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# New Voices

**Multilingual International Refereed  
Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies**

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**Editor**

**Dr. Parvez Aslam**

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## Contents

## English

Investigation of the Problems Pertaining to the different levels of Meaning of the English Phrasal Verbs as Encountered by Yemeni Advanced Students	<b>Abdulwadood Mohammed Mohammed Ali</b> <b>Satish Deshpande</b>	1
3 Torm in domestic lives: A study of Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh	<b>Abdul Anees Abdul Rasheed</b>	9
Modes of Protest in Ngugi's <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>	<b>Fadhel Qahtan Aldhahyani</b>	12
Elements of Designing Effective Speaking Tasks	<b>Ali Haidarah Saad</b>	18
Feminism: A Global Perspective	<b>Asmat Hashmi</b>	21
Transnationalism: A study of Michael Ondaatje's <i>Anil's Ghost</i>	<b>Shankar Ambadas Gavali</b>	26
<b>EDUCATION :</b>		
ICT in Education A Paradigm Shift in Curriculum Transaction in Educational Institutions	<b>Shaikh Imran Ramzan</b>	29
<b>MANAGEMENT SCIENCE :</b>		
Study on the 8 Quality Management Principles	<b>Maysoon Sadik</b>	33
<b>HOME SCIENCE :</b>		
A study on Marketing Efficiency Analysis of bakery and confectionery products in Parbhani District (M.S)	<b>Khan Darakhshan Irfana</b> <b>Priyanka-Aeri</b>	38
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION :</b>		
A Comparative Study of Personality Characteristics of Elite Level Semi Urban And Urban Table Tennis.Players of Marathwada Region	<b>P. B. Dube</b> <b>Bondar Appasaheb Bajirao</b>	43
Emotional Ability Among The Badminton and Table Tennis Players of Aurangabad District Level	<b>P. B. Dube</b> <b>Mr. Bondar Appasaheb Bajirao</b>	46
A Comparative Study of Personality Characteristics of Elite Level Semi Urban and Urban Hockey Players of Maharashtra State	<b>Md. Ataullah Jagirdar</b> <b>Abhijit N. Nalwade</b> <b>S. V. Dhande</b>	49

Emotional Ability Among The Cricket and Football Players of Aurangabad District Level <b>Ataullah Jagirdar</b>	<b>S. V. Dhande</b>	<b>52</b>
Emotional Ability Among The Badminton and Table Tennis Players of Marathwada Region <b>P. B. Dube</b>	<b>S. N. Lomte Md. Ataullah Jagirdar</b>	<b>55</b>
A Study of Effect of Eight Weeks of Cricket Training Programme on Speed Among Beginner Cricketers <b>Saudagar Faruk A. Gafur Md. Ataulla Jagirdar</b>	<b>Yousufzai N.S. Abhijeet Nalawade</b>	<b>60</b>
"Effect of Yoga, Meditation on Health Physical Fitness And Performance of State Level Kick-Boxing Players" <b>Miss. Dhanshri M. Gaikwad</b>	<b>Dr. Dayanand R. Kamble</b>	<b>63</b>

**HINDI :**

नयी सदी के हिन्दी गजल साहित्य में बालक जीवन मृणाल शिवाजीराव गोरे		<b>67</b>
हिन्दी साहित्य में व्यक्त स्त्री विमर्श द्वारका गिते-मुंडे		<b>72</b>
तुलसीदास और एकनाथ के साहित्य की प्रासंगिकता (रामचरितमानस और भावार्थ रामायण के विशेष संदर्भ में) सुनिल बाबुराव कुलकर्णी	<b>दत्तात्रय लक्ष्मण येडले</b>	<b>77</b>

**MARATHI**

वेदना व्यक्त करणारा पहिला अस्पृश्य कवी : संत चोखोबा ताहेर एच. पठाण		<b>80</b>
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### 3 Torm in domestic lives: A study of Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*

Abdul Anees Abdul Rasheed

#### Abstract

This paper deals with a critical study of Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*. This novel, on the surface level, depicts violence, chaos and the political perplexity during the late sixties when Punjab was partitioned into two newly formed states-Punjabi-speaking Punjab and Hindi-speaking Haryana. The novel also touches the forced linguistic bifurcation (based on religion) of Punjab some twenty years after the first partition (1947). The novel also focuses on the national illness and the political situation that affects the personal lives of the characters. By means of this paper, efforts are taken to trace how Sahgal has focused on the root causes of domestic conflicts and their consequences on the married lives of the characters.

Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), on the surface level, depicts violence, chaos and the political perplexity during the late sixties when Punjab was partitioned into two newly formed states-Punjabi-speaking Punjab and Hindi-speaking Haryana with Chandigarh as the common capital. But if we scratch the surface, it reflects Nayantara Sahgal's human spirit in a traditional culture milieu and its characteristic response of freedom to meet the challenges of change. The main focus of the novel is on the theme of forced linguistic bifurcation of the Punjab some twenty years after the first partition (1947). This bifurcation was based on religion. The novelist has candidly focused on the national illness and the political situation. G. P. Sharma throws light on this aspect of Indian politics in this novel:

'This novel is a significant work portraying in detail a chaotic period during the transition from one phase of Indian politics to another.'

The word 'storm' in the title, metaphorically works at two levels; one the political, following on the partition of Punjab, and other the personal or emotional crisis caused by the domestic conflicts. The novel begins with the Union Home Minister's statement, 'Violence lies very close to the surface in the Punjab.' It indicates the stormy atmosphere and panic in the two states. Vishal Dubey, the centre's efficient bureaucrat, was deputed to Chandigarh as officer-in-charge to ease the violence.

It was noon when he arrived in Chandigarh. Huge treeless spaces fell away on either side of the road. The line of flowering trees down the middle of the wide dual carriageway looked decorative and fragile, struggling to make an impression against the sprawling emptiness. (SIC- P.20)

One of the aspects of the novel exhibits the listlessness of the married lives of the characters and their sense of loneliness. The futility of the married lives is the result the lack of mutual understanding and inability to adjustment between wives and husbands. This issue is dealt by means of the three married couples Vishal Dubey and Leela, Inder and Saroj, and Jit and Mara.

The first couple is of Vishal Dubey and Leela. Vishal a widower now, has been assigned the most challenging task of settling the matter of strike at Chandigarh by peaceful life negotiations, but he is a miserable failure in his own personal life. The protagonist, Vishal Dubey at the personal level plays a pivotal role in his relationships with various characters. The marital conflicts caused by the lack of communication, subsequently result in the estrangement of the individuals. Dubey is sensitive to the problems caused in the personal world around him. He believes that

decent human relations are not brought into existence by luck or by chance. They can be built *"With care, with love, when possible, and otherwise with time and interest. And always with truth, or as much of it as the other person will allow."*

The second couple is of Inder and Saroj which faces domestic problems caused by the male dominancy. Inder treats his wife, Saroj, as an object having no feelings, no emotions. He rigidly considers that the wife is supposed only to look after the household and bring up children. Ironically, Saroj is to live a normal life in an absolutely abnormal situation. She refuses traditional norms restricting woman's individuality. She wants to have self-identity.

The third issueless couple is of Jit and Mara. This couple is not at all happy as it is void of faith, communication and acceptance. Jit, incapable of violence, a considerate husband, can provide no happiness to his wife, Mara. She is drawn towards the magnetic of Inder as she wants the better of the two worlds-the hardness of Inder and softness of Jit. It shows the necessity of adjustment with the partners without which nothing can spare the married lives from unpredicted disintegration. Inder is alone responsible for his utter unhappiness owing to his indomitable self and stubborn nature. On the other hand, Saroj and Mara, are able to look forward to a better future as they have a compromising nature and a progressive outlook towards life.

In Chandigarh, Vishal gets acquainted with two young couples: Saroj-Inder and Mara-Jit, who offer a study of contrast. Saroj is the cousin of Nikhil Ray. Both Inder and Jit are young industrialists in Chandigarh. Inder looks after Nikhil Ray's nylon plant in Chandigarh and Jit is the whiskey manufacturer. "Both had experienced the traumatic partition in their youth and now watch a further bifurcation of the state just when they are participating in building everything a new in the planned city of Chandigarh."

The novel focuses on how temperamental incompatibility causes disharmony in the married lives of various characters of the novel. Vishal Dubey's marriage is a "vanishing search for communication." Vishal wants to establish relationship based on truth. But it seems difficult for him. In his relationship with Leela he gets much frustrated. Despite her extra-marital affair with Hari, she insists on keeping the facade of a stable marriage with Dubey. She has always been a pretentious and hypocrite. Leela and Vishal lived together but like strangers to each other. Leela's death due to the incompetent abortionist has not touched the inner core of his personality.

Sahgal's fictional creations sometimes seem to contain auto-biographical elements. The character of Saroj seems to reflect the author's image. Sahgal herself acknowledges when she says that there were *"Pieces of me going into the men and women I created when I really began to write."* Saroj grew in her personality through debates and discussion with Dubey. She is amused to hear him say: "If chastity is so important and so well worth preserving...it would be easier to safeguard it by keeping men in seclusion, not women", for he believes that "The biological urge is supposed to be much stronger in men, so it is they who should be kept under restraint and not allowed to roam free to indulge their appetites." It is described in the novel:

For years he had done everything in his power to make her happy.... She didn't know what it was. She didn't want to cherish and affection made no impression on her. (SIC- P.119-120)

The emotional gap between Saroj and Inder keeps widening. Inder is, to much extent, indifferent towards her and seems to have no time for emotional involvement. Besides, he is aggressive in nature, and treats Saroj merely as a personal commodity. For Inder, even to walk with her in the pleasant evening becomes difficult, because for him, it is just a meaningless expenditure of time.

Even Inder's brief affair with Mara comes to an end. Mara's self-assertion and distinct individuality disgusts him. He thinks that man's relationship with women will always be one of domination: "A thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own command her and that's the man she'll respect."

In this novel, Mara stands for a new kind of Nehruvian woman. "Slenderly feminine, she yet reminded him (Inder) of a man, of qualities he associated with men, strength and resolution." Inder's reaction to Mara foregrounds her singularity, a kind of gender-crossing that undermines the categorical division between masculinity and femininity. Mara herself constantly challenges the rigid and limiting definitions of woman that refuse to consider her subjectivity. Affirming women's right to "behave more like human beings and less like possessions." Mara reacts strongly against Inder's assertion that his wife "belongs" to him:

"Belongs to you? So do your shoes."

"Even my shoes are special to me because they are mine."

"They're special because they fit you. If they didn't you'd throw them away. And you can't own a woman, even if she's your wife." (SIC- P.124)

In comparison to Saroj-Inder, the couple of Mara-Jit is better in many respects. Mara is shown an aggressive and her problems are more emotional than physical. Gentleness of Jit makes her dissatisfied in her wedlock. Mara terminates her brief affair with Inder which upsets her a great deal but protects her married life. Jit's being a man of reason makes him different from Inder in terms of his role as husband. His has passive by nature which brings him strength to understand Mara at the end. A conversation with Dubey on the picnic day at Pinjore Gardens had inspired Jit to "reach-out" to Mara. The discussion which helped him, was regarding "cave theory." The novelist has used 'cave' as a symbol of hypocrisy, pretentiousness and non-communicability. Jasbir Jain writes in her book on Nayantara Sahgal:

'Human beings need emotions, and communication and love. Even Inder who is so set in his ways feels the need for the 'oxygen of understanding.' Progress is not important in itself; it is the end-product of progress which matters.'<sup>2</sup>

Inder saw in Gyan Singh's paper the news about Dubey's friendship and lonely walks with Saroj. He had drawn Saroj's attention to this, but Saroj refuses to give up seeing Dubey. In the end Inder hits Dubey for having sent his wife Saroj to Delhi without his knowledge. Dubey feels: "*All he felt was kinship with Harpal, who lay in hospital for no reason he could understand, and with Saroj, another kind of victim.*" The storm is blown off on planes, the political and the personal, at the end of the novel. For Sahgal the test of a value lies in the freedom and growth that indicated a sense of fulfillment for the individual. M.N. Sharma has expressed the opinion that there is an undercurrent of humanitarian concern in Sahgal's work which is also her

'solution to political confrontations, social evils and individual conflicts.'<sup>3</sup>

The novel ends with a note. '*Death should not be so abrupt, he thought. There should be time for moment's friendliness.*'

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