Conclusion

An analysis of the historical and political aspects of the writings of Nayantara Sahgal, leads to some significant insights, not only into the story of a nation in flux, but also of an artist in the making. While the nation has oscillated between strangulation and revival, anesthesia and recovery, paralysis and reform, Sahgal has steadily evolved into one of the few creative forces of rationality in 21st century India. In sharp contrast to the prevalence of the transient peculiarities and skeptical mindsets in the literary world, the temperate tone of her oeuvre is indicative of the equanimity and steadfastness that informs her thought process. While it may be true that there is a marked devotion to facts and an unwillingness to invent too much, yet the purposeful substance of her work commands attention to its most granular detail. If political realism be a stigma in the aesthetic circus of obfuscatory symbolism, Sahgal would gladly be expelled from its precincts, for her imaginative leaps are firmly entrenched in the grounds of political history. The ethical edifice of her work does not rest on sentimentality and suggestiveness; it unconventionally connects to the material and cultural realities of the characters to reach the core of their predicaments. Considering the writer’s deep understanding of the various nuances of Indian realities, it is not surprising that on most political and social questions Sahgal has it right.

A noticeable feature of her works is the striking of balance between concepts that are habitually posited in all contrariness, and are also understood as stark oppositions. For instance, being a front-runner woman political writer came so naturally to Sahgal, for the gynocentric and androcentric inclinations achieve a perfect confluence in her works ï the subliminal feminism merges with an astute understanding of the traditionally patriarchal disciplines of politics and history, to create a distinct oeuvre. The re-reading reveals that throughout her corpus, intended change rides on the wave of continuity, aggression is backed by temperance, modernity is rooted in the richness of tradition, and imagination seeks
manifestation through reality. The Eurocentric and the Oriental civilizations come across as unique strands of achievements in the history of mankind that could work wonders in the path of human progress through a two-way flow of cultural traffic, rather than the more prevalent confrontational posture. The fictional leitmotifs embody the appreciable achievements of the Western cultures, besides working out the assimilative nature of her own Indian roots. On the economic front, Sahgal’s endorsement of the semi-socialist Nehruvian policy, and her critiques of crass materialism and sacrosanct communism, show the way forward only through a pragmatic turn in Marxism and an ethical twist to Capitalism. Sahgal’s writing stands out as an exemplar of eclectic human thought; it enforces the fact that fluidity, open-mindedness, amalgamation enrich rather than dilute cultures.

Most writers do not waste their energies trying to motivate or transform the rich when they can far easily bask in the stirring grandeur of the pitiable poor; Sahgal is one of the few writers to have etched a phenomenal, ironical portrayal of the mighty and prosperous, in the full glory of their achievements as well as in the statural diminution brought about by the hamartia, hypocrisy and hubris in their behavior. Some critics have court-martialed Sahgal for committing the literary unlawfulness of representing the powerful, and focusing predominantly on the elite. On a closer look at the life and works of Sahgal, there is no discernible incongruity in the steadfastness of her intellectual and ethical intentions, and a lot of the hysterical criticism is totally unjustified. Sahgal has appreciated the archaeologies of thought, both ontological and political, of the great literary and historical minds of the modern period and has objectively worked out the mechanics of her morality. It would be useful to raise a few queries to prevent the lopsidedness in critical studies towards an overzealousness to locate the ōtherōnd the ōrnamentalō in literary texts: Is the elite a subject over and above literary scrutiny? Is change possible without the middle-class taking up responsibility that it has shamelessly abdicated? And most significantly, is it possible for a
writer to be nonchalant towards his/her reality? Sahgal’s contribution to literature, without any discernable bias or prejudice, is a product of her circumstances, as much as it is of her vision. The writer was privy to the lives and events of historical importance and has also wielded this precious heritage to build a reliable narrative of national transformation. The level of commitment and truthfulness is high and it is prioritized through topicality and realism over literary pretensions.

Since a significant part of anti-colonial history is also Sahgal’s personal back story, it remains a literary mine of incidents that provide a depth to characterization and a contextual layering to contemporary aspects of her fiction. The conflict in the major texts arises out of the contrast between the past and the present, the struggle and the complacency, commitment and moral destitution, and most of the early texts, particularly *Rich Like Us*, are a lament on the break in momentum set by the Nehruvian policies. While there have been some glitches in going beyond the personal experience in the early novels, the latter works have realistically churned the historical, topical, imaginative and personal into a classic sub-genre of History-Fiction in Indian Writing in English.

Sahgal has lent credibility to meaningful realist literature in the face of ahistorical deconstructionist theories by strengthening the fiber of the hybrid, cross-over genre with conviction. The complexities of human consciousness and the subjectivities of language make the objective recreation of history almost impossible, and there is no denying the fact that warnings sounded by *textuality* are timely critical alerts, but, they need not cause an anarchic discontinuity in the optimistic flow of thought of the progressive human civilization. Sahgal’s realistic style and themes contribute towards coherence and productivity of the historical material in a life-preserving and thought-enhancing manner. The fiction sprouts from the fertile grounds of history, part of which actually, is an imaginatively interpreted, lived experience. Being in the know of the significant backstage happenings and as an
involved spectator of the front-stage historical drama, her witty fictional critiques bear the poise of an old-time crusader and thought provoking expertise of a contemporary artist. Writing in the humane critical tradition, Sahgal mostly handles history from the "server end," as it was disbursed downwards from the centralized source, making an exception with *Mistaken Identity*, where subaltern history forms the distinct subtext of the novel.

The historical framework, far from appearing burdensome or constraining to the imaginative flights of the writer, lends them a substance that gives her aesthetics a purpose beyond mere craftsmanship. The fictional canvas unrolls a panorama of about a century of Indian history, foregrounded against the backdrop of the game-changing events from world history. Sahgal crystallizes the enigma of Tilak in *Plans for Departure*, the mystique of Gandhi in *Mistaken Identity* and the charisma of Nehru in *A Situation in New Delhi* and *Lesser Breeds*, and in addition intersperses the texts with the radical national activism of Subhash Chander Bose and Bhagat Singh and the apostles of Marx. The world vision of the writer is evident from the fact that the fictional web is laid out against the backdrop of the two World Wars, Marxism, Fascism, Nazism, the revolt in Turkey, the Russian revolution, the Japanese foreign policy, the Asian sub-continental ethnicity, the American cultural revolution et al. None of these events, or references to other global happenings, is extraneous to the intrinsic structural unity of the novels concerned.

A few feminist critics are unappreciative of the historical digressions, in the form of stream of consciousness, reverie, recovery of diaries and other chronicles by nostalgic or disillusioned characters in the early novels of Sahgal. It is true that while focusing on the feminist aspects of a work, these inroads into the past may seem incongruent with the urgency of the feminist issues at hand, but barring Kailas's nostalgic recall of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa in *This Time of Morning*, which has some relevance as a contrast, there is no evidence of unessential lengthy historical reflections elsewhere. As a matter of
fact, in the theme based trilogy of colonial history, analyzed in Chapter III, the well-blended quotient of history and fiction gives it the empirical reassurance of the past, a fictional aura of gravity and purpose, and a ticklish texture of sardonic wit and absurdity that come across as a literary statement of the fine talent, incisive insights, deep concern and singular circumstances of Sahgal.

In a time strapped age, with the intelligentsia almost doomed with political apathy and lack of commitment, and the ignoramuses mostly ruling the roost, the literary works of Sahgal stand out for their social and political engagement - they gain in terms of artistic relevance with every perusal and critical examination. If history is Sahgal’s unshakeable predicament, politics comes across as her conscious, considered call. There is a complete awareness of the fact that change is a prisoner in the higher echelons of power and must trickle down to the masses from its pyramidal height. From the intoxicating politics of the freedom struggle that created the Indian history of independence, Sahgal, regrets the veering of politics towards dynasty, identity, cronyism, self-service, projection and unscrupulousness. There a sense of deep remorse at the crumbling of institutions, wreckage of democratic conventions, arbitrariness in policy making and the disregard for consensual decision-making in the post-Nehruvian era of post-colonial political history. The interrogation of the inherent politics of power, pelf, culture and gender generates the underlying tension in her fictional texts. Through the explicit treatment of the polemics of the power related discourses in her narratives, Sahgal synthesizes pragmatics and poetics to emphasize the central role of politics in human existence. The non-fictional political commentaries are monumental works of research and balanced judgment, and Sahgal is quite understandably a reliable novelist to be trusted with the portrayal of the hope, disillusions and realities of contemporary India.

In the course of unfolding the political narrative, the commitment and optimism of the protagonists is juxtaposed against the darkness of a system that is steeped in immorality and
corruption The emphasis is on dissolute politics in *This Time of Morning*, communalization of politics in *Storm in Chandigarh*, shallow vision of the avant-garde leadership in *A Situation in New Delhi* and dictatorship in *Rich Like Us*. There is a persistent reminder of the leadership vacuum created by the stalwarts, who subsumed their political ambitions to the needs of the National Freedom Movement, in the characterization and *emplotment* of the novels - a glaring contrast that deepens this nostalgia is the not-so-understated portrayal of Mrs. Gandhi as the *Madam* despot in *Rich Like Us*.

Regardless of the fact of Nehru being the *third parent* and the genealogical proximity of the author to Indira Gandhi, it would be naïve and conclusive to interpret the fallouts of the personal chemistry between the cousins in the fiction of Sahgal as sibling rivalry. It was Sahgal’s intuitive sense of history that helped her envision the detrimental effects of temperament politics on the inchoate institutions of governance and the budding federal polity. In the course of the parallel readings undertaken in the study, it became clear that the findings of most historians hold Indira Gandhi responsible in a predominant way for the drastic turn taken by Indian politics towards the promotion of dynasty, corruption, weakening of institutions, vendetta rule and genuflection. While the baton of the political legacy of Nehru was abandoned mid-way for lack of insight by progeny, his intellectual vision has been interrogated and enshrined for posterity in literary writing by Sahgal with deep reverence.

The historicity of the colonial and anti-colonial representations in Sahgal’s novels stands vindicated because the fact of the subjugation of the colonized people through brute force and cultural coercion is now a universally accepted truth. The degree of the historical relevance of events has also been appropriately gauged by Sahgal, being a well-schooled witness to much that happened around her. The glaring contrast in the fictionalization of post-colonial (Nehruvian) and the late post-colonial (post-Nehruvian) periods has been examined
by building a "counter-narrative" of the relevant texts of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Nehru, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor and Arundhati Roy to the literary works of the author. While there is a marked affinity of the Sahgalian thought with the critical percepts of Fanon and Said, which also had a seminal influence on the postcolonial school of studies, there is not only a fictional overlap in the portrayal of the Emergency regime in the works of Sahgal, Rushdie and Tharoor, the trio also had a fair share of personal brush with the arbitrary curtailment of the freedom of speech during the despotic rule. Although very engaging, Naipaul's portrayal of the changing social equations in new India is less nuanced than the homegrown political perceptions of Sahgal. Roy and Sahgal differ in the tone and tenor of their political expostulations - the former exhibits a leaning towards radical activism while the latter exudes a literary temperance in her arguments.

In addition to the brevity, lucidity and eloquence of expression, it is the resonance of meaning in the aphoristic turn of phrase which gives Sahgal's prose a distinctive style in Indian English Literature. The enamoring economy in a surprising arrangement of words underlines the fine fusion of aesthetics and commitment, form and substance, the literary and the political in the creative process of the writer. So exemplary is the pithiness that if one tries to reproduce verbatim a sentence, after clever memorizing, from one of Sahgal's works, one invariably ends up adding a word or two extra, in spite of all best efforts. With the exception of *Mistaken Identity*, all the other texts have a third person omniscient narrator, and a dialectical interrogation of the narratives yields concrete useful inferences due the directness of the method, manner and matter of the texts. The realistic prose, devoid of abstract symbolism and dense allusions, also helps in focusing on the sociological aspect of the work and the prevalent structures of power in 20th century India.

Sahgal refused to consider English language or for that matter, any positive cultural exchange, as the monopoly of a single race, and has consciously empowered it with an
ability of expressing with flair, the modern/postmodern Indian predicament in all its complexities. The authorial responsibility of adapting the language to suit the representation of the Indian ethos and milieu sometimes hinders the creative process, but owing to the syncretism and hybridity of her consciousness, and the social circumstances and engagement of her characters, the language has been very naturally appropriated in the narratives. Although Sahgal is well-versed with the reading and writing practices of the Western novel, the author's creative and critical experience has also drawn sustenance and support from the age old, rich native mythological and critical traditions. Her appraisal of some aspects of the Western civilization in an open minded exposition exudes a confidence in the enduring assimilative spirit of the Indian culture and not a rejection of it in any manner.

An analysis of the fictional characters, the situations they create and confront, the decisions that they make, the power they exercise or lack, sends forth a cascading continuum of ideas in Sahgal's novels. Some of the persuasive recurrent motifs are expressed through a hope of arousing a culturally negotiable identity, an intelligence that is non-coercive, a non-belligerent nationalism, wealth with social responsibility, politics with vision and integrity, and a desire for freedom. The poetics of the notion of freedom has been constructively worked out in the gender space, the historical memory, the political terrain, the literary medium and the media context with depth and pragmatism. Sahgal has made a conscious choice to create a fiction that is realistic, but quite objectively, the writer does not let overt imagination seep into her non-fiction. There is no recourse to literary techniques of hyperbole, irony, personification, flashback etc. in her political and cultural essays, and as a result her non-fictional prose is thorough, to-the-point, relevant and carries gravitas. The vast and varied canvas of the writer's experience has been thought provocingly and
amusingly transmuted into literary works but without a sense of steam oozing out ears or an impatience for implausible radical change.

The confluence of fiction, history and autobiography in Sahgal’s imagination makes her writing an irreplaceable strand in the country’s artistic narrative. Although a colonial or post-colonial setting dominates in each of her works, yet they do not operate within a clear cut time frame, underscoring the vast vista of her intimate historical reflections and cultural scrutiny. In the kaleidoscopic range of her fiction, the characters cross the threshold of historical eras, political boundaries and ideological structures, back and forth, with contemplative ease. The euphoric snapshots of new India and heart felt reverence for Nehruvian idealism set the optimistic note of her writing without slackening her moral intelligence into political amnesia as the politics of the country continued to change drastically.

The theoretical practices based on the central percepts of deconstruction that have provided a critical sharpness to the interrogative stance of the research have provided multi-dimensional insights to Sahgal’s writings. The examination of the historicity of her fiction through the “counter narrative” methodology of new historicism, in addition to validating the position of writer on the selectivity of the material, also brings forth valuable deliberations on the events of the past, strengthening her role as an involved intellectual in society. The signs of cultural materialism rampant in all dimensions of art seemed to have evoked Sahgal’s lament on the ephemerality, shallowness and greed that had beset the world of aesthetics. The application of brute force to stifle the democratic freedom of the print media, and to simultaneously manufacture opinion to support authoritarianism during the Emergency is a classic case of crass cultural materialism crystalized in Sahgal’s fiction. The heuristic value of her fiction to postcolonial studies is immense. While Sahgal is unsparing of colonial injustice and political subjugation under imperialism, she softens her stand when it comes to
addressing the question of wholesome cultural assimilation that takes place through non-coercive means. Sahgal’s idea of nationalism is also defined by the domain of organically spread out cultural influences rather than political boundaries. There is a clear sense of aversion to the confining monolithic cultural constructs in favour of diffusive multiculturalism.

The scrutiny of the reflections of history, politics and change in the writings of Sahgal, by releasing them from the moorings of her providential genealogy and the narrow confines of intensive gynocriticism, brings to focus the consummate artistry and the well-schooled political rationale of a uniquely placed major post-colonial writer.