Preface

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the Indo-Anglian novelists who shows a consistent preoccupation with the political and cultural developments in India from pre-independence period to the contemporary time. Tracing the social transition in almost all the eight novels written by her, Sahgal proves herself to be a keen observer and a vehement critic of the socio-political scenario of postcolonial India. Belonging to a generation of ardent nationalists, who longed to realise a "heaven of freedom", Nayantara developed a deep concern for the nation.

Born in 'Swaraj Bhavan' in the city of Allahabad (known as "Prayag" in ancient India) -- a blend of ancient civilization of Ramayana and the influence of Moguls, the meeting place of the Ganges and the Jumna -- Sahgal grew up speaking Hindi and Urdu; internalising the essential multiplicity of Indian culture. Sensitive to the turmoils and transitions in the contemporary Indian society, her personality was greatly influenced by the romantic idealism of a nation which was "being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into one of light" (Sahgal, PCC 15). Sahgal's poetic prose captures the gradual development of political consciousness in the three daughters of Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Renjit
Sitaram Pandit -- Chandralekha, Nayantara and Rita -- In her autobiographical piece, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. She writes:

With us, the growth of political awareness was a gradual and unconscious process and the most important influence in our lives. We were born and grew up at a time when India had come under the leadership of Gandhi and was maturing to nationhood under his guidance. My sisters and I were among the youngest of India's children to be touched by the spark with which Gandhi illuminated our country. It touched our lives in innumerable small ways and penetrated our consciousness gradually, so that as we grew, it became a living part of us. (14)

A child of Gandhian India, Sahgal inherits the idealistic tradition of Gandhian nationalism. She cherishes the values of idealism, humanism, secularism, sincere commitment to the nation, self-sacrifice, compassion and peace that connect the individual spontaneously to the social whole. Yet her fiction with its recurring motif of the divided self also concentrates on the individual who is alienated from the society.

Sahgal's fictional space is peopled by such alienated individuals who question the norms of the society, identifying themselves with the margins. Referring to the institutionalisation of Western dominance in India, Sahgal writes, "It was enshrined as the normal, rational, and only possible state of affairs. Even those who opposed it found it hard to visualise any other kind of world order. Domestic relations came under somewhat the same dispensation when the physical and financial
ownership of the wife by the husband was taken for granted. There are no circumstances so hard to dislodge, in public or private life, as those that look like a normal respectable condition" (PV 67). The colonial ideology pervades the whole atmosphere influencing even those who oppose it. The individual who resists this dominance is projected as the embodiment of idealism, humanism, and compassion as against the lawless, corrupt multitude. Indeed it is right to ascertain that these individuals are connected with the society through their opposition to it. Yet while denouncing crudely unidealistic forms of imperialism and authoritarianism, she is ideologically constrained to discover in the nationalist politics a saving idea. But the degeneration of nationalist politics forces her to formulate a universal vision transcending the racial and national boundaries. Such a vision is expressed especially in the later novels. Thus the fictional space of Sahgal is united in its contradiction with an extreme sense of nationalism and a preoccupation with internationalism; a strong commitment to human solidarity and an affirmation of individualism; a view of bourgeois society as a corrupt organisation of selfish interests and a romantic belief in the emancipatory role of liberal humanism.

Taken as a whole Nayantara Sahgal's fiction shows a distinct pattern of progression instigated by the union of opposing tendencies. Being a complex process the conflict is many layered, having political, cultural and personal dimensions. The confrontation between colonial ideology and nationalist liberal ideology, the conflict between authority and freedom are the inter-personal confrontation between man and
woman form part of the complex whole that interact forming a pattern of development.

The ideological conjuncture of Saghal's texts is determined by the idealistic character of the bourgeois liberalism she believed in, the political struggle for freedom headed by nationalism, the subsequent disillusionment in the post-independence period in India and the struggle of the marginalised woman against the male centre. Moving in-between tradition and modernity the nationalist movement has incorporated into its fold the East and the West. The ambivalent space constructed by this dialectic filters into the psyche creating a divided self. The nationalist government exposed the discrepancy between its romantic ideals and the real material practice; the emancipatory power that it is expected to be and the authoritarian regime that it turned out to be. This disjuncture between the ideal and the real, what was expected and what was got, gets portrayed in Sahgal's text. Originating from this sickening scenario, Nayantara's novels expose the wide gap between the romantic vision of the nationalists regarding the nation and the horrible realities of contemporary India. Tracing the development of Indian society, politics and culture in novel after novel she reveals the continuance of the colonial power structure and its brutal foregrounding of hybridity, syncreticity and displacement.

Saghal began her career as a writer with an autobiographical work, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954). The novels that followed turned out to be the biography of the nation, India. Novels from
A Time to Be Happy (1958) to Rich Like Us (1985) trace the nation's history and politics from the period of independence to the Emergency period. The last two novels, Plans for Departure (1986) and Mistaken Identity (1988) goes back to the pre-independence period. However a continuity of pre-occupations underlying these novels is quite discernible on a closer analysis.

Set in the period of the attainment of Indian independence, A Time to Be Happy deals with the dilemmas and confusions that the colonial regime has left on the Indian psyche. Spreading over a period just before and after independence, this novel provides signs of its impending doom. Govind Narayan's opportunism and Girish's total alienation from his country suggest the directions along which the society is developing. Only Sanad, among the westernised characters, provides scope for consolation as he transforms himself from a mere imitator of the western ways of life to a real Indian, deeply aware of his own distinctive culture.

This Time of Morning (1965), set in the post-independence period, develops this confrontation further. Signs of authoritarian tendencies developing within the new ruling class, suggested in the novel through Kalyan Sinha, finds its opponents in the liberal humanists like Rakesh and Kailas. If nationalist feeling and ideals of humanism and compassion is at the centre stage in the early post-independence period portrayed in the novel A Time to Be Happy, individualistic autocratic tendencies capture the centre stage in the next novel, This Time of
Morning. This is suggestive of the continuing influence of the colonial ideology.

The decadent politics practised by the new generation of rulers and the growth of divisive tendencies within the nation in the name of language is portrayed in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969). The emergence of the regional politics as a threat to the imaginary unity of the nation is hinted at here. Regionalism developed later as a real threat to the nation especially in the eighties. *The Day in Shadow* (1971) reveals the deterioration of the political as well as personal values. Som's "spiralling mania for affluence" (87) has overpowered ideals like self sacrifice. The emergence of an individualistic, money-mongering society, blind to the problems of the poor is suggested here. The emergence of political leaders like Sumer Singh indicate the sharp turn that the public life is undergoing from selfless social service to professional politics. The gap widens and the confrontation continues.

The political predicament reaches an alarming situation in *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977). The death of Shivraj the leader of independence movement and the present Prime Minister metaphorically represents the total disappearance of the positive values of the nationalist movement and the emergence of an authoritarian, oppressive, violent system in its place. Devi's total alienation in the Cabinet, the rape of a girl in the University, the violent resistance of Naren and Rishad and the resignation of Usman from Vice Chancellorship and Devi's resignation from the Cabinet, indicate the fatal insensitivity of the
ruling power centre to human problems. According to Sahgal the two
ovels, *The Day in Shadow* and *A Situation in New Delhi* reflect, "the
mounting unease and at times the feeling of impending disaster"
(PV 153) when she wrote them. Sahgal's ability to predict the directions
of political development finds expression in the novel, *A Situation in New
Delhi*. In this novel, which continues the uneasy mood expressed in *The
Day in Shadow*, Sahgal suggests the emergence of an authoritarian
regime, predicting the declaration of Emergency.

*Rich Like Us* (1985), that has won the Sinclair Prize for fiction in 1985, is set in the period of National Emergency in India. Sonali, an
IAS officer demoted for her "disobedience" resigns from the service. The
oppressive nature of Emergency forces Sonali to trace similar oppressive
traditions in the Indian past. By employing Sonali as the second
narrator the novelist tries to shift the point of view in order to attribute a
multidimensional structure to the narrative. Tracing the growth of
authoritarianism Sahgal hints at the failure of the non-violent method of
resistance. She feels that she has "grown to adulthood nourished on
monumental lies" (RLU 30).

A shift in Nayantara Sahgal's attitude to Gandhian nonviolence is
evident in this novel. This self-critical attitude develops further in the
next two novels, *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity*. Moving
back to the period of the nationalist movement Sahgal portrays Bala
Gangadhara Tilak and Khudiram Bose, in *Plans for Departure*; leaders,
who advocated violent extremism, as opposed to the moderate Gopala
Krishna Gokhale, the political Guru of Mahatma Gandhi. This shift in focus can be interpreted as a change in attitude. Similar sentiments find expression in *Mistaken Identity* where Bhaiji, an ardent Gandhian fails in influencing the authority through his satyagraha. He has to meet with death at the end of his fast.

Shifts in the time frame provide Sahgal scope for experimenting with the narrative. The two novels, *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity* are introspective, looking back to our own history with a self-critical attitude. At the same time they are connected with the present as the contemporary political developments are indirectly referred to in these novels. *Plans for Departure* is a departure from the boundaries of narrow nationalism to a larger universalist perspective. Moving between India and Europe, the novel connects the East and the West. Sahgal hopes to realise her Utopian dream of a universalist culture through an idealistic intermingling of cultures represented in the novel by the couple, Jason and Gayatri.

The blending of cultures proposed by Sahgal in *Plans for Departure* is followed by the juxtaposition of political philosophies in *Mistaken Identity*. Sahgal, who advocated a liberal humanist stance in the early novels, lacks preferences when she comes to *Mistaken Identity*. Gandhism and Communism share the same platform in this novel, within the prison, where political differences do not matter much. Bhushan, a man without any particular political leaning observes these political philosophies, without prejudice. It is a fine platform to evaluate the
relative merit of these political positions. But instead of doing that Sahgal observes these divergent political positions with a touch of humour, once again becoming vehemently self critical in her attitude.

These novels chart some of the struggles and transformations which have brought into being the world we now inhabit. Moreover they also intervene and participate in the struggles. Harping upon the shared tradition of India which is neither Hindu nor Muslim, Sahgal points towards the contemporary discourse on religious fundamentalism in *Mistaken Identity*. The references to the "Impure" culture of India in *Mistaken Identity* is a reaction to the emergence of communal politics in contemporary India adding a new fascist face to the colonial power structure. Once again the accuracy of Sahgal's political observations reveal itself. Thus privatising the social fragmentations through a strategy of inwardness Sahgal foregrounds the ideological conflicts within the postcolonial Indian society. This thesis hopes to probe some of these issues.

The introductory chapter concentrates on the impact of colonialism on Indian society. Tracing the political and cultural transformations that India underwent during the postcolonial period, I propose to trace the rudimentary dialectic of this period. The term "postcolonial" has been variously used by critics. However I would like to use the term in the sense in which it has been used in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present
day"(2). The terms "pre-independence" period and "post-independence" period will be used to refer to the periods before and after independence. Similarly the term "dialectic" has been subject to various interpretations by philosophers from Plato to Marx. So it is necessary to specify the meaning. Here dialectic is used to indicate a progressive unification through the contradiction of opposites.

The interrelationship between colonial expansion and the demands of capitalist development explains the metropolitan hegemony of the pre-independence period. The multinational capitalist forces, together with metropolitan and the native bourgeoisie form part of the power structure in the post independence scenario. The patterns of cultural transformation and the prevalence of a rudimentary dialectic resident in it are the chief concerns of this chapter. Nayantara Sahgal's novels reveal the dialectic of the postcolonial Indian society through the interpersonal and ideological conflicts presented in the text. I propose to trace these confrontations analysing the political and cultural transformations that they produce.

The resistance to the cultural denigration instituted by the colonial centre, its continuance in the post-independence period in different forms and its ideological implications are discussed in the next chapter. The resistance embedded within Nayantara Sahgal's text is traced to the social confrontations of which it is a part. Resistance to various oppressive ideologies like the colonial ideology, patriarchal power and to the contemporary decadent culture is analysed in this chapter. The
concept of ideology which informs the present study is an exploration of Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatus in which he includes religion, education, family, law, politics, trade-union, communications and culture and also his famous thesis that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (36). Different from the Repressive State Apparatus which functions by violence, Ideological State Apparatus functions by ideology.

The third chapter deals with the displacement of cultures triggered by the colonial experience. Concern with place and displacement is a major feature of postcolonial literatures. These concepts may vary in its meaning in different societies. In general it demonstrates the "very complex interaction of language, history and environment in the experience of colonized peoples . . . ." (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, Key Concepts 177). Though physical alienation effected through forced migration or slavery was absent in the Indian context it could not escape the dislocation caused by the imposition of English language and the introduction of modernity. Separating "space from place," colonialism in India disrupted a sense of place by dislocating native culture. The alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image are the after effects of such a dislocation. Colonialism has altered beyond recognition the cultural scenario of India and its influence is evident in divergent realms like the political structure; constitution, law, civil administration, education, history, literature, culture, family and in the intimately personal psychological realms. Stressing the essential hybridity of postcolonial culture, this chapter analyses the ebb and fall of colonial
and nationalistic ideologies and its psycho-social implications in Sahgal's novels that trace the political and cultural history of India from the pre-independence period to the Emergency period. The cultural transformation finds its resonance in the historical and political realms. Analysing the ideological implications of cultural transformation I propose to examine its portrayal in Nayantara Sahgal's novels.

Sahgal's novels express strong concern for the oppressed female subject and underline the necessity to resist the patriarchal domination. Nayantara is hailed as an ardent feminist who practices her ideals in her own life. Her women characters, some of them created in Sahgal's own image provide scope for a feminist analysis. Discussing the position of women in India and the operation of patriarchal ideology from the traditional to the modern period, I propose to analyse the portrayal of feminist resistance in Sahgal's novels in the fourth chapter.

The last chapter discusses the discourse strategies of postcolonial writing. Sahgal's portraiture of Indian society from the period of early national resistance movement to the later post-independence period encompasses within its fictional space many of the strategies of postcolonial writing. Techniques like irony, fantasy and the use of double narrators can be juxtaposed with the inherent duality of postcolonial society. Analysing the linguistic diversity and intertextuality in Sahgal's novels, this chapter explores the multicultural discourse tracing the dialectic of the use of language.
Reacting to the socio-political situation of contemporary postcolonial India, Sahgal portrays the confrontations that affect social development. By tracing the socio-political scene, the novels intervene in the contemporary social, political and cultural practices. Nayantara Sahgal's liberal humanism and her cherished ideals of brotherhood and love ultimately become the postcolonial ethics of her writing.