CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

On the basis of the critical and analytical study of theory of resistance and revolt in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal show the voice and vision of the novelist who her writings "fully express and depict the changing realities of Indian life and while encouraging the scientific and rationalistic tendencies in literature" and "lend full support to the progressive movements."\(^1\) Going deep into tradition and modernity, Nayantara Sahgal felt a deep concern for and commitment to the suffering and exploited Indian female masses. She reflects in her novels an urge for freedom from the clutches of the age-old caste and class system, socio-political burdens and revolt and resistance against all irrational, established norms be it social, economic, political or religions. She is in search of newer paths that would lead women away from the existing systems and searching for their identity, freedom and self-respect. She believes in the altruistic aspects of humanism and often asserts a role in the reformation and reconstruction of the existing order for the welfare of humanity at large. Her protagonists display an idealistic outlook towards life.

Nayantara Sahgal works with the idealism that "Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestations of some mysterious idea of the beauty of God; it is not as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotion by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and above all, it is not pleasure, but it is means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity."\(^2\)

Nayantara Sahgal adopts the theory of resistance and applies it to the changing social and moral reality, as well as other outer pressures and pulls and undertakes to


write due to inner compulsions and commitments demanding expression. The present study presents the women characters in the novels of Mrs. Sahgal revolting and resisting against the system which treats women with utter indifference and contemptibility. Economic disparities leading to class distinction have been a major cause of social upheavals. Nayantara Sahgal is deeply concerned with the liberation of women. The central projection of her novels is the suffering caused to her women protagonists in a loveless and lifeless marriage. Nita leaves Kalyan in *This Time of Morning* because of mutual misunderstanding and marital discord. Her another novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* also depicts domestic disturbance in the lives of mismatched or ill-matched couples. Saroj also leaves Inder as Simrit goes a step further in *The Day in Shadow*. She divorces Som and goes to marry Raj. The novelist's rationalistic mind does not allow her to accept injustice with passivity, even though breaking away also meant may problems.

Resistance or revolt in her novels is a medium to enable man to understand the present and future of his life and society. Novel as a form of art conveys a message and presents a vivid interpretation of life. According to Bhabani Bhattacharya, "Art must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth." Resistance shows an expectation and dissatisfaction with society. The novels of Nayantara Sahgal reveal the socio-political, economic and religious background so as to take a moral stand and resist and protest against the social code or injustice. She advocates changes in the traditional pattern of society. The moral preoccupation characterizes her work and her plots and patterns are constructed out of incidents and situations which matter much in human affairs. She also revolts and resists against the female suffering and male dominance.

Resistance against traditional values by urbanization is evident in Nayantara Sahgal. She shows the trends of revolt through conformity. Different human responses to resistance against suffering are revealed ranging from meek passivity to active resistance and rebellion. Here a new mode of action is discovered which enables the protagonists to fight the established code with courage and dignity. Human existence is full of struggle. The novelist claims the responsibility of finding a

---

suitable form to express human misery. The reaction of the suffering protagonist is in
the form of resistance against the existing order and the unendurable suffering. The
novels of Nayantara Sahgal air resistance against disparities and hence for economic
changes, political revolt against imperial oppression, revolt by way of individualistic
reaction against the established code and ethical, moral and religious revolt.

Nayantara Sahgal entered the literary scene in the latter part of the fifties. Her
political problems were genuine problems "I grew up during the national movement.
My parents went to jail repeatedly during our fight for freedom .... Our home was the
meeting place and many decisions momentous to India were taken in it. I became a
novelist and a political journalist, and all my writings, fiction and non-fiction, have
been about contemporary India." Enriched with political knowledge due to political
environment, she devoted herself to writing. Her concern with political themes and
her perceptive analysis of the national scene are projected in her novels which present
a chronological account of Indian politics from the last phases of the freedom struggle
to the period of Emergency in 1975.

Nayantara Sahgal's world mostly belongs to the upper Indian society of
bureaucrats and politicians. Her novels deal with the decadence of the Indian heritage.
Her concern with the country led to her outright revolt against the Emergency
imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. A sensitive response to the political currents is felt.
There is a constant interaction between the past and the present in her narrative,
Prison and Chocolate Cake and From Fear Set Free. The change from the colonial
set up to the various administration levels of the country is revealed in A Time to Be
Happy and This Time of Morning.

The novelist projects her deep political imagination pursuing a political
strategy. Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi, and
Rich Like Us focus their attention on the problems of governance in post-
independence India. The characters are closely linked with political aspects and her
involvement with political freedom is evident too. Her fiction should be read with
primary regard to her political views. In all of her novel, Sahgal reveals her characters
fighting against repressive political forces. In Storm in Chandigarh, we mark an

---

artistic interpretation of political events. A Situation in New Delhi captures and covers the pre and post Emergency political scene. There is a brutal show of strength through tracing "intricate map of burns"\(^5\), on the bodies of people who dare to revolt against the apathy of the government. The novel captures the indifference of the western country towards democracy in India.

The Emergency in Rich Like Us crushes trade unions, censored news and politicized bureaucracy, certain facts like the blinding of criminals and the raid on JNU are also portrayed along with nepotism and attempts to foist family rule. There is a note of resistance and revolt against the Prime Minister's intentions to become the President and to make his son politically powerful. The novelist reflects the widespread fear of ruthless political power in the novel especially in relation to JP's arrest for his anti-government activities. She rebels and resists against the dissolution of Jawaharlal Nehru's humanitarian perspective along with his political structures and the political atmosphere becoming restricted to personal gains. Sonali opposes the Emergency. The repeated references to Gandhi and his idealism highlight the change in the political scenario. She despair at the degeneration of human values and human civilization. In each novel, there is a crusader for Gandhian values, like Vishal in Storm in Chandigarh, Ray in A Day in Shadow, Devi and Usman in A Situation in New Delhi and Sonali in Rich Like Us. Vishal single handedly resists and revolts against political unscrupulousness. Similarly Raj in A Day in Shadow handles political situation. Usman and Devi resign from the official posts in protest against unscrupulous leaders. Sonali in Rich Like Us also fights against her helpless situation during the Emergency. Sonali is punished for not adhering to the demands of the political scenario and is "demoted, punished and humiliated."

Nayantara Sahgal reveals the awareness of individuality; tradition bound lives, resistance and resentment against male domination, code of morality and double standards by projecting their own visions.

Injustice and imbalance individual disturbs Nayantara Sahgal as she says: "For the first time I came across the shocking assumption of inequality. A man's ego and ambition, I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict, the man's will and desires

---

must prevail."\(^6\) She is deeply concerned with the freedom of women. She presents her women as simple women who are conscious of their identity and wish to be accepted as equals to their husbands. In the novel, *A Time to be Happy*, Ammaji does not find any solution to the difference of her opinion with her husband who had never made any effort to understand her. She had refused to "submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her."\(^7\)

A humble effort has been made in the preceding chapter of the dissertation to critically evaluate and analytically examine various shapes and shades, forms and figures of resistance revealed in some major works of Mrs Nayantara Sahgal who is a representative writer of the post-independence Indian English novels. The motivational interest made the researcher study her novels as a part of the perspective period. It is true that each of her novels taken for the study is taste and ethos of the times. The underlying pattern that comes outing her novels is the replica or reflection of the then dominating ideas and attitude which made and moulded the mode of a particular type of resistance. It is also apparently seen that Mrs Nayantara Sahgal is a realist and not an escapist living in an airy- fairy world of fancy and illusion. She is quite lively to the pulls and pressures and problems and issues of the times. In a broad way, she is a ‘committed’ writer with a keen desire to bring about social consciousness and reformatory awareness in society.

In her novels, we mark the deep undercurrents of the idea of resistance running regularly. She shows a revolutionary expression of her Indian mind during the disturbing times of great social and political fervor and ferment in the country-from the time of independence to the Emergency. Her novels have certainty helped us to understand a broader perspective, the shaping factors and forces with the shades of resistance in the period after independence.

As a result of the past times, the literature of resistance, gained ground and formed shape and got direction by the social, political and economic pulls and pressure of our society. The design and approaches in this literature reveal that some protesting and dissenting aspects of and approaches to life and society dominate her

---

\(^6\) Sahgal, Nayantara.""This Time of Fulfilment", *Femina*, 7-20 May 1976, P. 15.

\(^7\) \--------------. *A Time to be Happy*, op. cit., P. 35.
novels. In this period, on the one hand, the novelists like Mulk Raj Anand has deftly
described the resistance and protests of the ‘dalits’ and the woes and worries, and the
struggles and strifes of the higher aristocratic circles or the elite class. Novelists like
Bhabani Bhattacharya and K.A Abbas have mainly depicted the sorrows and
sufferings, tensions and tussles of the resistance. Nayantara Sahgal shows that she is a
visionary concerned not only with the changing norms of the times but also with the
improvement of the future progress of the country as a whole.

Nayantara Sahgal has also tried to dispel the dark spell outdated customs and
conventions in India. She condemns and criticizes these outworn traditions. She has
skillfully woven the warp and woof of social and political themes of the worthwhile
basic values of life in all walks of life as social, political, economic and feminist.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels not only reflect the Indian ethos and cultural
heritage, but they also form an effective and impressive care of resistance literature in
political field. The political resistance can be marked at two levels. At the first level,
the resistance is mainly against the foreign rule and at the second level, it is concerned
with the ‘internal misrule’ and some social maladies which have no remedy after
independence.

The major novels of Nayantara Sahgal deal with the contemporary Indian
political scenario with a deep insight and a convincing presentation of the corrupt
workings and false wordings of selfish politicians and under-hand practitioner
bureaucrat. More, a younger generation, like Rishad, Naren and Swarnpriya in A
Situation in New Delhi mostly and mainly resort to the means of violence and
bloodshed for the destruction of the corrupt system both in government and society
and with the aim of building a new neat and clean system. We can also note, on the
other hand, the elite class finds itself in a fix on account of the vacuum in the
leadership which could inspire them to rise to the occasion and get ready for the battle
once again but this time the battle is to be fought against the misrule and internal
social malady. There are characters like Devi, Professor Usman, Sonali, Raj Garg and
Vishal Dubey who ridicule and rebuke the passivity of the masses for not strongly
and staunchly resisting any social, moral, economic or political evil any kind of
exploitation or suppression. At the same time, these protagonists assert new plans
or the policies and prescribe new remedies for curing the maladies of social system. They also foster the ideals of humanity and equality. They know fully well that the change in the present system in imperative and that only by destroying or cleaning the old corrupt system can and with a new system evolve. However it can be said that this new system has to be evolved not through violent means, but through truth, non-violence and passive resistance. Professor Usman and Devi in the same novel resign from their high positions in order to fight against the old system and establish the new plans and policies which are necessary for the healthy and happy growth of the country. Sonali is one woman character who hates any place in the tyrannical rule during the Emergency of 1975 imposed by Indira Gandhi, and she is very much critical about the single family rule, red-tapism, and compulsory family planning of a person on any age. The resistance in this phrase is the resistance of the isolated and sequestered sufferers victims who dream of the golden age.

The Indian English novelist, like Sahgal, belongs to a society that is full of several corrupt practices and dogma, superstition, illiteracy and dire poverty. It is not surprising to see that the writers take up this vital issue of resistance against the plethora of evils. This resistance takes place because of the conflicts between the victim and the victimizer, between the oppressed and the oppressor of the Indian society and Nayantara Sahgal is inspired by the constant imposition of and intimidation by one group over another, one individual over another and by a man over a woman. Moreover, the social and political and socio-economical forces enlarge the vista of Naynatara Sahgal who has portrayed the multifarious and manifold facets of life and its problems and issues.

The struggle of the ‘weaker sex’ against the ‘stronger-sex’ is a new theme on which Nayantara focuses in her novels. It is an interesting theme of resistance in the Indian English Fiction. The weaker- sex now no longer seems to be so weak. The very truth that women are taking their solid stand against anything that hurts and harms their self- respect and prestige as a human being. This renders their resistance in a meaningful manner. These emancipated and liberated women characters of Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are in search of their own identity, a ‘self’ and a new type of morality
which might enable them live happily like human beings and as ‘co-partners’ with their husbands and equal sharers in their joys and sorrows, and gaiety and grimness.

Nayantara Sahgal’s women characters like Saroj, Simrit and Mara also face and fight against injustice, throes of sorrow and strings of hypocrisy of the male dominated tendency. They try their best to adjust and sacrifice devotedly and dedicatedly. They do their best to adapt themselves to any kind of circumstances and situations so that their social and domestic world remains undisturbed, harmonious and happy. But this being not so up to their expectations, they do not hesitate to resist strongly so as to pave their own way which gives self – respect, identity and meaning to their individual lives and their place and position in society. Saroj, Simrit, Mara, Sonali and such other women characters focus full attention on the struggles and challenges involved in contemporary social living and the loneliness that compels every woman to draw upon her own energy and resources. These emancipated women thus in search of new ways and means of life. They are by all means positively motivated towards a larger concept of love, sympathy, joy and good will. They want to transcend the patriarchal, bureaucratic selfish and self-centered full of and …with programmed consumption.

Thus, Nayantara Sahgal in her novels has shown that she has fearlessly faced the inimical forces and unfavourable factors of our society and country as well. Though the novelist has not yet suggested any radical solutions suggested, the way each and every protagonist confronts the reality and creates new patterns and designs of resistance and revolt against the age old established exploitative and coercive forces brings in a new resonance, a new vibrant way of looking at life as a whole and an inner area of light and lusture. However, to a large extent futile and fruitless this resistance may be, still it gives a sense of satisfaction and exhilaration, a new voice and vision and a bright ray of hope while it lasts and functions effectively.

Out of several sorts of resistance, there is also political resistance which is very well marked in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Her novels present a sense of disillusionment with India’s Partition of 1947 and people’s passive attitude towards national problems and events. Corruption was there everywhere but no one seemed to be resenting and rebelling against…
If by chance anyone tried to resent in any way, he was regarded an outcast, a
misfit, an anti-nationalist or an outdated person. Moral and basic values of life were
fast declining. It had several reasons behind. The common masses were not happy
with the partition; they felt cheated by their own leaders. They suffered mass exodus.
The corrupt politicians and bureaucrats created many problems in the way of the
common man. The nation as a whole felt dopped and duped into believing that the
leaders were there to safeguard their interest. Nayantara said, “The most unusual
aspect of our national leadership after independence has been its commitment to
safeguard the liberties of a people who were not yet experienced enough to protest
these for themselves”8. Corrupt and power-hungry politicians polluted politics. They
exploited the people in the guise of their well-wishers. The common man soon rose to
the occasion to show his strong resistance against this kind of deceiving. Thus, the
partition and politicians resulted in the loss of faith in the future leadership. They
resented and resisted against such things. Later in 1975, the sudden declaration of
Emergency was another shocking and striking blow to the people who were trying to
condemn and criticize the system.

As people knew it very well that their voices would not be heard properly,
they could only express their disgust and show a sense of indignation directly or
indirectly in the form of resistance and resentment or revolt every now and then. This
resistance is reflected and revealed in Nayantara Sahgal’s such novels as Rich like Us,
Storm in Chandigarh and A Situation in New Delhi. Her novel, Storm in Chandigarh
(1969) contains the visible problem of violence and shows invisible resistance.

Vishal, the protagonist in the novel, is an intelligent officer who has to deal
with the problem at human level. He converses with these two chief ministers who are
the symbols of two political parties. Gyan Singh threatens the city with a strike to
show off his power politics. Harpal Singh protests and resists against the split and
partition of the states in the name of religion and language. Thus, the conflict between
Gyan and Harpal is not simply a battle of personal discord, it is a battle of politics,
ideology and philosophy. Harpal at last does not take the risk. The resistance that they

---

show to Gyan Singh is their personal contribution to the quality and values of political life. However, in the end, the death of the Home Minister in the Centre abates this ‘storm’. Harpal is shot by the mob and Gyan Singh calls off the strike as a token of regard and honour for the death of a patriot.

Similarly, her another novel, *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) is basically a novel in which we mark two political ideas through contrast and juxtaposition. Polarization of ideas, characters and incidents underlines this contrast. The novelist polarizes various sets of ideologies- the ideology of Shivraj versus the ideology of Naren and Rishad- Democracy versus Naxalism. There is a character in the novel, Pinky, who represents old decadent sets of values. In balanced juxtaposition is the character, Swarnapriya or Priya (skinny) who wants to change the world and so she helps Rishad in his revolutionary activities. Naren and Rishad resist, rebel with the aid to panic and violence.

In her other novel, *Rich Like Us* (1985), the novel opens in the twentieth century for India. The year in 1975 is the year of the Emergency, and it is a paradox nevertheless true that ‘free’ India is suffering among other evils and a different kind of suppression- the suppression of ‘freedom’ itself without freedom nobody can live happily. Freedom to be free in misunderstood, not by others from outside but by our own people, our own politicians and leaders.

In this novel, Nayantara Sahgal badly and bitterly condemns and criticizes the power, blind politicians and bureaucrats, on the matters, where political contacts and connections create corruption and vitiate the social and economic atmosphere of the country. She criticizes the most degraded, inefficient, corrupt and careless people like Dev and Ravi Kachru. Anyone who showed some sense of resistance against the ‘supremo’ during the Emergency was put behind the bars without giving them even a simple chance of hearing. There was no natural justice for the sufferer or the victim. It was indeed an absolute rule related to totalitarianism in the name of so-called development, progress and prosperity.

We also see that the novelist has successfully handled the juxtaposition to throw ample light on resistance and conflict between two different ideologies. Two
diverse characters like Sonali and Ravi Kachru are seen set in polarization to bring Sonali’s rightful resistance more meaningfully and forcefully.

Sonali, no doubt, is a sharp minded and hardworking IAS topper, but she is “demoted, punished and humiliated”. Her only lapse, lacuna or mistake is that during the emergency period deliberately or indeliberately she refused to sanction the foreign project of some Happyola drink, because the project was beyond the legal and constitutional jurisdiction, though the Prime Minister has given a green signal to it. This came as a shuddering shock Sonali which to her was:

Like a physical assault…… the alienness of what had happened,
The midnight shock at midday, for no reason (She)could under-stand,
Paralysed( her)…. No malign fate had signaled (her) out for punishment.
The logic of June 26th had simply caught up with (her). The same
Soundless nudge that (had) landed (her) in the ditch had carted
Thousands off to jail…..herded as many like animals to sterilization centres. 9

Sonali is humiliated and hated but she knows the uselessness of resenting or resisting against the single willed and single voiced oppressions of the Emergency and her persecution. With the result of her mental shock, she falls ill. In her fitful fever she recalls the poor plight and hopeless condition of the boy she saw in the Cannaught Place “stumbling blind towards his glasses”, and she comments bitterly, “I had never before seen power and authority so nakedly displayed on the pavement”8. The boy had at least shouted in resistance and protest but she could not even do that. Hers was a silent or passive resistance that had been gathering to erupt like a volcano at the right moment whenever it would come naturally. The Emergency had finished her career but suddenly she did not want a career “in the crumbling unprofessionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus emergency”10 Although Sonali loses in the eyes of the world but she does not lose her heart and her own inner conscience becomes elevated, sublime and heroic.

---

10 Ibid., P. 30.
Sonali sincerely feels that she should have been differently trained and taught as to “how casual we are about cruelty, depravity. She understands very well the instinct of survival and servility of the civil servants. She boldly says, “We (the civil servants) were being realistic… We knew we would survive the blasts outside only if we pretended they weren’t happening.” Such a feeling or a sense of realization cannot be expected of a person who has no power to resist or courage to protest. On the other side, these reactions of Sonali surely show the resistance against the corrupt and degenerate system. Thus, Sonali’s silent passive resistance becomes more vocal, and her silent protest turn, more violent.

One thing is clear here that by comparison and contrast, the political resistance and resentment in the pre- independence period was more vocal, wide-spread and more intense, when even a common shopkeeper like Ram’s father burnt his foreigner possessions and when Sonali’s grandfather had fought against untouchability and the ‘Sati-System’.

Thus, we see that resistance in Sahgal’s novels is the resistance of the sufferers and victims who want to change the existing system of the corruption and bring in a Ram- Rajya.