Abstract

A pawn in the game of chess is powerful enough to checkmate even a King in spite of having the smallest value. As a chess player uses pawns to make his moves, similarly the political system has made a pawn of the common man but at the same time like pawns people are powerful to overthrow the unjust rulers through their right of adult franchise. Democracy signifies people to be all powerful but as far as democracy in India is concerned, people most of the times appear to be powerless. This study portrays the powerlessness and helplessness of the common man and hence it is titled ‘People, Pawns and Politics.’

The helplessness of people has emerged gradually due to change in the outlook of politicians. The politicians after independence were not used to self governance and they faced the additional challenge of building a vast nation. While doing so, the administrators copied the model of the earlier government. In this process, the general masses felt betrayed since their basic needs and expectations were not fulfilled. They had high expectations from the painfully earned independence and a lot of bright prospects from their leaders. The common masses of India feel disillusioned because their miseries and grievances remained unheard. The politicians were busy striving hard to build up the nation and politics was harnessed for the benefit of the masses. When the second generation of rulers entered the political scenario, the aim and functioning of politics slowly started shifting from selflessness to selfishness. Politics of the few has changed the life of the common man and has not fulfilled his anticipations. This is how the common man has become pawn in the political system today.

Indians were used to monarchy and dynastical rule before the British entered the Indian scenario. The monarchs abused power by using it according to their own whims and fancies. The Britishers made every attempt to plunder India financially, socially and culturally. Even after independence, the political system has ensured that the importance of the public is limited to being vote banks. Their voice is suppressed even in the world’s
largest democracy. This shows how common man suffered no matter who ruled him. He became a pawn under every governance system.

As far as the politicians are concerned, the high ranked ministers most of the times conveniently turned a deaf ear to the woes and grievances of the public. The selfless and dedicated political leaders who fought for India’s independence and worked for the upliftment of the poor and glory of the country were either dead or had been replaced by the opportunist and corrupt leaders. Public exposure of acts of corruption and various secret happenings going on in the corridors of power has been the utmost concern of the common people as all these are directly related to their lives.

This thesis puts forth the hypothesis that how the common man is exploited by the political system and is made a pawn through the analysis of selected postcolonial Indian English novels and hence it is titled, “People, Pawns and Politics.” People suffer due to the political events and turmoils since politics is an indispensable part of human life. When politics is twisted for the benefit of the few, it leads to sufferings and injustices upon the general public.


The political themes in the selected novels are limited from the late sixties to early eighties which cover the major post – independence political and social events like National Emergency, wars with Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Naxalite movement in the North – Eastern states, functioning of bureaucracy and illegal immigration. Independence had brought in Partition and the problem of integration of more than five hundred princely states. Indians had to confront with fiery problems and distressing experiences which had put their inner strength, talent and spirit to severe trials. The country had fresh disputes with the creation of linguistic states in
1956. The study focuses on the political events after the end of this phase and its effects on the masses. This time span is chosen for the study as it signifies the end of one political era where one generation of rulers who were freedom fighters was replaced by the next generation of rulers. Nehru’s death had ended an era in Indian politics paving way for the dynastical rule in Indian democracy.

Along with a limited time span of sixties to early eighties, the research geographically covers the three continents Asia, America and Europe and mainly deals with Mumbai, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Madna, Kalimpong, Delhi and the rural interiors of India. This wide geographical scope shows how people suffer universally and are victimized by the political system.

The distinctiveness of this research is that many researchers have explored literary theories and political events like partition, wars, political ideologies etc but have not applied the parameters of Constitutional provisions to the works of literature and have not checked its practical proposition to Indian democracy. The special contribution of the study is that it has applied Constitutional provisions to the selected works of literature and has analyzed the effects of the alteration of democratic principles and provisions.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first two chapters provide the background to the study. From third to seventh chapter there is a concentration on individual analysis of the selected novels. The last chapter presents the crucial findings of this research.

The first chapter introduces the underlying principle and premise of the study which deals with the impact of political system and political turmoils on the lives of the general public. The chapter studies the working of the Indian democracy because the argument of the study is how politics makes a pawn of innocent people, so it was essential to check the mistreatment of the system in the hands of politicians which is one of the root causes for the anguish of the masses. The so called ideal system is twisted for the benefit of the few rather than the common welfare of the masses. The chapter takes into consideration the various Constitutional provisions like the Directive Principles, fundamental rights and duties, Public Service Commissions, provisions for the North Eastern
states and reservation policies to show deviations of these provisions and the wide disparity in theory and its practice. These provisions will be applied as parameters to analyse the selected novels to check the effectiveness of the implementation of these provisions.

If we trace the progression of democratic government in India, we find democracy was put to test several times. The freedom struggle was sanctified with a lot of bloodshed and signification of many martyrs. India became an independent country on 15th August, 1947. India was formally declared a sovereign democratic republic on 26th January, 1950 with the formation and implementation of its Constitution. But its newly acquired sovereignty was put to severe tests and threats in the first three decades. The country tackled with many external and internal problems which seriously challenged its existence, supremacy, sovereignty and integrity. India faced wars with Pakistan and China. While the French Government vacated Indian colonies peacefully, the Portuguese colony of Goa, Daman and Diu could be freed in 1961. All these events contained a wide range of political problems of this period.

After independence, the political ideologies have converted towards one common direction i.e. middle- of - road pragmatism. Congress may be credited with giving birth to this unique ideology where one has freedom to move in any direction- right or left- without calling it as ideological shift. When Indira Gandhi was nationalizing, Congress men praised her and a few years later when Narsimha Rao and Manmohan Singh started privatization of government companies, this was hailed by the same set of people. All political parties follow middle of road pragmatism.

After independence certain factors caused a lot of things that ensured Indian development on the political avenues. India adopted secularism but still some parties have holier- than- thou attitude when it comes to secularism. Communism was the next impacting factor on Indian democracy. However, today it cannot be denied that communism has stagnated and no one would predict a bright future for communism in India in the present circumstances which was once one of the shaping factors of Indian politics. The Preamble of the Constitution of India declares India to be a socialist republic. Hence, like in the case
of secularism, every political party has to be compulsorily socialist. The problem is that everyone has his/her own connotative meaning of socialism so no one can be pronounced right or wrong. In the post independence period, all the parties gave due consideration to caste equations while nominating candidates for elections. Rise of caste as an ideology in Indian politics can partly be traced on the one hand to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Constitution of India. On the other hand, one may blame it on the reservation policies embedded in the Constitution but to a large measure, it is because of the inability of the political parties to offer any direction to the country. To secure vote banks, the political system has cherished the reservation policies till date. Therefore caste has emerged as an ideology of choice to fill the vacuum of political thought in modern India. Thus pragmatism, communism, socialism, secularism and casteism are some of the ruling factors which govern the functioning of Indian democracy.

Along with the Constitutional provisions and functioning of democracy in India, the study also takes into consideration the evolution of political novel in Indian English writings. The second chapter, ‘Postcolonialism and The Development of Political Novel in Indian Writings in English’ focuses on how the genre of political novel in Indian English literature has developed. It has traced the growth of the Indian political novel in English and the various phases it has passed through and how these phases got reflected in Indian English fiction. It shows the effects of political events on the lives of the contemporary masses.

Looking at what has been said earlier, it would be necessary to say that every country has its own background of politics against which its political imagination in the creative field thrives. Our political background, in the strictest sense of the word, goes back only to the coming of the Moghuls in India followed by the British. The Moghuls’ period somehow has failed to appeal the Indian novelists in English or maybe it is too remote to turn its history into a novel of political conflict. The British period, however, shows clear signs of a regeneration of political awareness in the novels written by Indian novelists in English.
It is only after the nationalistic strings gained momentum in India, the novel changed its direction and attention from romances, history, sociology and culture to politics revealing a new kind of awareness and relationship of the individual with the specifications of the milieu. The progress of the Indian English novels reveal the various aspects and stages of the national struggle for independence impinged upon the imagination of the writers to produce a new genre called the political novel. It is said that one of the most compelling types of fiction for modern man is the political novel. Aristotle said Man is a political animal and this befits the modern man.

Similarly, novel can neither escape being political nor can it be fully political. It is basically given to depicting man’s struggle at assimilating the discordant strands and notes of its milieu into an aesthetic whole. Politics is a part of man’s history and it is men who make history. It, therefore, remains to be the privilege of the writer as men to decide upon the extent to which he may participate from the political aspects going around him. In this process of participating into the political going around him, the writer throws light on the political and social issues.

At the same time it is too narrow and mechanistic to interpret a political novel as one portraying a political movement or depicting political condition, for most social problems have political dimensions. On this point V. N. Rao rightly remarks:

On the one hand, a novel about a social evil like untouchability becomes inevitably political in the context of Gandhiji’s movement to eradicate untouchability. On the other hand, there are novels that have used a political movement only as a means of projecting the personal situation of the characters. Moreover, there are political situations but which nevertheless have a strong political message.¹

It is difficult to distinguish between social problems and political problems since every social problem acquires a political dimension, pointing towards an all encompassing political solution.

The same thing has been reflected in the writings of writers of Indian English fiction in which the political motif has been especially prominent from the beginning.
Since the Indian novel in English was born before independence, the politics of the freedom movement plays an integral part in the genre’s development. In fact, it is possible to analyze the intimate connection between the growth of the freedom movement and the rise of Indian novel in English. As it is observed by M. K. Naik:

Up to the 1930’s there was no Indian novelist who could claim sustained and considerable achievement in fiction originally written in English. Then came a sudden flowering, and it is significant that it came in 1930’s a period during which the glory that was Gandhi’s attained perhaps its brightest splendour. The Indian freedom struggle was already more than a generation old, yet with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi it was so thoroughly democratized that freedom consciousness percolated for the first time to the very grassroots of Indian society and revitalized it. It is possible to see a connection between this developments and the rise of the Indian novel in English; for fiction, of all literary forms is most vitally concerned with social conditions and valves.

Most of the Indian English novelists recollected it in tranquility and depicted this national experience into their fiction. Apart from this national movement, the Gandhian force was also the most appealing factor to the novelists. The call given by Mahatma Gandhi and his truthful and non-violence struggle ushered in new ideas and fresh methods which shook the world in several spheres to the core. As Nehru puts it: “Gandhi… who was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and took deep breaths”

In novel after novel, therefore, the political theme is a focus of the work. Political developments after the attainment of independence in 1947 also ensured that the excitement heat of the political drama would continue. The holocaust of the partition, the tumultuous merger of the princely states; the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi; the ongoing oppression of the Indians in Goa and the wars with Pakistan and China all readily invited fictional treatment. More recently, the working of political democracy in India have also formed the subject matter of the novels.
Sometimes it is also found that the public exposure of corruption has been the utmost concern of novelists of the period. The malpractices of the so called political leaders have certainly troubled the common civics of the country. Nayantara Saghal in her novels liberally draws upon her knowledge of what happens in the drawing rooms of politically very important people or in the lobbies in Parliament.

The post independence Indian English novelists have certainly looked at the above mentioned development of Indian political thought. They have also observed all the undercurrent ideas that shape the future of India.

It must be noted here that the Indian English novelists, though writing in foreign language are rooted in the soil, whereas the pre-independence writers were more lured by the British politics, the socio - economic policies of the government and the British milieu, the novelists writing in free India, feel more at home in the delineation of Indian political milieu and important national events. They have reacted and represented the spirit of Indian political ethos in their novels.

The Second chapter has also tried to make a brief survey of postcolonialism in India as the selected novels belong to the same period. To study the impact of postcolonialism, the theories of colonialism are explored. The chapter intends to put forth the impact of postcolonialism on the Indian English political novels. In the selected novels there is decolonization of language, manner and lifestyle itself. We find in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, how the tribal culture is considered inferior by the foreign infiltrators which is the outcome of tribals’ exploitation. The immigrants smartly keep the tribals ignorant and claim their own culture to be superior. It is a sort of neocolonialism which has affected the psychology of the natives and we find them rebelling in the form of Naxalite movements.

The individual analysis of the novels was done in accordance with the chronology of political events. The first shock to Indian democracy which shook its very foundation was Emergency since all the democratic institutions were suspended for the first time after independence. Democracy had changed to autocracy. Emergency is a stain
on independent India’s history. It is difficult to believe that the hard earned democracy was put to a severe test for the sake of retaining political power. Therefore three novels were selected for analysis based on Emergency i.e., Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* as they show different aspects of Emergency. Salman Rushdie uses Emergency as a backdrop; Nayantara Sahgal has a feminist and an insider’s approach whereas Rohinton Mistry has a diasporic approach with a focus on rural politics and hardships of metropolitan life in Mumbai.

The Third chapter, The Fantasizing of Democracy— Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* explores the political events from 1915 to 1977. We find the effects of Emergency on the urban India with a focus on the middle classes. Saleem is an archetype of the common man as well as the mouthpiece of Salman Rushdie. He participates in the major events of the modern Indian history and suffers. He transcends nationality, race, creed and even cultural upbringing and we get a truthful view of political events.

Salman Rushdie maintains a continuous effort at synchronizing national and domestic life so that the story of the Azizes and Sinais becomes the story of the nation from the year 1915 upto about the year 1977. At the personal level, the novel starts in 1915, 32 years before the birth of Saleem and ends when he is about to be 31 years old. It spans about 63 years, with Saleem’s and India’s birth as the center. At the national level, the novel deals right from the end of World War I to the Independence of India (1947) to the lifting of Emergency rule (1977). The country’s subsequent losses and blood baths are Saleem’s losses – hair, finger-tip and blood lettings. He is castrated during Emergency. The motif of retention of power affects the other characters in the novel like Padma and other Midnight’s Children who lose their magical powers.

In the Indian context, the fascist as a mother has a special significance as the Indian male’s first authoritarian personality is his mother. What begins as an anxiety about a bad mother soon deepens into horror, as Mrs. Indira Gandhi moves to forced sterilisation programmes and imposition of the infamous Emergency. The figure of Shiva, one of the many Midnight’s Children and a blind admirer of the Prime Minister and her son Sanjay’s dictatorial policies, is one of the many Rushdie’s marginal men trying to make sense of
rootlessness and poverty by supporting a fascist regime. Shiva alone expresses some measure of anguish and dilemma and he is a fascist constantly torn apart by doubt regarding self-esteem. The recurrence of fascists is also a reminder of the havoc, pain and human suffering that can be wrecked in the name of nation, religion, ethnic group or region by men-women espousing rigid ideological positions.

The chapter has tried to show that Saleem, who is a representative of common man, becomes a pawn everywhere. He packs up his story into thirty chutney jars to hand over history - making to the next generations. He is wise enough to leave one empty jar - the future chutney – because the subsequent generations of Midnight’s Children will determine how it all turns out. The chutney jars represent the history of India affected by the politics whereas the empty jar signifies the future politics of the nation. The protagonist emerges as an Indian at the crossroads of history, gifted with a fertile imagination, having no illusions and cherishing truth, sincerity, love and tolerance even in a barren and hostile world. He can laugh at himself as well as others.

The Fourth chapter, The Other Side of Emergency - Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* has shown the effects of Emergency on the upper middle classes and the rich classes. Nayantara Sahgal, born in an illustrious family of freedom fighters, is eminently qualified to write political novel. Her first-hand acquaintance with political issues and personages is an enviable asset.

Sonali is demoted as she is unable to accommodate herself to the new requirements of Emergency. Sonali suffers at multiple levels as she is victimized as a bureaucrat, a woman and a common citizen. Ram’s paralytic condition symbolizes the paralytic condition of the government affairs during Emergency. Jaya Prakash Narayan’s arrest under Emergency provisions and his deteriorating health shows that even influential senior political leaders were victimized during Emergency.

Inspite of all these injustices, the novel displays a ray of hope. Sonali faces the injustices bravely and it symbolizes that the Emergency will end after all. Her studying the history of seventeenth century Indian art is a way of retaining her inner harmony during the
fateful period of Emergency. Everybody tries to find peace during Emergency in one’s own way and Emergency has not trampled this right. Ravi though late has realized that he is used as a puppet by the politicians and therefore tries to support Rose. Thus there is optimism for the survival of bureaucracy too.

Rose’s death is surfaced by individual resistances. Sonali provides the beggar artificial hands. The limbless beggar symbolizes the handicapped democracy in India during Emergency. The beggar getting arms advocates the empowering of Indian democracy and its vibrancy. The picture is not totally bleak.

In the Fifth chapter, Struggle for Balance during Emergency - Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* we find a diasporic approach towards the effects of Emergency on the lower classes, rural India and its interiors and the sufferings of the common man in a metropolitan city like Mumbai during the critical times of Emergency.

Upper caste people like Thakur Dharamsi devise atrocities on the lower castes and wield power to discipline them and for selfish gains. Therefore untouchability still flourishes in rural India inspite of the laws forbidding it.

Dina, Maneck, Ishvar and Om are deprived of their accommodation, financial independence, decent living and identity itself during Emergency. They have lost freedom of settling and right to work and earn during Emergency. Ishvar and Om have become beggars and Dina has become a maid servant at her brother’s house. Infact the characters have lost their identity and a right to decent living.

It is striking that all the characters in the novel are trying to resist Emergency in their own way. They are fighting for their continued existence during the dreadful times of Emergency and its aftermath. Though Dina has become a maid servant in Nusswan’s house, she shares the same bond of affection of the good old days with the tailors and her troubled soul finds consolation. Emergency is finally withdrawn and democracy is restored back. The most important fact is that Emergency has not crushed the faith of people in democracy.
The Sixth chapter, Illusion and Disillusion of Power of Bureaucrats in Postcolonial India – Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* describes the experiences, beliefs and attitudes of Agastya Sen, a trainee bureaucrat. He belongs to the Cola generation and has no interest in his esteemed position as a bureaucrat due to the corrupt administration of bureaucracy. He comes across several lacunas in the functioning of bureaucracy which slowly end up his enthusiasm to work in the system for the welfare of the people. He finds superiors dominating subordinates. He wants to use his position to better the life of people but has many constraints which disallow him to do so. He faces several hurdles when he works for the welfare of public as a BDO.

We find Agastya and his bureaucrat colleagues are pressurized by the politicians and have limited rights. Also the bureaucrats have their own contribution to the exploitation of people by extracting free services and provisions from general public like free lunches and dinners, parties, various goods etc.

The novel depicts how the politicians have kept the tribals underdeveloped thereby ensuring their vote banks. Most of the times the politicians lack vision, rational thinking and will power to work for the benefit of the masses. They pressurize the bureaucrats to implement even unfair policies. The bureaucrats become helpless before the politicians. Thus the common man and bureaucrats are equally victimized and they suffer silently.

The novel shows the other side of the society where people like Baba Ramanna offer selfless service to humanity. Agastya visits Baba Ramanna’s Home for lepers and is stunned to see the devoted service offered to the outcastes like lepers. This visit imbibes positive values like serving mankind, carrying out one’s duties sincerely and somewhat clears Agastya’s disillusionment for the job. The writer shows the brighter prospect for bureaucracy and after all everything is not rotten in bureaucracy.

The Seventh chapter, Conflict of Interests: Personal and Political – Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* has highlighted the problem of insurgency, Naxalite movement in the North - Eastern states and illegal immigration. The chapter portrays how Naxalite
movement in the form of GNLF is the result of disillusionment of inefficient governance. The welfare state of democracy has remained a dream for the natives there since their territory is remote, inaccessible and cut off from the main land.

All the characters in the novel endure crucial loss in their lives and are therefore inheritors of loss justifying the title of the novel. The judge is oppressed by the system in which he is working both in the pre independence phase as well as the post independence phase. He is not received well by the Britishers being an Indian and his exclusive position and mimicking the western lifestyle does not allow him to mingle with the native Indians. Sai becomes a pawn in the hands of Gyan who uses her to loot Cho Oyu. He has been unfaithful to her. Her grandfather maintains a safe distance from her so she gets no love and affection from anyone. The Cook, Pannalal is used by the judge to serve him for a meager salary and Biju too uses his father to migrate abroad for a better and secure future. Therefore we find that all the inhabitants of Cho Oyu and the residents of the North - Eastern states have lost their identity, have inherited loss in their lives and have been adversely affected by the insurgency.

The native tribals are deprived of their ancestral lands and culture and are forcefully converted to Christianity. The illegal infiltration is dominating the North – Eastern states by having their own people in government jobs, contesting elections and their representatives formulating new laws in favour of their own people.

Through the character of Biju, we come across the painful experiences of illegal immigrants in a developed nation like US. As soon as Biju returns to Kalimpong, he falls into the hands of the revolutionary members of the GNLF who rob him of everything he has brought from America. Despite shame and humiliation, he is extremely happy to unite with his father.

Everything is not lost. Gyan realizes that the GNLF movement lacks sincerity and decides to quit it and begin life in search of fresh avenues. The judge is satisfied with his own way of life. Thus all march towards the future with expectations of new and better things discarding their agonizing past.
The last chapter, ‘Conclusion’ presents the crucial findings of this study. It strongly proves that the common man is an eternal sufferer in the game of politics. One finds politics governs the lives of people irrespective of caste, class; religion or gender being an indispensable part of life. The study has highlighted the positive as well as the negative aspects of Indian society and politics in general. Along with the lacunas of democracy and Indian society, we come across the positive aspects of our society as a nation. The Indian society has tremendous capacity to come out of the grime situations like partition, Emergency, foreign aggression etc. This capacity to bear constant setbacks has made the Indian society carry on in spite of incessant harassment for centuries. The credit goes to the psychological toughness and flexibility of the Indian psyche. Also the firm faith of people in democracy has ensured its survival inspite of several obstructions.

The selected writers focus on the element of suffering of the masses with unique versions like the portrayal of Emergency is done differently by Salman Rushdie, Nayantara Sahgal and Rohinton Mistry. The novels show that the masses are weak and are used as pawns by the system. Though the Constitutional framework of governance is ideal, there are loop holes in its implementation and the policy makers take advantage of it like the misuse of the provisions of Emergency.

The picture has changed today for the good since people have become politically conscious and aware of their rights and powers. So they revolt against the injustices levied on them in some form. This has got reflected in the selected novels too. Like the tribals beating up and cutting the hands of the forest officer, Gandhi in English, August is an example of the awareness of power among the masses.

The political system is always instable since no man made system can be perfect as the political framework needs to change to suit the growing and varying needs of the people. After all people are at the centre of governance. Thus politics has been affecting one and all inspite of the differences of caste, class, gender, religion etc and this has governed the direction of this study.
References

