



Research Article

Navigating the Dualities of India: A Comparative Study of Nayantara Sahgal and Kota Neelima

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Abstract

The role of Indian writing at the Global level is vital as it represents the nation's History, culture and socio-economic dynamics. In the 1960s and 1970s, most of the writers in India transitioned from the socio-economic interests to the internal conflicts of the individual worlds. But the writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Kota Neelima kept weaving their writings around the grave external realities of India. Sahgal focused on the political landscape and the urban elite, but for Neelima, the focus was on the real, unseen and unheard rural India. Neelima was deeply working on the Agrarian Crisis in the rural parts of the nation. The contrast of these two writers' work signifies the clear contrast between the affluent city culture and the destitution of the countryside.

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INTRODUCTION

The Evolution of the Indian Novel

Indian English fiction back in the late 19th century, authors specially the women authors, took the authority in the hands and exploited the opportunity to put forward there on thoughts and understanding in their writings with authority. After independence, this was the most crucial time when India was going through social, political and economic shift in many radical ways, so the novelist took the opportunity to mirror the change and its effect on the common man in the nation. Nayanthara Sehgal combined social realism with the modern political and cultural changes that were taking place around her, while writers like Anita Desai were more inclined towards the individual's inner world.

Kota Neelima, a contemporary writer, became a prominent voice of the systematic change that was not focused only on the criticism of the system but also on highlighting the changes.

Sahgal shares the essence of life in urban India with all its glory. Neelima shares more of the ground realities and hardships of Rural India. In this paper, the main focus is to bring forth how these writers highlight the contrast between the two starkly different worlds living within one single nation.

Nayantara Sahgal: The Politics of the Urban Elite and Cultural Conflict

Sahgal is well known for her deep connection with the freedom movement. Her understanding and expression come from her lineage of political influence, and the reflection of the same is seen in her novels as political writing. Hence, her writing is like a continuous documentary of the socio-political change and chaos of post-independence India.

Nayantara Sahgal is renowned for her independent and striking views on society, politics and most importantly, the democracy of India. Her writings, essays and novels often highlight how the Urban and elite shape the culture and the politics of India, all because of their wide exposure to wealth and education.

The urban elite, according to Sahgal, have a very significant say in shaping the national politics, although they do not have the awareness of any ground realities of life in India. They live comfortably, rather lavish lives, far away from the daily struggles of the rural or common citizens. They have opinions without knowledge. This kind of power creates conflicts between different sectors of society.

Another issue she highlights is the cultural conflict. India is a diverse country with numerous religions, languages and cultures all living together. When a particular religion or culture is promoted and protected by a political group, it creates tension in society. The influential Urban elite here can play a vital role in either reducing or encouraging the conflicts with their sources such as the media and institutions.

Sahgal, keeping in view the power of expression, advocates the freedom of expression. She has a strong belief that the thinkers, artists and writers must have freedom of thought and expression. She warns that the politicising or control of cultural narratives can harm the peace of society. It may try to silence free speech and democracy in general.

Overall, Sahgal advocates for the freedom of expression and the sharing of thoughts across cultures and religions. The harmony of such a diverse country comes from the very right of expression of democracy and acceptance of diversity.

- **Influence of Urban Elite:** The strong hold and influence of Urban Elite over the culture and power dynamics of India is the core of her writing.
- **Transitions and impacts:** Her writings are deeply influenced by the major turning points in the history of India. One being the Independence in 1947 that laid the foundation of a new India. Then the emergency in the 70's, that was a major turning point that shaped the future of this new India.
- **Weakness of Modernity in Emerging India:** Her writings revolve around the dilemma of characters and their relationships due to the conflict of modernity with the traditional social system. The characters in her novels often lack the emotional connection due to this ongoing war between traditions and modern society. They lack the empathy and emotional strength to make a proper connection between traditional past and modern approach of future.
- **Feminism in writing:** In her writing, being a strong woman of strong opinions, Sahgal paints her female characters as strong and equal parts of society as men. A woman is not merely a sex object but an equal contributor and partner. The continuous struggle of women to find and establishing their identity in the society is quite evident in her writing.
- **Power Dynamic:** The society underwent a major change from 1947 to the 1980's, and the power dynamics and conflicts have always been there in the socio-political setup. It is depicted with great care in the writings of Sahgal.
- **Cultural conflict of East and West:** The freedom of Western culture blending with the power of Eastern inheritance is visible in her writing in a significant way.

Kota Neelima: Agrarian Distress and Systemic Critique

Where Sahgal's writings are focused on urban India, Kota Neelima depicts the ground realities of rural and real India. The farmers are neglected in the era of urbanisation.

Kota Neelima highlights the shortcomings of the system and how it fails the farmers. The real struggles of low income, debt, lack of resources and knowledge, rising costs, and almost no govt support are only adding to the distress of rural India. These issues even have serious repercussions, as extreme as the suicide of farmers.

As per Neelima, the Agrarian distress is not caused only by nature only. It is deeply rooted in the neglected infrastructure of rural India.

All the problems are intertwined as a lack of implementation of policies, weak infrastructure and above all, unfair market systems. The system in India is focused on some big companies and their profits, completely ignoring the well-being of the farmers. She highlights such problems and urges better

opportunities, facilities, and reforms for farmers of India through her writings.

Where Nayantara Sahgal highlights the role of the elite and the cultural issues of the society, Neelima, on the other hand, focuses on the economic and social well-being of rural India.

Sahgal focuses more on the political and cultural values in democracy. The disconnect of the elite with the real world. Neelima shows the impact of this unawareness and the suffering of the farmers.

- **The Agrarian Crisis:** Neelima, in her writings, such as *Widows of Vidarbha*, explains the reality of farmers facing difficulties leading to extreme steps, such as suicides. The pitiful conditions of their widows and families after that are more grave.
- **Systemic Failures:** Her fiction being a powerful tool, she highlights the gap between the policies introduced by the govt for the rural areas, and the reality of implementation failure of the same.
- **Exploitation of Debt:** The Govt fails the farmers in providing sufficient funding or even bank loans, which makes them fall into the traps of private money lenders and eventually unending sufferings.
- **Integrity of Journalism:** Neelima explores the political pressure on the present journalism, making it lose its integrity and failing the citizens by becoming a mere spokesperson of the Govt. The truth is compromised.
- **Buoyant Protagonists:** Gangiri Bhadra, her hero in *Shoes of the Dead*, embodies the moral courage and patience challenging the corrupt system.

Comparative Analysis: Two Worlds, One Nation

Both authors have a similar patriotic vision of India and have portrayed their country with utmost dedication, but with very different perspectives and aspects of India. They have explored two distinctly different social landscapes.

- Sehgal's focus has remained on the political conflict as she has witnessed it very closely post-independence in the middle and upper classes. Neelima's work revolves around the agrarian society and introduces it to a global audience.
- The gender imbalance in their world gets the primary space, but Sehgal approaches it through an urban lens through modern Indian urban female characters, and Neelima takes a more rural norms and hardships faced in agrarian society, specifically the widows and their orphans
- Neelima writes with poignant notes emphasising structural reforms and bringing change in the plight of women at lower strata of society, whereas Sehgal also explores the same goal through her stress on political honesty and social equity.
- The dishonest practices have been highlighted by both authors in their respective worlds. Sahgal concentrates on political descendants and officials obsessed with power, while Neelima targets the highest echelons of government leadership and public administration.

CONCLUSION

Both writers have recorded the centres of power as well as the struggles occurring in the lives of women from agricultural heartlands, offering the readers a collective and thorough grip of the Indian state. Their shared artistic fervour and ingenious works provide a lasting legacy of a nation that is still navigating its contradictions. While Neelima puts light on the continuing suffering of farmers even after seventy years of Independence, Sahgal portrays the insecurity and distrust of the period following independence. Together, both of them elucidate a nation that is moving towards achieving its true glory in modern times, balanced independence, while struggling through the tempestuous currents of social and political turmoil. Both authors have shared concerns regarding social imbalances and inequity, yet their specific areas of meditation differ. They both offer vital understandings regarding the state of modern India. Taken together, their unique insights assist in comprehending the diverse challenges faced by both rural and urban India.

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Anjali is a dedicated Research Scholar at SKD University, Hanumangarh, Rajasthan, India. She is actively engaged in academic research with a keen interest in literary and cultural studies. Her work reflects critical thinking, analytical skills, and a commitment to contributing meaningful insights to the field of English literature.