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A Study of Postmodern Narrative Technique in Nayantara Sehgal's *Mistaken Identity*

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Abstract:

Nayantara Sehgal is most important figure in Indian writing English. She is the writer who gives the political consciousness into her fiction. Many of her novels are famous for the feminist writing. The aspect of politics becomes the main concern of her writing because she is the part of political family. Her parents took part in the India's freedom movements and stayed many days into the jail. This makes her to know the struggle of the Indian people for the nation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is her uncle, a brother of her mother Vijaya Laxmi Pandit. There are many postmodern techniques she uses in her novel. It goes from the subject matter to the narrative technique. She is famous for the political writing which was many times missed form the contemporary writers. The current paper focuses on the postmodern narrative techniques which abundantly used by Nayantara Sehgal in her fiction *Mistaken Identity*.

Keywords: - historical writing, postmodernism, apocryphal history, historiography metafiction etc....

Nayantara Sehgal is the very famous name in the Indian writing in English for feminist writing. She has the political background which helps her to write accurately in the fiction. The political association with Gandhi and Nehru family makes her the best writer to use postmodern technique in the literature. Her mother Vijaya Laxmi Pandit made her name in the international and national level politics. She played an important role after the independence of India and becomes the first ambassador to the U.N. She even served as member of India's Constituent Assembly, and at the same time she becomes the governor for many Indian states. She is not only the ambassador of one nation but represented at many countries like Soviet Union, United States, Mexico, Ireland and Court of St. James. The political blood runs in her veins and she had seen the struggle of the formation of the nation. She was very close

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in the house to see each movements of political ruler while shaping the nation. She was born on 10th May,1927 in the city Allahabad. They are three daughters of Vijaya Pandit with her father Ranjit Sitaram Pandit. The best phase of her life, her childhood; she spends at Allahabad, Anand Nagar. She was always accompanied with her uncle and cousin at the Allahabad. Uncle Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and cousin Indira Gandhi is very close associative of her at native place. This changed at lot and she unconsciously diverted towards the political writing. Nayantara had taken a very good education that begins with her schooling at Woodstock, Mussoorie. This is the great sign of the great people that they basic education at the very good place. Education helps to nurtures the personality in the field of writing. Even the most important part that they get the skill of expression. This is the coincident that the school she attended comes under the American missionaries due to that she gets her next college admission easily at the American colleges. The result of that she gets her Bachelor of Arts in the subject of History from the Wellesley College Massachusetts in the year of 1974. The education is in the subject of history because of that, she has a very good handling skill of writing historical details in the fiction. The current study is based on her historical novel '*Mistaken Identity*' (1988).

Nayantara Sehgal is prominent Indian writer in English mostly famous for the political writing. Another aspect of her writing which reflect in the fiction is history. The novel *Mistaken Identity* represent this aspect of her writing. It is a political historical writing of the struggle of India's independence. She uses the simple and lucid language to write the fiction. The vocal images and symbol are employed in her fiction. the subject matter is the most important factor we find in her writing. The life of her goes in the political upheaval of India and at the same reflects in her writing. The nurturing of her goes in that period which is very apt for the developments of nation. As a female she keeps the female character strong in her writing at the same time the emancipation of women becomes the prime concern of her fiction. The writing and authentic subject matter makes her writing the best within other fictions. The feature of her personality is journalism which gives her immense skill of writing truth and that is always available in her writing. When the novels are presented, she keeps those journalistic details in her fiction. The most important aspect of archive is taken in the consideration while writing the combination of the fact and fiction. when she writes her first fiction *Time to be Happy* (1957) this is the fiction in search of identity, the novel develops the Indian struggle for independence and the hero's search for his identity. It is mostly about the congress activities in the period of

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1942. The contribution of congress for the independence of India is narrated in the fiction. she writes about the nation's consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of an individual. The period of pre-independence and post-independence narrated in the fiction. Nayantara Sehgal's another work of art *This Time of Morning* (1965) this is a political novel. The characters are more relate to the political personalities of the contemporary era. The plot of the novel is set in the Delhi and about the parliament of the nation. So, it presents the qualities of Sehgal as the most accurate political writer. *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) another example of political writing. This deals with the internal violence of division between the Panjab and Haryana. Though both the states are different but have the same capital which are divided on the language. The story develops many issues of the society in that the freedom of love, the ideological clashes. The India's post-independent period is available in the text. *The Day in Shadow* (1971) is the best example of women's emancipation. The revolt of the women in male dominated era when she suffers the trauma of divorce. The flow of the characters mind available in the novel, a stream of consciousness employed in the novel. The politics is also main concern in this fiction. *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) the novel deals with the political issues of after the death of Nehru. The novel comments on the Naxalite movement

and the student's instability in the country. The politics charges the life of many people in the country but they are opportunistic and other young generation suffers a lot due to the unavailable facility. It represents the contemporary political India. *Rich Like Us* (1985) this fiction mostly depicts the picture of emergency in India which was implemented by Indira Gandhi. This novel is the journalistic details of Indian history. The emergency changes the life of many and it affects the face of nation. *Plans for Departure* (1987) the novel set in the backdrop of the war. The picture of pre-independence available in the text. The love story is available in the fiction and that develops in the turmoil of war and political changes in the country.

The narratives technique of her writing mostly bases on the political writing. The narratives of her are a blend of politics and history which appeals to the national consciousness. The authenticity in her writing brings the clear picture of India in front of reader's eye. The overall narratives of her goes in favor of women's liberation. The role of politics and history in nurturing the human life is clearly available in her all fiction.

Mistaken Identity (1988) is a postmodern historical novel deal with many of the historical incidents. The writer unconsciously or sometimes consciously uses the postmodern trails in her writing.

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The idea of history is well presented in this novel. The historical events go in the background of the novel. The political conspiracy and the fight for the freedom nation goes simultaneously in the backdrop of the novel. The ruler in India makes natives or Indian as foreigner in their own country. They all fight for their own identity and this is the issue of identity crisis raises in the novel. This theme of the identity is always the prime concern in the precolonial and postcolonial country. The novel presents the Indian tradition, culture and history of the nation throughout the fiction. History is the prime concern in relation with the novel in the current research. The absurdity of human life is to divide themselves into Hindu and Muslim. With the riots and the treatment of inequality to each other makes their life meaningless. So, with the equality and acceptance of difference make both religion tolerable for each other, can have the permanent peace in the life. Another point is to treat each other as a human which the first identity of each human being. *Mistaken Identity* (1988) is very different novel than the other creation of Nayantara Sehgal because this the only novel which has the strong male protagonist otherwise her prime focus is mostly on the female protagonist. The novel set in the early twentieth century at the Vijaygarh when most of the Indian states are under British control. And the Raja who is like minor kings appointed by the British government to control people.

The state Vijaygarh is under control of Bhushan's father who is the minor Raja of the place. Bhushan is the son of the Raja.

So, treated as a Prince for the state. The fiction starts with details where Bhushan Singh get arrested under the false charges of conspiracy to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty over India. Before that he comes to the India after staying many days abroad. The procedure of checking luggage and completing that lines to finish the formalities has done that all and just recently come to India in Bombay. When he comes to India this time, he brings many books with him. The book *Famous Trail of History and Wine and Wine Lands of the World* is with him that time. When he comes to Mumbai, he stays with his girlfriend Sylla in the hotel. The book changes his life which he brings with him from England is *The Revolt of the Angels*. The intention bringing the book is just, he likes the binding of the book. He stays in Mumbai because there is drama show of Sylla in the city. The drama 'Scarlet Letter' which has the modifies script by Sylla. There is another reason of his staying back, she gave him a little act into the play. He decides that as soon as his part is over, he will be moving to Vijaygarh. The love between two is at good state and she calls him Jumbo. When the story goes in the background that time, he tells the reader the reason of calling him jumbo. He has many elephants at his home

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so she calls him Jumbo. Bhushan and Sylla meets in the hotel. The personalities of the both persons match which each other, one stayed abroad and another is in the liberal city Mumbai. They enjoy a lot at the hotel. Bhushan narrates the incident when he meets the Turkish man in the hotel where he stays. Both talks about the life in the Turkey the place is so liberal about the fashion and lifestyle. There is lot of the talk about the Muslim religion. According he person the Muslim religion brings in India by the Turkish people. He excites so much to talk with Bhushan that he invites him to visit Turkey. Bhushan started his journey after the play to his natives at Vijaygarh but in between the journey in the train police officers catches him and take in the custody for the charges of conspiracy. Later he directly transformed to jail with other nine members. Bhushan tries to tell the police and magistrate that he caught due to his mistaken identity but it goes in vain and nobody listen him. He tries to tell him that, he is the son of Raja and his family is very loyal towards British Raj. There is good conversation between the advocates and magistrate but he did not listen him and reject to relieve him. There are some questions of the magistrate which stays unanswered, why did he stay back at Mumbai? and Why did he buy the book '*The Revolt of the Angels*'? when he tries to give the satisfactory answer to him but he did not listen him and kept him in the jail for two years.

He meets many people in the jail. Many of the them the followers of Gandhi and some of them the followers of communist party. Bhushan meets Bhaiji in the jail, he is a Gandhian follower. Bhaiji says that all people should come together and fight for the nation and make the Marxist movement strong for the development of the nation. Bhushan meets communist comrade in the jail, named comrade Yusuf, comrade Day and comrade Iyre. Bhaiji want every Indian should learn to come to jail according to him it gives strength to them. The comrades talk with him and satisfy him that they don't belong to any party so they are communist. The introduction of this all people in the jail makes them a good friend of each other and Bhushan takes the task to tell them all the stories of his life. Bhushan is very good poet. All other members find his life a story are interesting and invites him to tell them the stories of his life. Bhushan start and tell them about the birth story of his life. He says his mother takes nine years to give him birth. After the lots of visit to pilgrimage and temples and holy places like Ayodhya she conceives and delivered baby boy Bhushan. There is good amount of the details provided about the city Ayodhya the birth place of Krishna. The entire process of the birth of Krishna narrated by him in the text.

The narration of the story goes in the flashback many times. The narration is

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not liner but abrupt. Bhushan's father becomes the king of the Vijaygarh on the mercy of Britisher. He is the mediator to collect the tax and keep watch on the people that no one go against the empire. But his father is not able to keep this title of the king with him forever and he was not successful to make his son Bhushan a king of Vijaygarh. The reality of the novel is based on the Meerut Conspiracy Case, in this matter many of the trade union people are put behind the bar and charged with conspiracy. This is the real case in the British colonial era in the year of 1929. The Britisher kept all the communist and socialist groups in the jail due to the fear to company. This case is not only famous in the India but also in the England also. There are many British representative of Union Trade also put in the jail at that time. In the relation of Bhushan it is so absurd step of the government that he isn't part of any group but then also kept in the jail. Thus, it is the deliberate selection of the author that Bhushan doesn't belong any party otherwise Sehgal can't present the ideologies of the parties properly. Bhushan Singh is a deliberates selection of the neutral party to give clearer picture of the political status in India at 1929. The main agenda of Nayantara Sehgal's to present the reader the historical data in the fictitious format. She achieves this feat of historical description through the case of Bhushan. There are many political incidents takes place in the novel like Dandi March,

execution of Bhagat Singh and his two associates, civil movements and colonial rule of Britisher. The novel gets shape in this atmosphere so it is the historical novel.

Bhushan falls in love with Muslim girl Razia. Both are deep in the love but the people of the both communities against each other. This love affair of Hindu and Muslim brings the communal riots in the city Vijaygarh and many of the Hindu and Muslim people lost their life. In this incident even, policemen also lost their life while controlling the crowd. The situation makes the tremendous change in his life and he send for the study abroad. While narrating his story to Sylla he confesses many times that he would get a role in the Hollywood movies. His foreign girlfriend Willi May so much interest to make him the hero in the movie. Willi May goes with him for dance and both develops sexual relation. She tries to help Bhushan to forget the old girl in his life because the girl has no existence today anywhere. Bhushan left the city in search of his old lost love and come back to Mumbai.

Mistaken Identity (1988) is deals with many issues and in that, the issue of Indian prisoners get the insulting treatment in the prison. Comrade Day narrates the incidents where the British prisoner get the better treatment than Indian. The difference in dress, food, hygiene and facilities narrates in the text. Bhushan always give

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this account throughout the novel about the false cases of Britisher and they send many people in the jail without any proof. Another side he narrates the story of his life to jail mates. Bhushan's love for Razia is at the height when he was at the Vijaygarh. The school life of his gets disturbs due to his love and school authorities forced him to leave the school. His father appoints a new teacher for him at home to teach him. The wish of his father that Bhushan should learn the Rajput history. The intention of the family members is to keep Bhushan away from the girl and should give more focus on his tradition that he belongs to a worrier family. He concludes in his study that only the emotions are important and the way of forceful nature of the study troubles him a lot. This overall thought takes the reader on the journey of Bhushan's identity. He is not happy with his internal identity that he isn't get his love and other when he put in the jail due to false charges. Nayantara Sehgal keeps one prominent female character who is strong and decision taker, here is the fiction she narrates this role for Bhushan's mother, she is the Rani of the kingdom Vijaygarh. The narration of the characters like Bhushan and his mother both are deprives for love in their life. This makes them stronger than the others and they fight with any situation. The thought process and behavior are almost same of the mother and son that brings them at the similar psychological level.

Nayantara Sehgal uses the flashback technique in her novel to narrates the events. The reader doesn't get tried to understand the concept she provides in the novel. Though the flashback is used but the narration is so smooth that it makes easy to get the storyline of the novel. Bhushan narrates a picture of his life that his father is Muslim and his mother is a Hindu lady. His father has agreed for the Raja and because of this he always praises the British Government. Bhushan becomes very angry when his father gets married third time. Another fact that when Bhushan is in the jail that time he was on tour with his second wife. There are many sentences in the fiction where Bhushan is not happy with behavior of Gandhi's decision about Bhagat Singh and his two friends. The poem he writes in the jail '*Bridge*' get good response from his friends inside and outside the jail. There are many incidents in the text where a lot of discussion available about Russia's communist movement. The issue of Khalifate movement is taken always for the description in the text. The people of India also help for the Khalifate movement but later it is rejected. The description of Bombay workers strike is available in relation with Bhushan in the novel. Gandhiji takes the Dandi March in his hands in relation with behavior of the Britisher. There are thousands of the people join him on the road show.

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Though Britisher put many of them in the jail under the charges of conspiracy but they have to learn the power of non-violence. Whenever British government find they are in trouble they keep people in the jail. Though Dandi March done with non-violence then also the supporters send to jail. The people work promotes the Khaddar and sales it they also kept in the jail. The Khaddar worker are kept in the jail under the charges of peasant agitation. Bhajji is the supporter of Khaddar movement but he also put in the jail under false charges. The local people also against the British rule, there is reference in the fiction about the Republican Army of Chhattisgarh. They take control of their city in own hand. This is the way at least the small movements start against Britisher. The effect of this case of conspiracy is very deep in Bhushan's life that the thinks around him get changed. After the lot of efforts and debate he get the clean chit in this case and comes to Vijaygarh. The life is so different everywhere when he proposes Sylla for the marriage she already decided to get marry with her new boyfriend Bhushan's advocate Vacha. His mother expresses her happiness when Bhushan plans to marry Yusuf's daughter, his mother stays with Yusuf who is communist comrade. At the end of the novel, it is the conclusion that the *Mistaken Identity* (1988) is not of the Bhushan but of Indian identity where all are of mixed race.

Nayantara is postmodern historical writer, she intentionally intermingles the history in her fiction. The histories in the same simple way but the political ideologies are presented through the novel. The development of the character and story is available in the novels with the proper political and historical backdrop. The historical incidents make changes or affect the life of characters. This is one type of intermingling historical events in the fiction. The facts are fictionalized in her work. The historical incidents are a prime subject of her narratives and that all are fictionalized. When she writes the fiction, she is much aware that this is the fictitious description of history and politics. she uses the intertextuality in her text because almost all her fictions are talk about the historical incidents. The polyphony adequately uses in Sehgal's fiction. The self-conscious nature of the writer gives the stories from autobiographic events and that is very clear when she writes the political and historical novels, she herself revels that, the thought is in her because her belonging to political families. The major political people who take the lead after independence to run nation are her cousin and uncle. The subjective version of history she narrates in almost all her novel.

The history and politics in *Mistaken Identity* is also her own version of subjective description. The own created fictitious characters and the nature of them

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get involved in the making process of the novel. Her novel *Mistaken Identity* is a form of self-reflexive literature. When she writes such historical novel, she is totally aware about the historical fact and with the help of its narration she keeps her reader attached to the novel. This takes the reader on another track that the pre-existed knowledge of them is useful to understand the novel better. This pre-existed knowledge carries forward in her fiction is a part of intertextuality which is the prime feature of postmodern literature. There are verity of narratives forms she uses in her novel, they are history, feminism, satire, political details, love story, issue of women's emancipation, human relationship, comic effect are available in her one fiction *Mistaken Identity* and this mixture of the forms is a part of postmodern literature.

Sehgal uses the plurality and multiculturalism in her fiction. The plurality of the society, culture, religion, tradition and human beings available in her fiction. The point of multiculturalism is in the fiction available in *Mistaken Identity*, the Hindu culture and Muslim culture, the Gandhian thought and communist thought, the British and nationalist these all-multicultural aspects available in the novel. This multiculturalism and plurality are the part of postmodern literature. Barry Lewis put the theory of 'paranoid history' in this, the society is plot of the novel and the

dominant authoritative government against the individual identity. The same is here because the narrator Bhushan Singh is in mistakenly put in the jail due to his identity.

These all features of Nayantara Sehgal's writing take her in the new realms as the postmodern writer. She also fits in the 'historiographic metafiction' that is itself a postmodern trend in the historical writing.

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