CHAPTER VI

Nayantara Sahgal’s Language and Style

Language is the vehicle of the vision which a novelist embodies in his work. Just as a sculptor transforms a block of stone into a lovely shape with his instruments and a painter paints a picture with colours and brushes which half conceals and half reveals what is within, in the same way it is through language that a novelist gives vent to his thoughts and feelings which find expression in the story moulded in the crucible of his imagination. As Rene Wellek says, “Language is quite literally the material of the literary artist. Every literary work, one could say, is merely a selection from a given language, just as a work of sculpture has been described as a block of marble with some pieces chipped off.”

Nayantara Sahgal takes every care to use the English language in such a way that his readers may feel no difficulty in getting at the heart of her novels. She writes with spontaneous ease and from the lips of her characters, who belong to the upper class of the society and are well-versed in the English language, flows the English language with equal effortlessness and ease. Her prose moves nimbly and easily and enables her narrative to proceed onward without any obstruction. She has, indeed, a journalist’s love for limpid expression. As she once observed, “I rewrite a lot and am very particular about ‘polish’. I am finicky about words and sentences. Each one has to count and economy in expression is what I always work for.”
In an interview with Jasbir Jain she threw light on the objective she never loses sight of while using English as a writer:

The word I used the other day where it then flows out and almost needs no correction, so in the end what I’m doing is, I’m only polishing, finishing, and with me it means paring it down, even what I have written because I am very conscious of superfluity. I don’t like verboseness. I really have no taste for it. My personal taste is not for these huge big domes. I think the ultimate end of everything is simplicity and certainly that is the ultimate end of style where you pare down to the essentials and each thing can be only that one thing like in a poem there is no word you can substitute for another word without running the line.³

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels bear witness to her extraordinary descriptive power. Her descriptions of places are quite vivid and rich in sensuous appeal. The following passage from her first novel “A Time To Be Happy” offers a rich feast to the senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste:

Past the Indian bazzars we went where fiery hot gram sprinkled with chili powder was sold by singing vendors in narrow cones made of old newspapers, through the European
shopping district, and upto Denkins’ Hotel. It was brimming with life at the height of the season. Once show-window at the entrance always displayed an elaborate wedding cake or some other artistic confection, and beribboned boxes of Swiss Chocolates and loaves of German Bread, while the other had an array of dolls and toys that were available at the hotel’s toy-shop next door. In the following passage, Savitri’s attractive person is described against the beauty of dawn which adds to her charm:

It was the hour of sunrise, and it held all the glistening perfection of a raindrop before it falls to the ground. Savitri, fresh from her bath, had the scent of sandalwood about her. In her crisp cotton sari, her long hair falling in deep waves down her back looked part of the dawn.

In Plans For Departure, we have a very charming description of Sir Basu’s experiment on plants which proves that plants live like every creature that breathes:

Plants get drunk like humans....One drink of whisky made a mimosa straighten up and look bright and eager. Another drink made it drowse and droop. The third drink made it drunk and folded its little leaves.... It plainly
shows, as Sir Basu says, that plants have animal (or human) traits, but so far hardly any one in the scientific community accepts his finding. He says botanists in the West may accept that a tree feel a woodman’s axe, but he wonders if he can persuade them about the tortures peas go through when boiled.\textsuperscript{6}

And here is a lively picture of the procession of freedom-fighters protesting fearlessly against the British rule and their being treated harshly by the police:

Akbarabad in the grip of processions. Who were those people, who came out of nowhere in their hundreds, wage-earners all, who had everything to lose by marching along banned thoroughfares, singing banned national songs, waving the banned national tricolour and landing in jail. Nurullah saw the tricolour snatched back and forth in grim struggle with the police…. The procession’s leaders were manhandled into barred vans, the youngsters in the crowd were kicked and cuffed, and the obstreperous flag-wavers among them were pulled off the road and flogged.\textsuperscript{7}

The novel is remarkable for pictorial representation of sex acts also. The narrator describes in vivid terms the scene of love-making Nurullah came upon while he was on ‘a lazy trail to see what he could
recognize of trees whose names he had learnt from Pyare Chacha'. Here is an interesting erotic picture of two lovers indulging in sex against the agreeable background of Nature presented almost in religious terms. The picture is highly evocative:

   Coming to an avenue of weeping ashokas he (Nurullah) knew them instantly by their shape, tall narrow cones whose densely layered leaves pointed sharply earthward. In an encircling girdle of them he came upon Mr Mc Cracken fallen to his knees. He was bowed over in the prayerful posture of namaz with his russet head between the bleak parted thighs of Mrs. Crik. She lay spread wide open on the grass. Only her eyes were closed and her pallid features were twisted into an expression of anguished unendurable pleasure. 

Nayantara Sahgal describes with equal skill various personages of her novels. We find her concentrating on their character more than on their external features. Their inner selves are laid bare before the reader through their behaviour. In A Time To Be Happy, the character of Ammaji, Govind Narayan’s mother, is presented in contrast with her husband’s. We have an insight into their characters:

   She was a diminutive figure in white, oddly austere in that opulent setting and though she often talked of the days when she had been mistress of the house, I knew she had not
enjoyed the position. The indolent pleasure-loving man who had married her and brought her here had not understood her nun-like disdain of luxury, her stubborn refusal to submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her. She had in her youth been a woman of character at a time when character was not admired in women of breeding, and later this had given way to a sharp criticism of all that she disapproved of in her husband and his home. The old gentleman, Govind Narayan’s father, with his gentlemanly dislike of argument, had regularly escaped from the possibility of it. In Paris, judging from the stories that were still told about him, he had been as dashing as any boulevardier, twirling his moustache and his cane as he sauntered along the Champs-Élysées. Now he had long been dead, but his views lived on in Harish to mock her.9

And here in a few words in the same novel is summed up the character of Sohan Bhai – his patriotism and dedication to the deprived in the country:

So Sohan Bhai had made the whole country his home. He had not met the Mahatma again, but the bonds he had forged with Gandhi’s
naked and hungry brotherhood had become his life’s work.\(^\text{10}\)

In the Narrator’s following words the novelist brings before us Veena, Sanad’s sister, a young woman full of energy and new ideas. Again, the description is centred on her attitude of mind:

Here was a young woman, forthright and candid, who would never be bowled over by sentiment or buried in outworn tradition, but who would passionately cherish what was her own just because it was hers. Service had many meanings. I had found. It could spring from duty or inspiration. But here was service in its purest form, born of love.\(^\text{11}\)

In *This Time Of Morning*, Kalyan Sinha describes the passivity of his adoptive parents which he always found to his dislike. Here Kalyan Sinha’s tone suggests the desirability of an attitude just opposite to one embodied in his adoptive parents. Here the prose is used in such a way as to suggest quite effectively the mental attitude of the speaker towards his subject as well as that of the novelist:

Together they belonged to the vast sick multitude who bore their lot like beasts of burden and when it became too much for them, lay down and died. Like victims of famine... only worse, because they could have fought and did not. Living and dying was not what they did. They stagnated in the turgid
waters of their lives and gradually they rotted away.\textsuperscript{12}

In \textit{Storm In Chandigarh}, the novelist’s prose moves ponderously when she analyses the characters of Vishal Dubey, and Leela. They come to life with their attitudes towards each other in the following words:

He had wanted the woman and won her, and forever afterwards had tried to reach the person in her, the one to talk to when the day’s work was done, the friend with whom he could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself. The whole self was not heroic. Most of it was ordinary. It was soiled in part, maimed in part. It had lived and all the signs and scars of living were upon it. But it was all one had to give. Leela had not been interested. She had selected what she wanted of him, the distinguished escort at parties, the successful civil servant with a promising future, the husband who could be relied upon to take pains with whatever she took to him. She had given herself selectively too, what she had considered prudent and convenient to give, and left him empty of the reality of herself. Even her vitality had needed an audience. She scintillated in company.\textsuperscript{13}
Again, when the novelist takes us into the mind of the reader, the language she employs to reveal what is going on it is quite simple. When, in *Storm In Chandigarh*, the reader finds Inder exulting in his possessive attitude towards Saroj, he is reminded of Dubey’s opinion about the appaling condition of Indian women who glorified the very act of self-effacement. This opinion of Vishal Dubey is expressed by the novelist in language at once simple and clear:

He though of his own countrywomen as the subdued sex not yet emerged from the chrysalis’ for whom the adventure of self-expression had not yet begun. Whatever womanhood had once meant in India had been lost in the mists of antiquity. In its place there had long been a figure of humility, neck bent, eyes downcast, living flesh consigned to oblivion.\(^{14}\)

In the following passage from *Plans For Departure* we get a clear glimpse of both Sir Nitin Basu, a botanist from the University of Allahabad and Miss Hansen, a Dane:

He was no good at guessing ages. His skilled and patient looking was done through a microscope. Miss Hansen’s age was as indecipherable as hieroglyphics, her colouring as foreign as fricadella to his palate. He knew nothing about women, and her fine, pale hair and ice-blue eyes gave him no clues. Her teeth
and bones were splendid, her energy unsurpassable. But if anyone had asked him whether she was attractive or plain, he would not have known what to say. The sheer foreignness of her appearance – that whitish hair, those limbs – exceeded even that of the English. It was impossible to make judgements about anything so remote from what usually met the eye.¹⁵

And in *Mistaken Identity* we have the charming beauty of Razia described by Bhushan through its effect on his mind:

I thought of face. It took me years to decipher its spell and understand why it haunted me. It defied unwritten laws. The Tartar cheekbones of the face should have had slanting eyes above them, but hers were long ovals, the lidded eyes of temple sculpture. Their width took me unawares when they pounced upon her tonga. It was this manifest racial impurity, a mix belonging to a vision of a future communal union that made it unforgettable, and retreat impossible for me. At the time all I knew was I had never seen such a face. ¹⁶

Nayantara Sahgal has the knack of getting into words the feel of a character’s personality and describing in a style at once clear and compact his achievement of never dying significance. The description
of Nikhil’s father and his achievement as a lawyer in *Lesser Breeds* bears witness to the descriptive power of the novelist. The narrator speaks of Nikhil’s bold father in these words:

The portrait’s painted eyes held whoever’s was looking into them from wherever the viewer sat. The whole effect left one in no doubt about the magnetic pull of the lawyer’s personality… He was best remembered for the treason trial after the Great War and his defence of the sole survivor of the blood bath below Victoria’s statue in Company Bagh that had killed his three co-conspirators… his lawyer’s chilling argument had whipped the mask off a ruling power whose law courts condemned men to death for following his own example. ‘For the crime’, he had famously declared, ‘of putting their words to your music’. 17

Sometimes Sahgal waxes eloquent when she seems to share the view of a character. In *The Day in Shadow*, for example, Ram Krishan who identifies himself with the problem faced by Simrit as a result of Consent Terms, decides that he will not let her be a victim of renunciation as he himself quite unknowingly has become. To him, renunciation sounds like the disuse of one’s better self and so quite undesirable. He speaks of renunciation as disuse:
It was a sadhu with his arms held above his head, until they could never be lowered again. It was eyes blind folded until they lost their sight. It was living as he did without striving. It was desire to strive broken in two, laid on Vinita’s pyre, burned with her ashes to the winds. And that must not happen to Simrit. He would not allow it to happen.\textsuperscript{18}

These words of Ram Krishan have power to make one a good Samaritan like himself. He, indeed, expresses his thought in a very convincing and memorable manner.

There is many a passage in her novels which is charged with irony. The pretentiousness of Englishmen like Tom Grange in \textit{A Time To Be Happy}, for example, is presented in ironical terms – the gap between what they appear to be in India and what they are really in England:

\begin{quote}
There he was Tom Grange, anonymous British subject living in a numbered house in a row of similar houses. Here he was somebody... though in England he could not have afforded the membership of a single club, or even have been considered eligible for one, here he belonged to two. In England his wife Dora would probably have had to do her own cooking and cleaning, while here she had untold pleasure and servants to wait on her.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}
The following words of the narrator in *Storm In Chandigarh* are a fine example of the irony of situation, for here the situation turns quite opposite of what Harpal Singh had expected it to be. The narrator says:

He (Harpal Singh) had thought of this election in terms of a very personal endeavour where he would meet people, acquaint himself with their problems, and establish a living communication with them. But instead he was a “candidate”, a major cog in a huge machine, and his fate rested on transports and funds, not on his sincerity of purpose. The ones who paid for their own campaigns could afford sincerity. The unknown and obscure were safer doing as they were told.  

By means of irony, the novelist exposes the reality of elections and Indian politics.

Hypocrisy is a deviation from the established social norm which requires men to look as they really are and those who practise it for achieving their selfish ends easily become objects of satirical presentation. Lalita Chatterjee, who was a trend-setter in Calcutta before independence and who could not have known a village product from a champagne cocktail, dedicates herself to promoting village industries in order to remain in the forefront of Indian social life. Renu’s description of the change in Lalita Chaterjee after Independence to Sanad has an ironical tone:
You know Lalita, she never does anything by halves. She has made the cottage-industry thing a sort of crusade. You ought to see the house now. It’s been redone. I haven’t got used to it yet. I keep thinking I’ve walked into the wrong house.  

Sanad’s exposition of hypocrisy all round is satirical. He realized:

... that an immense masquerade was going on in Calcutta, and that if one tore off the masks and finery, all the ugly rotting structure underneath would be revealed.

In *This Time Of Morning*, the bureaucrats manipulating their appointment in places of their choice is presented in satirical terms. Dhiraj Singh, an I.C.S. officer, is furious over his posting in Burma. His wife, too, is angry and says, “If Dutt has Rome, I do not see why you cannot have Paris.” Dhiraj Singh approaches Kalyan Sinha, now Minister without portfolio, who, knowing that his wife’s illness is only an excuse for getting an European posting but believing in his usefulness, saves him from the trauma of going to Rangoon. This incident is the subject of satirical treatment in the novel. A cartoonist writes an article “who’s going to Burma’ in his *The Way Farer*. Below the article he gives a cartoon of an Indian diplomat being forced into a train marked Rangoon Express, with the doggerel –

*If all the world were western*  
*And all its people white*  
*The I.C.S. would have such fun*
And every post be right.

In *Lesser Breeds* we find how words uttered in one context acquire a satirical tone when the context changes. At one point when Nurullah assures Bhai that he would smuggle the bundles of the notices of the Kisan Conference out for distribution after dark with three of his trusted students, Bhai tells him amusingly,

“No need for all that rigmarole, just distribute them…. We don’t work in the dark, Nurullah, because we have nothing to hide.”

The words ‘We don’t work…. to hide’ are used by the narrator to pass a satirical comment on Bhai after he (the narrator) has described Nurullah’s having seen Bhai in a compromising posture with Jeroo in a lonely room on a moonlit night.

Humour and pathos are distinguishing features of Ms Sahgal’s style in her novels. Humour and pathos are signs of life and without them no picture of life can be complete, close to reality, and convincing. In her novels we come across instances of pure as well as satirical humour. In her first novel, *A Time To Be Happy*, for example, the “bara sahib” ways of Harish are a source of laughter. The narrator says, “We had often laughed at his classic phrase : My dear fellow, to tell you the truth, I’m far more at home in Paris or Rome than in the South.” But the narrator’s words acquire a satirical tone when he speaks of Harish’s European mentality which makes him prefer foreign countries to India : “It was as if the white man, weary for a little while of his burden, had passed it on to Harish and he felt an inestimable privilege to stagger under it.”
The satirical spirit continues to haunt the following reaction of Ammaji’s reaction to her son’s remark that Harish will certainly be a success: “This is a success, one of the most successful creations of the British Raj.”

The novel, *A Situation In New Delhi*, is remarkable for its humour and irony. Ram Murti’s way of showing respect to Devi, The Education Minister, is humorous. While speaking to her, he abstains from looking at her. When Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of the Delhi University, rang up Devi, “Ram Murti came into the dining room and told the coffee pot that the Vice-Chancellor was on the telephone.” Ajab Singh, Devi’s driver, shows his respect to her in a way different from Ram Murti’s. He is outspoken and knows no inhibition. He addresses Devi as ‘Sir’. This address may suggest that Devi is equal to any man in the sphere of life, but humour lies in the speaker’s ignorance which prevents him from addressing her as ‘Madam’.

This novel delights the reader with the fun of ‘noses’. Pinky, ‘who has not been allowed to put her nose out of the house without her mother’s permission, is being married to a man ‘who hasn’t put his nose out of his house – his mental nose any way.’ Devi’s comment on this marriage is quite humorous: “Anyway their noses seem perfectly matched.” While Rishad’s approach to this marriage has an element of irony, that of Pinky’s grandfather is humorous. Rishad calls it an organized rape where as Pinky’s grandfather holds that Pinky is betrothed not to a man but to “three banks and a brewery.”

The description of the cabinet as “well-dressed, well-groomed, well-heeled” is as, their care for the physical aspects of their
personalities, indicative of their shallowness of mind. When the Minister of Minerals and Metals speaks at the cabinet meeting, the others look at him “the way television showed American Presidents’ wives looking at their husbands – faces lit with dazed rapture.”

Here the comparison of the Cabinet Ministers with the American President’s wives is quite humorous. Similarly, The British High Commissioner is described in humorous terms: “The British High Commissioner, a lean tall haggard bachelor, his knees jammed at a ten past ten angle, caught Devi’s sympathetic eye, and rose, snapping and cracking with the effort.”

In *Mistaken Identity*, the communists in jail make fun of the India of Bhaiji’s dreams – the India in which people will abstain from sex and turn the other cheek. The following passages from the novel are charged with ironical humour:

In fact, Bhaiji expounds, man’s reproductive fluid (as he calls it) will be saved up to regenerate his body and brain and, as yogis know, extend his life beyond the normal hundred years it should be by twenty-five more years. He will attain the Vedic lifespan. Who these days lives to even a hundred years? Bhaiji pokes his chin challengingly at us.

Well? Do any of you know a hundred year-old? There you are then! The precious fluid is being squandered.

Civilizations have declined and disappeared because they frittered it away, Iyer tells Pillai
Independence might come sooner than we think, since he’s pretty sure the bureaucrats have not been conserving their precious fluid.  

In *Lesser Breeds*, Nusli’s stammering makes the reader laugh as it does one in real life. We read in the novel that Nurullah “had just finished helping himself to golden strands of sewai when Nusli, leaning forward to catch his eye, told him to s-s-s-see to the jammed f-f-f-flush of the t-t-t-toilet adjoining the last master’s study.” Nurullah, Shan’s tutor, at one point thinks that Shan is a child but soon realizes his mistake and ‘wonders what lapse of common sense had made him think she was a child.’ What he tells Shan is a fine example of irony directed by the speaker towards himself as well as of pride in belonging to the people of his class:

I don’t suppose you know, he found himself telling her, that this province’s Easter region where I was born is famous for its buddhus. But slow-witted simpletons though we are called, it was one of us, Mangal Pandey, who started the mutiny against the East India Company. Fools rush in, the English poet truly spoke, where angels fear to tread.

Above are given some of the examples of humour from the novels. Pathos has an upper hand in Sahgal’s novels. Pathos is that quality in a work of art which moves the human heart with pity. Sahgal’s heroines suffer a lot in their life and it is their sufferings that make the reader’s heart well up with sympathy for them. It is also true that
most of her heroines come out of the crises in their lives and win our praise for their boldness in defying the conventional morality which comes in their way of achieving fulfilment. When we think of a woman’s life full of pathos, it is Rashmi of This Time Of Morning, who comes first to our minds. Her life is miserable and pathetic. At the beginning of the novel we see her tormented by the bitter memories of her unsuccessful marriage with Dalip. This event exercises a great change in her. She does not remain the lively and energetic girl she was before the break-up of her marriage. She becomes subdued and looks pale. On his return from abroad, Rakesh does not fail to notice this profound change in her and easily accounts for it:

He realized what was missing was contentment, a state as natural to her as warmth to the sun. Through all the years he had known her, she had possessed brightness that had distinguished her in a crowd.... Now she looked displaced, it was marriage, then, that had altered her, made her a moth trapped in cement. 33

The phrase ‘moth trapped in cement’ effectively presents to the mind Rashmi’s abjectively miserable and painful existence. Asha Choubey observes: “It is in the person of Rashmi that the bleak married life of an average woman is brought forth. Marriage is meant for happiness, but it can also bring sadness, ‘how like prolonged starvation wronged marriage could be, robbing lustre defeating courage and will.’ 34 Rashmi’s misery is enhanced by the fact of her not
getting any support from her parents in her miserable plight. When her mother learns about Rashmi’s impending divorce, she regards it as “a mortal blow to all she held sacred.” Her father, Kailas Vrind, who is fully aware of the stigma attached to broken marriages, is of no help to her. She has to make decision about divorce all by herself. It is pitiful that her unending craving for love remains unsatisfied. Even during a short tryst with Neil her soul remains as hungry as ever for Neil does not share himself with her fully whereas she surrenders herself to him totally.

In *Storm In Chandigarh*, there is a lot of pathos in the lives of Vishal Dubey and Saroj. Vishal Dubey did not get from his first wife, Leela what he wanted most, namely, love. The memory of this even six years after her death gives him pain. His following reflections on this aspect of his life touch the very chords of the reader’s heart with sympathy:

He had wanted the woman and won her, and forever afterwards had tried to reach the person in her, the one to talk to when the day’s work was done, the friend with whom one could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself. The whole self was not heroic. Most of it was ordinary. It was soiled in part, maimed in part. It had lived and all the signs and scars of living were upon it. But it was all one had to give. Leela had not been interested. She had selected what she
had wanted of him: the distinguished escort at parties, the successful civil servant, with a promising future, the husband who could be relied upon to take pains with whatever problems she took to him. And she had ignored the rest. She had given herself selectively too, what she had considered it prudent and convenient to give.... She scintillated in company.... Alone with him she had little to share. 35

The life of Saroj is pathetic before she comes in contact with Vishal Dubey. She is married to Inder. Their marriage is what is known as ‘empty shell marriage’. They live together as a legally married couple but their marriage exists only in name. Saroj does not get from her husband, Inder, what she wants. She wants to share with him everything, but Inder has no desire to go beyond sharing bed with her. The reader becomes aware of her pathetic situation when she laments that she feels lonely even in her most intimate moments in the company of Inder, who does not share himself fully with her.

The novelist employs appropriate language to bring out the pathos in the life of Simrit in The Day In Shadow. She signs the Consent Terms, the full implications of which she understands only afterwards. But she becomes sad when she understands them and hopes her husband will mend them in her favour. He invites her to talk about them. When she goes to him, he says,
“What we can do is make a new agreement. Let’s say you can use the income from those shares – if you don’t marry – and until they’re transferred to the children. Of course, I’d have to stop the support you’re getting now. And you’d have to pay the taxes on the corpus, but since you’d be using the income that would be quite fair. 36

The pain that these words of Som cause to Simrit finds expression in the narrator’s comment: “Som had summoned her here not for a reprieve but for another form of execution.”37 Her miserable plight comes out vividly in these words:

Primed with the facts and dangers she felt she was standing on the edge of a precipice, an inch away from certain death, while Som smilingly invited her to jump. It took her breath away. 38

In Mistaken Identity the pathetic life of Bhusan’s mother, the ‘ranee’ of Vijaygarh, moves the reader’s heart with pity. She, however, puts an end to it by marrying Yusuf, a communist, at the end of the novel. The following description of the life of the ‘ranee’ by her son himself brings out the pathetic nature of her existence:

Your prayers were granted, that’s what counts. What does it matter how long it took. You had a son! ‘And smoke-and-ashes good it did me’, growled Mother, face down in her green pillow,
pale green being her astrologer’s prescription for peace of mind. Bittan’s murmur of ‘As The Potter Wills’ arched Mother’s head back from her pillow and Bittan switched to the less controversial subject of mother’s labour from its first welcome wince to my jagged delivery the wrong way round, with my head and shoulders causing lasting havoc.... For years afterwards Bittan, stroking the soles and tops of Mother’s feet, consoled her with the litany, ‘At least you have a son, no matter what has happened. And whatever had happened, she could never help adding, because by this time in the retold saga Mother gently snored, was the Potter’s frolic. ‘The Potter makes and breaks us on his wheel.’

The ranee’s reaction to her senior maidservant, Bittan’s ‘You had a son’ and Bittan’s ‘At least you have a son, no matter what has happened’ movingly present the pathos of the miserable life of Bhushan’s mother.

Nayantara Sahgal’s use of symbols in her novels invests her style with the quality of suggestivity. In her novels characters and places acquire symbolical significance. The White Club of Sharanpur in A Time To Be Happy symbolizes absolute British dominance over the country, but after Independence, with its doors thrown open to Indians, it becomes a symbol of freedom. It is in this club that Sanad’s
marriage with Kusum is solemnized, a fact inconceivable in the British India. For the narrator, the club, after Independence, becomes symbolical of the new kind of life:

It had a life of its own, with its own strict etiquette.... It was a place where you could be somebody else for a while, or, if you preferred, more yourself.... Within all the rules and regulations, there was a curious freedom to be the person one wanted to be. It was masquerade, but one of personality.  

The garden in the house of Govind Narayan and the one in the house of Madan Sahai symbolize two different life-styles and atmospheres. In the former things are made to conform to a fixed pattern whereas in the latter everything has a natural and spontaneous growth. Again the sons of Govind Narain show, no doubt, sophistication and elegance in their behaviour suggested by the ‘clipped hedges’ of his garden but lack in that self-confidence which is possessed by the children of Madan Sahai and is shown by the naturally grown plants in his garden. The narrator describes the two gardens in these words:

Compared with the carefully clipped hedges and beautiful flower-beds of Govind Narayan’s garden with its exquisite, expensive blooms imported from Europe, the Sahais’ was a tangle of colour that had sprung up in obedience to no particular design.
There are other significant symbols in the novel such as spinning-wheel and Khadi, dhotiwallah, cottage-industries and heavy industries, the beggar girl with a dead child on her hips and a dead carcass lying on Trent’s driveway in Calcutta. Spinning-wheel and Khadi are symbols of self-reliance; dhotiwallahs symbolize the people of the middle class who were inspired by the Gandhian ideals and who were looked down upon by the British and the Anglicized Indians but became objects of respect in free India; industries indicate the shape which the economy was going to acquire in free India; and the dead dog and the dead child suggest very effectively the indifference of the affluent to the poor creatures during the famine in Calcutta.

In *This Time Of Morning*, the reader comes across powerful symbols in the Peace Institute and the new Governor, Abdul Rahman. The Peace Institute is an appropriate symbol for the need for establishing peace through non-violence in the world threatened by the nuclear war. Rahman like Kailash Vrind represents the fast passing old order in which human values and noble ideals of selfless service to the nation and sacrifice were held in the highest esteem. Similarly, other characters in this and other novels of Sahgal become symbolical of their various attitudes towards life.

Nayantara Sahgal is very meticulous in her use of words. She knows full well the linguistic significance of the words she combines into sentences to tell her stories. Her beautiful and rich prose style makes a great appeal to her readers. The following passage with which *The Day In Shadow* begins is remarkable for its stylistic significance:
The huge mirrors of the Zodiac Room at the Inter-continental, festooned in carved gilt, reflected everyone of consequence in the Ministry of Petroleum, and a lot of other officials besides. And their wives. And some of their daughter – the supple, flat-stomached young, with their saris tied low showing their navels, their hair swinging long and loose, or piled high in glossy architecture.42

This passage is remarkable for the pictorial quality of its style. She does not describe but presents the room with all its vivid charm to the reader’s eye. The passage shows also the author’s linguistic awareness of the words used to give a lively representation of the room. A.V. Krishna Rao’s comment on this passage is very significant:

The stylistic and semantic significance of Ms Sahgal’s use of such words as mirror, gilt, reflect, consequence, officials, wives, daughters, supple, show, swing and glossy cannot be over-emphasized in so far as they sufficiently suggest the artificial, superficial and snobbish kind of life that engulfs Simrit. 43

*The Day In Shadow* is no less remarkable for the author’s use of symbols in it than her earlier novels. The significance of such symbols as the Club in *A Time To Be Happy* and the Peace Institute in *This Time Of Morning* has been pointed out. In *Storm in Chandigarh*, the
building of Chandigarh is a powerful symbol. It symbolizes a new beginning towards as perfect an order as its blueprints. But this is threatened by the dirty politics indulged in by the worshippers of the cult of violence like Gyan Singh in public sphere and Som in the domestic field. The tainting of the atmosphere of Chandigarh is touched upon by Jit when he says to Vishal Dubey, “And now this place rings with the same cant as any other place. The architects couldn’t find the right breed of human beings to inhabit their perfect blueprints.” 44 Another effective symbol in the novel is the mutilation of the wall painting in Inder’s office. This symbolizes the threat posed to the finer values by the brute force of violence. In The Day In Shadow it is the river which is the most powerful symbol. Many an Indian writer has made use of the river as a symbol in his writings. K.R.S. Iyengar has pointed out the symbolical significance of the river in these words:

The river in India is a feminine power and personality, and the land (and men living on it) must woo her and deserve her love if their hopes of fruitfulness and security are to be realized. 45

A river has infinite fascination for Simrit. She has written a book on it. It gives her an “invitation to freedom”. 46 Simrit is at first an embodiment of passivity and the river with its unceasing flow symbolizes activity. It is, therefore, no wonder that the river exercises a powerful hold on her mind. It is the influence of the river combined with that of Ram Krishan that helps her come out of the crisis created
in her life by the Hiroshima-like Consent Terms. After all, opposites attract each other. The following description of the river as seen by Simrit through the windows of her car bears witness to the novelist’s power of description.

The water was like broken green crystal as it vibrated along, yet she could see white rock and pebble glistening through it. Even the gravel at bottom looked scraped and scoured a pure bone white. Mountains rivers were clean but she had never known one as enchanting, as riotous with its invitation to freedom. She felt absurdly happy looking at it, thinking that everyone should have one such river in his life.

Another powerful symbol in the novel can be seen in Som’s deals in armaments and bombs. In this way his business ventures become symbolic of his brutality, the consequences of which the novelist expresses very effectively through the thoughts of Simrit:

Imagine the abandoned vagrant children, the days without food, nights without shelter for people with no additional, outer threat over them, no fear of war. Why let imagination travel further than that to some woman with a child in her belly getting Som’s and Vetter’s bomb, or whatever it was, and flying apart, leaving bits of child and palpitating entrails all
over the place…. But that is not what I am crying about. I have never cried about such things before. It’s Som.  

The symbols dealt with above clearly show that they greatly enhance the suggestivity of Nayantara Sahgal’s style.

Nayantara Sahgal’s skilful use of figures of speech in her novels lends poetic charm to her style. These figures are functional, for they illustrate not only the themes but remarkably bring out salient features of the characters concerned. In the following passage the personalities of Harish Shivpal and his wife, Maya are beautifully distinguished from each other with the use of appropriate metaphors drawn from nature:

She (Maya) had the cool purity of Eucalyptus, as compared with his (Harish’s) extravagant gulmohar. She was the mirror-smooth lake to his rushing waterfall.  

Again, the fact of their marriage being sterile is artistically presented through the metaphors of bloom and plant:

Their marriage was a sterile, if exotic, bloom, having all the enviable façade – the looks, the money, the position that are deemed important by the world – but not the fragrance on the productivity inherent in a living, breathing plant. 

The disdain towards luxury shown by Ammaji in A Time To Be Happy is appropriately compared to that of a nun. The narrator’s use
of the simile of nun emphasizes the unworldliness as well as purity of Ammaji’s character: We are told that her husband had not understood her nun-like disdain of luxury.  

The narrator’s comparison of Maya to ‘a slab of marble’ speaks volumes for his attitude towards a woman who, having inspired love in his heart, suddenly withdrew it. Thus, this metaphor characterizes the speaker.

In *This Time Of Morning*, Rashmi’s unsuccessful marriage with Dalip results in her unhappiness as well as in the dimming of her radiant beauty. The narrator expresses this change as seen by Rakesh on his return from abroad. In the following passage which has the beauty of simile as well as of metaphor:

He realized what was missing was contentment, a state as natural to her as warmth to the sun. Through all the years he had known her she had possessed a brightness that had distinguished her in a crowd... now she looked displaced, it was marriage, then, that had altered her, made her a moth trapped in cement. 

The simile in ‘a state as natural to her as warmth to the sun’ presents Rashmi’s contentment as a part of her very being which has been eclipsed by the failure of her marriage. The metaphor of ‘a moth trapped in cement’ is a perfect objective co-rrelative of Rashmi’s restlessness and discontented state of mind.
There is another significant metaphor which effectively describes the marital relationship of Kailas Vrind and Mira. This is the metaphor of fabric. The relationship of Kailas and Mira is compared to the fabric which is worn thin and torn in places by Kailas but constantly patched by Mira and thereby kept whole. The metaphor brings out the whole-hearted dedication of Mira to her husband:

He had come and gone, but she had always been there, strong and sure. He had unavoidably stretched the fabric of their relationship till it wore thin and tore in places. She had patched and mended and restored it, and if it was whole today, it was because of her.54

The Consent Terms or the Terms of Divorce, which are forced on Simrit, the heroine of the novel, *The Day In Shadow*, look to Raj ‘a sort of Hiroshima’55 This comparison brings out the cruelty of the Consent Terms and brings together the political and private worlds. The image of Hiroshima beautifully suggests the victory of Simrit’s will to live over the destructive force of Som’s Consent Terms which can be likened to the triumph of the Japanese people’s will to live and progress over the forces of destruction let loose by the dropping of an atom bomb over Hiroshima. The effects of the Consent Terms on Simrit is also brought home to the reader’s mind through figures of comparison. Simrit feels that the agreement she has signed is ‘his (Som’s) pound of flesh’. This metaphor is drawn from Shakespeare’s popular comedy, *The Merchant Of Venice*. It throws into higher relief the heartlessness of Som towards
Simrit. Simrit tells Moolchand that she has been ‘in an earthquake’. The metaphor of earthquake expresses well the shattering experience given to Simrit by the terms of the divorce.

The following quotation from the novel shows the novelist’s skilful use of the figure of speech known in Sanskrit poetics as *Utpreksha* in which one thing is fancied as another thing:

> As far as men are concerned, it hardly makes any difference, but women are treated as if they have become paupers suddenly or untouchables. They are treated as outcasts; people’s opinion of them changes. They start looking at her; as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks.

Here the figures of speech have functional significance. They are vehicles of the agony caused by the humiliation a divorced woman always meets with in society.

Apart from Nature, Nayantara Sahgal draws images from the world of animals. The plight of Simrit resulting from her acceptance of the Consent Terms is very effectively conveyed through the image of an animal:

> May be she had always been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told. And in return she had been fed and sheltered. Now she must not mind if they threw stones at her, or even a killing boulder like the Consent Terms.
The comparison of Simrit with a domestic animal throws light on the status of women in Indian society. But they are given worse treatment than a domestic animal since nobody throws stones or a killing boulder on it. Simrit’s feeling of being crushed under the burden of the Consent Terms is artistically expressed by comparing the corpus with a monster:

The corpus, a fat, hideous, bloated monster, swelling fit to burst, crowded her imagination. The dynosaurs at least had died of their size. This monstrosity would feed and thrive on her.  

Thus we see that the images employed in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are vehicles of the author’s as well as characters’ perception. They have functional significance. They help the author in objectifying the perceptions of the narrators as well as of the characters. They enhance the beauty of the author’s language elucidate thoughts and give delight to the reader.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of those writers who have received their education in convents and public schools and colleges abroad. Her maternal grandfather, Pt. Motilal Nehru was a leading barrister and a famous political leader of his time. Her father was a great Sanskrit scholar who translated a lot of Sanskrit poetry into English. Her mother, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had a fair command over the English language. And above all, her maternal uncle, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, whom she regarded as her third parent, was well-known for his mastery of the English language. It was he who, seeing her inclined
towards the career of a writer, advised her to embark upon it heart and soul. After attending a convent, she went to Woodstock, a co-education school in the hills run by American missionaries. Thereafter she went to the U.S.A. for higher education. All this shows that English was in the atmosphere in which she was brought up and this facilitated her acquiring mastery of the English language and using it as a writer as easily as a native speaker. The fact that she received a greater part of her education in the educational institutions run by the Americans accounts for her preference of American English. Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly commented on Ms. Sahgal’s use of English in these words:

As against those Indo-Anglian writers who admit and exploit a regional reality, there are some whose use of the English language neither betrays their own origin nor gives much clue to the regional identity of the characters they create. Kamla Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonkar offer examples of this kind of Indo-Anglian writing. All of them are as much at home in the language they write in as any cultured native speaker of that language, and their fictional characters could belong to any part of the world, including India. When these writers attempt to present regional Indian characters, those are never central characters and often
only caricatures. Readers of Kamla Markandeya would have noted there is no mention of specific place of action. Nayantara Sahgal, on the other hand, locates her actions in so well-known a place that she feels no need to create this place anew for her story. The actions in the novels of these two writers are thus bound to time but not to place. Their prose style has the smooth uniform ease of English expensively acquired at public schools in India and private schools abroad. It is a highly readable English and seems to control their choices of themes....

Nayantara Sahgal, no doubt, writes like a native speaker of the English language but that does not mean that she does so having completely identified herself with the English or American culture. She carries over Indian words into the foreign medium. When she borrows from Indian vocabulary words connected with relationships, food, clothing and ceremonies, she provides a glossary at the end of the most of her texts. For example, in her first novel, A Time To Be Happy she uses Indian words like ‘behen’, ‘bhaiya’, ‘chappati’, ‘pan’, ‘kurta’, ‘shervani’, and they are glossed in a four-page glossary at the end of the novel as ‘sister’, an affectionate term meaning ‘brother’, ‘unleavened bread’, ‘a leaf smeared with betel and flavoured with lime, cardamom, areka, nut, and sometimes tobacco and other things’, ‘the upper garment, long loose shirt,’ and ‘knee-length coat with a high
Russian-type collar, buttoned all the way down—respectively. Occasionally some of the words and expressions are glossed parenthetically in the body of the text itself as in this sentence—"This Kalyug—this age of darkness—would pass as every age passed." Here the narrator, however, uses the wrong word ‘Kalyug’ instead of the correct one ‘Kaliyug’.

In two of her novels, *Rich Like Us* and *Lesser Breeds*, Ms. Sahgal neither gives a glossary of Indian words at the end of the texts nor does gloss many of them parenthetically in the texts themselves. For example, in the former she uses such Indian words ‘zindabad’, ‘Angrezi Bahu’, ‘Sati’, ‘Kurta’, ‘Kayastha’, without glossing them. She, however, does not fail to gloss parenthetically such words and expressions as ‘Daridranarayan’—God of the poor and ‘Bhaiyon and Beheno’—Brothers and Sisters—The following excerpts from ‘Lesser Breeds’ prove the point made above:

Nurullah had seen those puny volunteers at a meeting Robin-da had taken him to, mere chokras some of them, in their flapping Khadi shorts, who wouldn’t be able to control a flea much less a roused kisan.  

and

Kallu arm-in-arm with his moti-tazi Jarman bibi high-stepped in slow motion under a regimental archway of crossed swords.

Nayantara Sahgal in her novels shows a preference for American expressions. As an example of Americanisms in her novels may be
quoted: “He wore a rumpled bush-shirt and pants of the same indeterminate grey.”\textsuperscript{64} K.C. Nambiar in his article, \textit{Stylistic Studies in Indian Writing In English} observes: “Nayantara Sahgal particularly displays a certain aggressiveness in her partiality for American expressions. She is more sharply critical of those of her compatriots who affect British attitudes and manners than other women writers... Nayantara uses ‘aside’ as a structure word fairly consistently in \textit{This Time Of Morning}.”\textsuperscript{65}

Ms Sahgal carries over idioms of Hindi into her medium and this gives her English an Indian flavour. Thus, in \textit{Mistaken Identity}, we read: “…next door to his estate my son abducts a Mussalman girl. I am covered with shame. My face is black before the Ottoman government. My nose is cut....”\textsuperscript{66} The last two sentences of this quotation with the English renderings of well-known Hindi idioms illustrate well the Indianness of her style.

Compounding, a striking feature of Indian English, is exemplified in many places in Ms. Sahgal’s novels, According to K.C. Nambiar, “Since Indian languages use post positions rather than pre-positions, and relative clauses occur extremely infrequently, pre-modification appears to be a more natural manner of expression in Indian English. This tendency has resulted in extending the possibilities of compounding, particularly in creative writing.”\textsuperscript{67} This tendency of compounding present in Indian English characterizes Nayantara Sahgal’s medium also. The following expressions from her novels are instances in point: “a square white box of pure ghee sweets”; \textsuperscript{68}
‘Seldom-cleaned lavatory corner; ⁶⁹ and ‘Shans lung-bursting farewell had allowed no talk...’ ⁷⁰

Mrs Sahgal’s novels furnish fine examples of her aphoristic style also. She can make her narrators and characters reduce their conclusions to aphoristic brevity. The following sentences from her novels are remarkable for being thought-packed and so are easily memorable as well as quotable:

- All dictatorships meddled with histories. ⁷¹

- Civilization is a blazing fire that burns and obliterates those who will not acknowledge her. ⁷²

- All women worship success and ambition. ⁷³

- Great love is a serious, whole-time business. ⁷⁴

- Teaching is give and take. ⁷⁵

- Every thing depends on providence. ⁷⁶

- A healthy respect for tradition is a sound measure of a man’s character. ⁷⁷

Such aphorisms are found scattered throughout her novels.

Ms Sahgal writes fine English prose which readers everywhere find easy to understand and enjoy reading. But her English cannot be
said to be free from solicisms. The following sentences are deviations from the English grammatical norm: “Before I had finished speaking I saw the CID man elbowing his way through the crowd to get to the back of it…” And, “He says if it weren’t for the I.C.S., this country would have gone communist after Independence.” In the first sentence, according to English grammar, the adverbial clause, which ought to be in the past tense, is wrongly in the past perfect sense. Similarly, Past Perfect Tense is required in the conditional clause of the second sentence which has the past tense used in it.

Some people are of the view that Indian infatuation with English is a tragic love-affair. Stephen Spender made a remark to this effect in January 1989 at New Delhi. When V. Mohini wanted to know Nayantara Sahgal’s view on this subject during an interview with her, the latter expressed her significant view in these words:

So far as I think, it has been a very fruitful love-affair. More and more Indian writers are enriching the English Literature. Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, in a creative outburst, a flurry of writing have made the rendezvous fruitful with untraditional adventure into the new vistas. The pairing of Indian sensibility and English language has added new dimensions. Indian English literature needs a wider audience. Translation of Indian literature will further enrich literature in English. More and more people
will have an access to the refined sensibility of an ancient race with a rich heritage and accumulated racial memories.  

Thus we see that Nayantara Sahgal is meticulous in her use of the English language. She takes delight in describing scenes of Nature, places, and persons – their actions, traits of character and thoughts and feelings – in a language that appeals to the reader’s heart by its charm and clarity. She uses figures of speech with a great skill in her novels and their use lends a poetic charm to her style. These figures of speech not only adorn her language but serve as illuminators of thought also. In this way they come to acquire functional significance in her novels. Her use of Indian words, carrying over of Hindi idioms into her medium and forming of expressions on the principle of compounding and pre-modification give Indian colour to her English. In her novels Nayantara Sahgal shows her preference for American English also. There are not many florid descriptions in her novels because of her tendency of making her narrators and characters express in precise terms their thoughts and reactions. When one thinks of an elaborate description of an event in her novels, it is the florid description of the marriage of Harish in the fourth chapter of the first part of the novel, _A Time To Be Happy_, that comes to one’s mind. Ms Sahgal displays her skill in writing long as well as short dialogues. Whether the characters discuss such serious subjects as Hindu religion in long dialogues or reveal in short dialogues what goes on in their hearts and minds,
these dialogues are read with interest by the readers. They impart dramatic touch to her stories. In short, it is her charming language in which she tells her stories that makes them highly interesting and does not let the attention of the reader flag. Its charm is enhanced by her impressive use of figures of speech which have functional significance. The images in her novels characterize the speakers and become vehicles of their thoughts and emotions. The symbols employed by her give depth to her expression. Her style is vivid and picturesque, and is dictated by the themes she deals with in her novels. Nayantara Sahgal’s novels prove the truth of the statement she made in an answer to the question put by V. Mohini about her technique of writing: “I count more on meditation you think deep, deep, deep focussing inward. But I am very picky and meticulous about the use of words, I hate verbosity and florid descriptions. I go for brevity and essence. I could have been a poet for that, as in a poem every word has to match, and has to convey some meaning.”
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