CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Literature is umblically related to the environment whereon it takes birth. Fiction, especially in a third world country like India is the clearest example of such purposive literature. In the preceding chapters we have seen how an artist like Nayantara Sahgal, conscious of the onerous responsibility on her as a litterateur, she delineates the emotional, the sociological, the psychological and the political facets of the life around her. Nayantara Sahgal's, novels take up diverse themes ranging from personal relations to social, political and religious issues. She selects and reconstructs the events relating to a period of nearly one hundred years from 1885 to 1985 of Indian socio-political life.

Politics is one of the chief thematic concern of Nayantara Sahgal. The political theme manifests in her novels in many ways in selection of characters who move in a political setting, in a description and projection of political events. Her novels offer a direct treatment of political process, inclusive of political antecedents and traditions, institutions, practices and formation of change. She critically analyzes the Indian political culture: attitudes towards the political system and the role of the 'self' in the system. She probes deeply the fundamental concerns such as the scope of politics, the relationship of ends and means, the standards or criteria for evaluation of political action and values that are salient for political action.

Nayantara Sahgal is consistently concerned with realistic portrayal and comprehensive analysis of the Indian political situation and milieu. Political life on a local, state, or national level, forms the backdrop for many novels and deal with serious political issue. Each of novel authentically chronicles the era it portrays - Identity, Plans and Happy capture the pre-independence period; while Morning, Shadow, Storm, Situation and Rich capture the post-Independence era. The novels depicting the pre-Independence Indian political scene, portray authentically the Imperial rule, significantly projecting the Indian as well as the British perceptions and reactions. In her first novel Happy, she begins to grasp the new political reality only marginally. She matures through protest against the ills of political populism, corruption and moral degeneration in Morning, Storm and Shadow; and seems to be coming to a fuller undertaking of the political reality in a broader perspective in Situation and Rich.
Plans and Identity, she examines the Imperialism from various angels and attitudes. Her work has contributed significantly to comprehending varied aspects of the socio-political conflicts and complexities.

In the novels portraying political situation in Independent India, Nayantara Sahgal portrays the inevitable challenges, problems and transition from dependence to self-government. Political greed and corruption, parochial self-promotion, authoritarian and lack of sincerity and the other murkier aspects of the Indian political milieu such as sycophancy, feudal mentality, nepotism - these are what novel after novel attempts to expose and analyse. She attempts critical examination of the initial trials and grave dangers threatening a nascent democracy. Sahgal vociferously exposes and condemns the creeping politico-cultural conformism and loyalism in contemporary India. Her novels particularly Shadow, Storm, Situation and Rich are valuable interpretations of the changing political ethos in the country. While projecting a perception of politics of gradual reform, she does not compromise on the fundamentals of 'quality of life' and liberty of thought, conscience and action. Sahgal’s work reflects, her ideological primacy of Gandhian democracy and considerable anxiety and consternation at the erosion of Nehruvian vision of nation-building. In tracing the sources of current political crisis, Sahgal displays keen awareness and undertakes an in depth analysis of the nuances of operationalization of democratic political structure in India.

In her novel she makes use of politics but is not overwhelmed by it. Her novels are intensely concerned with politics, yet are not doctrinaire as the rhetoric and propaganda do not replace thematic depth and subtlety. The novels present particularly interesting dimensions in placing public events through individual experiences and projecting politics as a part of the totality of the social ferment and not as isolated phenomena confined to political leaders and political strategies. A careful reading of her novels reflects clearly that the novelist’s concern is not limited to a particular political situation but at a much deeper level with individual’s struggle for self-realization. Nayantara Sahgal’s concern does not reveal itself through political satire or futuristic anti-utopias as is the case with some of the western writers, instead it is concerned with the reality of the contemporary situation. Uncircumscribed by any specific political ideology, her works reflect remarkable artistic objectivity and a humanistic vision.

Sahgal’s humanistic concern leads her to an in depth exploration of the human psyche and relations. In all her novels, she is consistently concerned with the theme of man-woman relationship. She depicts realistically and sensitively the complex labyrinth of the man-woman relationship exploring its various dimensions - marital, extra-marital,
pre-marital and inter-racial. Her novels offer indepth psychological study of marital relationships disrupted by discordant views, mismatching and lack of communication. She is particularly concerned with the issue of a woman's freedom, identity and dignity. The changing social condition and perceptions awaken the conscience of the suppressed women and lead her on to a quest for liberty, individuality and self-respect. In Sahgal's novels, women realize on their pulse the discriminatory and hypocritical notions & perceptions of the Indian society and men. Her heroines gradually comprehend the grim reality and struggle to attain freedom and to assert their individuality. With the orthodox and chauvinistic husband, the assertion of individuality and the right of liberty and equality often leads to disruption and strain in marital relationship. Yet female protagonist are often helped by liberated and compassionate men who are intellectually superior and awakened.

Sahgal critically scrutinizes the traditional basis of man-woman relationship, the marriage. Accepting the validity of the social institution of marriage, Sahgal wants it to incorporate equality, understanding and compassionate approach, friendly communication and enduring comradeship. Marital relationships receive an exhaustive and sensitive treatment in her novels. At the same time, Sahgal shows an uncanny grasp and compassionate understanding of the pre-marital and the extramarital relationship. She is able to capture the complexity of the inter-racial relationships as well as she also portrays self-reliant career woman. In her later novels, women are no longer confined to the four walls of the house and their marital duties do not constitute be all and end all of their existence, reflecting the changing socio-political scene. Devi, Sonali and Anna fight with corruption and sycophancy in politics and administration, join morchas and win many a sensational battles. They are women of substance who exhibit a fighting spirit to uphold the values and ideals they cherish. In her first novel, women choose to conform rather than to rebel against the constraints imposed by their husbands, society and religion. She authentically reflects the ground reality of the times in this novel. In her later novels the "new woman" is conscious of her individuality and fights for her fulfillment, rights and freedom. Thus Sahgal authentically chronicles the gradual changes induced in the pattern of personal relationships by the changing spectrum of socio-personal values and perceptions. She carefully avoids to be sentimental and restrains in pronouncing value judgements. In spite of the autobiographical base, her novels reflect objectivity.

Not content merely with a realistic portrayal, Sahgal analyses deeper for the cause of the malaise afflicting the life of the nation as well as that of an individual. These critical analyses leads Sahgal to the realization that religion and religious attitudes condition our political stances as well as emotional dispositions. Thus religion is another
of her chief thematic concerns. She observes that religious attitudes and perceptions cause much misery and exploitation at the political as well as personal plane as they induce inertia, fatalism, stoicism, and irrational acceptance of status-quo. The religion of the majority - Hinduism, does not provide circumstances conducive to the development of a humanistic doctrine. Sahgal vigorously emphasizes for a critical scrutiny of Hinduism for a reinterpretation and revitalization. Significantly for her if Hinduism is the cause of the malaise afflicting the political & personal lives, it is also capable of offering the cure highlighting the virtues such as duty and compassion. She proposes that incorporating humanistic values emanating from Christianity, the invigorated Hinduism can offer the strength to fight the corruption and exploitation. Sahgal's humanistic beliefs do not deny or bypass religion, they only reject dogma and inactivity.

Sahgal integrates her chief thematic concerns - political, personal and religious - in a subtle thematic pattern projecting an encompassing vision of life. To achieve a coherent thematic pattern, the human, the ideological and the religious themes are artistically woven crisscross. The political concerns are deftly coalesced with immediate human experience. Her portrayal of political issues as current public and collective concerns subsumes an interaction between individual ethic and public norms. The varied artistic strategies employed by the novelist, enable her to achieve a thematic pattern exploring the political and the personal, the human and the ideological. The device of juxtaposing personal life stories with the socio-political history of India is exploited very successfully by Sahgal. Her intermingling and overlapping of the personal and the national histories link up persons with events in an extremely fascinating manner. Her novels can be taken as significant contributions, portraying life in its complexities, contradictions and comprehensible totality.