would die respected by his community. (9)

The episode of Dhan Singh, Gyan Singh’s uncle, gives a crystal clear picture of drivers; their *khaki* dress with turban, their daily routine, their familiarity with the vehicles they drive, and the garage. Their way of talking, their physic, their mentality, their working style, their anger, their drinking and enjoying, everything is so lively in the novel:

He could hear his uncle roar at him from the pump where he stood talking to the garage mechanic, ‘Get out, mule. Anything goes wrong there and I’ll be strung up, not you.’ The huge with its ragged beard had suddenly loomed threateningly in the window. Dhan Singh kept his beard neatly combed and netted when he was on duty, but otherwise, it flowed unkempt giving his face a leonine ferocity. One end of his faded green turban blew sideways in the breeze. his heavy hand swung upon the car door, reached inside to grasp Gyan’s shoulder, and dragged him off the seat. The boy found himself rolling on the ground from the force of his removal. Picking himself up he dusted off the seat of his pants and looked at his uncle with a pleading intensity. ‘I want to learn how to drive.’ ‘Off with you,’ came the roar again, ‘before I warm your hindquarters with the palm of my hand.’(10)

The daily routine of the drivers is given beautifully, who after their work in the evening drink the wine and talk to friends cheerfully. They don’t have anything to bother. Gyan’s uncle Dhan Singh, after drinking with his fellows, hitting each other, and laughing heartily makes the readers familiar with the truck drivers and all the car drivers drinking and enjoying. The description of the toilet in which Gyan was sitting and his uncle was about to pee, gives a true instance of a man after fully

intoxicated..When Gyan asks about his mother, his uncle's way of describing her 'whore' gives the realistic example of the foul language used by the commoners in common areas. His way of showing hatred to Gyan's mother is of a common man towards anybody else. The style of spitting by Dhan Singh, on that question by Gyan Singh presents a realistic way they behave.

Another incident that impressively attracts the attention is the description of Dhan Singh's intense familiarity with the engine of the car and his respect for the engines and anger for new drivers. It reveals their familiarity, love, and dedication to their work. Dhan Singh can recognize the disorder of the engine only after listening to the sound of it. He does not seem satisfied with the drivers as they think driving is just holding the steering wheel. The suffering of the people reaching their destinations when any demonstration is going on, revealed by Man Singh's statement that he could not reach at the appointed place because the mob has blocked the road. Generally, this is done by the normal people. This problem is not of him but of all who feel it every time when there is any strike or any *band* in India that occurs usually and people doing it don't think more about it.

The mill workers' violence is not only of Inder's but worldwide. When workers, due to dissatisfaction, have become violent and beat Inder badly, forget that he is the owner of the mill where they work and due to whom, their family is feeding. Now the only way they find is violence:

It did not surprise him when he heard a sharp crack of sound behind him. He wheeled round in his chair to find the glass pane behind him split. Another crack dislodged pieces of glass and they fell in splinters on the floor in a shower of pebbles. A stone struck his temple, sending a wild pain drilling through his skull. Stunned, he saw men outside smashing other windows, and one man leading the way through an opening into his office. They stopped, momentarily taken aback, to find him there, and then poured in. Inder saw the glint of steel through the painting Gauri had sent. Within seconds knives went through the sofa and chairs, expertly ripping upholdings. Stones smashed the light bulbs on the wall and brought the bulb covers crashing down, their ground glass crunched underfoot. Then they were in a semicircle around his desk. At the same instant, he heard shouts and running feet and knew the mill had been attacked ... They would set fire to it, burn up months of their own labor. And in agonizing importance, he knew he would not be able to stop them. The pain in his head pounded systematically, savagely, nearly blinding him. He snatched up the brass table lamp high above his head, feeling the plug wrench from its socket, and brought it down with all his force on the man nearest him, saw him buckle to his knees and crumple to the floor. Inder could not focus clearly anymore as with a huge effort he overturned his heavy office table. Swiftly they crossed over it and

his fists is smashed out as they closed around him, driving him to the wall. When he opened his eyes the the office was empty and he lay in its ruins. He raised his hand to his mouth, wiping away the blood. The pain hammered in his head. His telephone wire had been cut and the instrument smashed. He dragged himself up, limped out to his car, and examined its tires, Strangely, they were intact, and there was no damage to the car, perhaps because it was not parked in its usual place and they had not expected he would be in office today at all...He drove to the police station. (11}

Sahgal presents concept of the people about the partition of Punjab that it was not in the harm of the people rather it was beneficial for the people as they know that they were in the state which was now separated and they are working hard even the women start to toil and it was good for or state along with the country.

The scene of the demonstrators stopping the way of Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of Haryana and hitting his head, ultimately presents a realistic picture of the common man's fury at its peak. At the secretariat, people are not ready to let Harpal Singh pass so easily from their way and the driver informs about the mob's activity.

### **Conclusion**

Sahgal's description of these people delineates her deep understanding of the commoners. She seems almost successful in describing a realistic picture of these people and their ways. Her novel *Storm in Chandigarh* reflects her grasp not only of the political issues and human relationships but also the commoners, who are the people of all time in India. She seems successful in her endeavor of giving live pictures of these common man in the novel that it is highly regarded as a beautiful political novel in which the story of the separation of Haryana and Punjab is stated beautifully.

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