CHAPTER II

*Nayantara Sahgal’s Political Vision*

Nayantara Sahgal’s political vision was shaped under the influence on her of some of the prominent features of Gandhian philosophy and by her own concern for the individual and love of freedom – the traits she inherited from her parents. “She found in Gandhi the image of a balanced man who, solidly grounded in the ancient Indian tradition, possessed a profound moral earnestness which enabled him to rediscover the ethical values of this tradition. With his conviction supported by similar trends in ancient and modern western thoughts, he boldly applied his feelings to the political and social realities of the time.”¹ It is this moral earnestness of Gandhijii that she regards as sine qua non for one who dreams of leading this country and the lack of which will result only in its downfall. All those patriots who sacrificed all their best at the altar of nation elicit unbounded praise from her. She feels inspired by the noble example of Lokamanya Tilak, a great scholar, who organized people and set them ablaze with the noble desire of demanding freedom as their birthright. After Tilak the leadership passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi who gave the masses unique weapons of truth and non-violence to fight the British with.

Nayantara Sahgal’s political vision is thrown into high relief in her comparison of the pre-Independence and the post-Independence era. When people fought for the freedom of the country. They were inspired by the high ideal of unselfish self-sacrifice. Their sole aim was
to achieve their country’s freedom and it was to the achievement of this aim that all their energies were directed. But the independent India saw deterioration in the political trends. Now moral and human values were given a wide berth by the politicians. They became self-seekers. The Gandhian ideals of truth and non-violence became the things of a bygone age and seemed to have lost all power to guide and enthuse people. She highly disapproves of the politicians indulging in expanding their personal political stature at the cost of moral principles. The re-organization of Indian states on linguistic basis also does not find favour with her. We find this part of her political vision reflected in her novels – *A Time To Be Happy, This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow*. Ms Sahgal has unflinching faith in the Gandhian ideals of non-violence and the violation of it in the political as well as domestic sphere irks her and sets her going deep into the causes of people’s inclination towards its opposite. For her non-violence is a positive force which holds a hope for the strife-ridden world. She says: “It was the most fearlessly active force at the disposal of mankind, generated by the greatest power – love... was the need of the hour, any hour, any era and country of the world.”

Violence has no place in Nayantara Sahgal’s scheme of things. It hinders the spiritual growth of the individuals and so of the whole society. Its spread from small places to big cities arouses her concern. *A Situation in New Delhi* shows violence stretching its ugly arms towards the academic world, which ought to be fortified against it, but is over swayed by it. Here Usman, the Vice-Chancellor, expels three
students who have violated the chastity of a girl student, Madhu. Instead of letting down these immoral students, their friends support them and attack the Vice-Chancellor. Even the government supports these immoral creatures and asks him to take them back. Through these incidents, Nayantara Sahgal voices her concern over the unnecessary political interference in the academic affairs which is detrimental to the growth and spread of education. Universities cannot be expected to be the centres of dissemination of knowledge if their officials are made to dance to the tune of the politicians. She wants the politicians to play only the second fiddle to the educationist. Only then education can truly prosper in the country. This is an important aspect of Ms Sahgal’s political vision. In order to hold in check the growing bomb culture among the youths of the country associated with the Naxalities she wants the government to adopt effective measures.

She was a witness to the struggle for the freedom of the country and knew that it was won with great sacrifices. Freedom is, thus, a great value which is to be cherished whole-heartedly. She knows that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” Freedom faces threat not only from foreign forces but from internal forces also. Hence, when the government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi subverted the country’s freedom by proclaiming internal Emergency, she rose in protest against her and joined Jaya Prakash Narain, a great champion of liberty, who led the movement for total revolution. Though the Government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi declared that the Emergency was imposed with a view to improving the worsening situation of the country, but the intelligentia
of the country had no doubt that it was imposed by her to remain in power after the Allahabad High Court judgement against her and in this way to murder the spirit of democracy. The people were not misled by the Twenty Point Programme launched during the Emergency to allegedly improve the lot of the poor. They realized the reality of the Emergency. In her novel Rich Like Us, Ms Sahgal exposes the real intention of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, which was nothing but to establish her dictatorship. She is critical of any attack on human freedom, which, she thinks, needs to be preserved at all costs. Dr. R.A. Singh observes: “Sahgal’s articles and novels are both a record of the contemporary political events and a commentary on them.... What is more important is the form of protest she keeps alive in her fiction – the refusal to accept a political action simply on the basis of its intention and a persistence to relate the action to its result. She is critical alike of the inhibiting mental approach as if the disruptive violence approach. The supreme test she applies to a situation is how far it furthers the cause of individual freedom and growth and how far it is conducive to self-respect.”

Ms Sahgal sees a link between the political ills of the country and orthodox Hinduism, which she considers outdated. According to Dr. Manmohan Bhatnagar, “Sahgal in her novels shows the breeding of corruption in public life as the direct consequence of the non-concern of Hindus with their immediate problems”

In, Rich Like Us, after the declaration of the National Emergency, teachers, lawyers, school-children go to the P.M. daily to congratulate her on imposing Emergency in the country. Among such people there
is an editor also who belongs to the fourth column of democracy and who, along with all other intellectuals ought to champion the cause of civil liberties but extols the curb on them by praising her for the measure she adopted to save her post. This attitude of the intellectuals towards the Emergency shows that they were spineless and it was their faith, according to Ms Sahgal, that was responsible for their deplorable condition. People accepted the repressive measures like Emergency because “the Hindus have such a fully developed assurance that everything will always be as it was, for ever and ever, amen.”  
Perhaps it was misinterpretation of the Gita that made Hindus fatalists and passive. After all, Mahatma Gandhi also read the Gita and was inspired by its philosophy of renunciation in action. He remained active all his life and inspired crores of Indians to join the freedom movement but the masses were not like the Mahatma. Gandhiji perhaps thought that it was because of the influence of the Buddha and many a saint on the Hindus that they became more enamoured of the life of contemplation than that of action. He exclaimed, “If I had the good fortune to be face-to-face with one like him (the Buddha) I should not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work in preference to one of contemplation. I should do the same if I were to meet... in these saints (Tukaram, Janeshwara and others)."

It is a fact well-known that democracy upholds the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Liberty without equality is meaningless and liberty combined with equality naturally leads to fraternity. Political freedom was achieved on the 15th August, 1947 and all
Indians felt free. But they did not feel equal. Time, instead of bridging the gap between man and man created by caste, creed and wealth, seems to have only widened it. Equality between man and man is an essential condition for the progress of the country. Nayantara Sahgal wants equality not only from political and social points of view but also between man and woman to make family life happy. Both husband and wife should live on the level of equality. Male chauvinism is the greatest hindrance in a woman’s being regarded as an equal partner in marriage. It is this male chauvinism that makes a man apply the conventional standards of morality to his wife and find her wanting while considering himself above them. If married life becomes unbearable, a woman should not hesitate to get a divorce and make someone else her life partner through marriage or without it. Everyone has a right to live life fully. Ms Sahgal is for gender equality and she has been working for this cause ever since she became aware of the fact that men expect from women a subordinate role in the family on account of which women live a miserable life and sees revolt the only way to come out of it.

Now we have to consider what inspired Nayantara Sahgal to write political novels. It was after her divorce from Gautam Sahgal (and in consequence of the cruel terms of divorce settlement) that she plunged into journal and novel writing. This she did to stand on her own feet and face the cruel terms of divorce settlement. Thus it was a desire to earn money that prompted her to write novels. There was nothing wrong with this kind of inspiration. After all Mammata, a Sanskrit critic, speaks of desire for money as one of the reasons for composing
poetry. Her decision to become a writer was also an outcome of the advice to her to this effect from her uncle, Pt. Jawahalal Nehru, who was himself a writer of many books. He had advised her to concentrate on writing if she loved it. But the question still remains – why did she write political novels, not other kinds of novels.

It is a fact well known that Nayantara grew up during the countrywide struggle for India’s freedom from the foreign yoke. Her maternal grandfather, Motilal Nehru, her uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru and her parents were all freedom fighters under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. She saw history of the nation in the very process of its being made. Most of the great leaders of the country – Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Abdul Kalam Azad etc. came to Anand Bhawan and she had an opportunity of coming in close contact with them. In this way politics got into her blood. A writer pours into his works the knowledge of life he has absorbed through observation and experience. So it was natural for Nayantara Sahgal to make the pre and post Independence politics and its bearing on human relationships the subject of her novels. Thus, her novels came to acquire political character and she became an exponent of the political novel in English in India. On being asked why she wrote, Nayantara Sahgal replied, “Because I have to get my feelings on to paper to talk of hate, fear, love and lust and the lengths the ordinary people go to, to live or die for an idea – to turn epic ideas to a human scale and see comedy in despair and other unlikely places.”

This shows that in her novels she is not just a political chronicler recording political events and portraying with veracity the
persons associated with these events, she penetrates them with her sharp insight, stripping them of their ephemerality and catching and committing to paper what is of permanent nature. In this connection we are reminded of Bhavani Bhattacharya’s following words; ... “The true artist writes because he must. If the events of today have moved him so deeply that he must have a creative outlet for his feelings, why should he put those feelings in cold storage, as it were, and leave them there until the present time has slipped into the vista of dim yesterday.”

Current political events as well as those of the immediate past stir Ms Sahgal’s emotions and she examines them to find out how far the persons involved in them have fallen from the desirable ideal political behaviour or are equal to it and then she gives vent to her feelings in the form of a novel. In order to assess how far her novels subscribe to the character of the political novel, it is necessary to understand the nature of a political novel in the light of its various definitions.

M.E. Speare has defined the political novel as “a work of prose fiction which leans rather to ideas than to emotions, which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform or expression of the lives of personages who maintain government or of the forces which constitute government”. According to H.A.L. Fisher, a political novel is a concerned with “men and women engaged in contemporary political life and discussing political ideas.” This view reduces a political novel to just a conversation by
politicians on political matters. It does not take into consideration the vision that the writer of a political novel projects through his work. A political novel is certainly more than what Fisher thinks. For Howe, ideology is the motive spring of contemporary political fiction. He defines the political novel as “a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which political milieu is the dominant setting.”11 This definition rightly highlights the political milieu as the spirit of a political novel, but leaves out of consideration the characters who move about in that setting and give vent to political ideas and attitudes.

Dr. Manmohan Bhatnagar, who has pondered deeply on various aspects of the political novel, defines it in these words: “A political novel obviously forms but a species of the genus, viz. the realistic novel and it most pointedly encompasses within the constraints of the broad genre a search for political values in a society inimical to finesse in its quest for political ends.”12 He further says, “A political novel... intertwines inextricably the aspirations of men and women, their interests and urges with the more immediate social scenario in all its varying dimensions, and recants their turning to politics to seek fulfilment through political ideas and efforts when their urges are thwarted by repressive forces.”13

As a writer of political novels, Nayantara Sahgal has deeply pondered over the nature of a political novel. Her definition of a political novel is highly satisfying. Jasbir Jain, during an interview with her, put this question to her, “How would you think of a political novel – that this is a political novel, this is not a political novel from a
writer’s point of view ?” To this question she gave the following reply : “I think of politics not as is leading the country or anything like that but politics as the use of power. And also the abuse of power. In our context it happens at so many levels – the domestic level – misuse of power between husband and wife, parents and children, between lovers – the way one human being wields power over another, that too is politics. So a political novel would be an awareness of the use of power whether it is directly in politics or reflected in domestic life or other aspects of it. The husband-wife relationship, that too is a political relationship. For instance, in Storm in Chandigarh, Inder saying, “Thou shall have no Gods before me”, that’s a political power of a kind. It also functions through religion. This episode in Rich Like Us that man is wielding religion, supposedly quoting the Shastras saying sati is a good thing. Power at the village level can be religious fundamentalism. It can be wielded in many different ways, and all of it is political.”

By defining politics as the use of power in various spheres of life, she has widened the scope of a political novel which deals inevitably with politics. It is no more confined to the power wielded by a ruling party, its ways of retaining it in face of the opposition from those who seek to replace it. Her novels, thus, become the embodiments of not only political consciousness, but of social and religious consciousness also.

The growth and development of the Indian English novel is inextricably connected with the growing up of the national political movement for freedom. The Indian English novels of the first phase of the freedom movement were inspired by the Great Revolt of 1857
which was initiated by the people with the sole desire of ending the foreign rule in the country. As Subhash S. Kashyap has said, “If there was any single cause which led to the 1857 struggle, it was the foreign rule itself.” Though the revolt did not succeed, it “provided the inspiration for a great many novels in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.” S.C. Dutt wrote *The Young Zamindar* which was published in 1885. It has for its subject national uprisings which aimed at winning freedom. The Indian religious tradition and the political issues of Indian nationalism find clear and inspiring expression in this novel. The novel has for its hero Manohar, a young zamindar. Along with Babajee, he pioneers the armed rebellion with the objective of making India independent. His another novel, *Shunkur, A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (1885) proclaims its theme by its very title. Here the novelist describes how the Indian sepoys “rose against the British and under whose leadership the atrocities both the sides committed and their ultimate consequences.” The novel tells the story of Nana Saheb. Nana Saheb, an adopted son of Bajee Rao, has been deprived of his annual pension of Rs. 80000. Therefore, he, with his intimate friend Azimoollah Khan, visits all the military stations with a view to raising a mutiny against the British. The struggle for freedom spreads consequently in Meerut, Delhi and Cawnpore (Kanpur). The novel has two immoral British characters also. They are Bernard and Mackenzie. Having escaped from the hand of Nana Saheb, these Britishers come to Soorajpura where they find refuge in a family of two female members only. They are well entertained there. But in return for the hospitality they show
only criminal ungratefulness, for they not only loot the property of
their hostesses but their chastity also. Nana Saheb suffers defeat at
the hands of the British and along with his wife, he tries to escape to
Nepal. The Britishers chase him. But their attempt is thwarted by the
sudden arrival of Prabhoo Shunkur, an Ex-Havildar.

The second phase of the Indian freedom struggle may be said to
begin with the establishment of the Indian National Congress by
Octavio Hume in 1885. The institution of this organization gave a
boost to the thought of self-Government, a strong desire for which had
found voice through such organizations as the Indian League and The
Indian Association after the failure of the Great Revolt of 1857.
Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee, Madan
Mohan Malviya and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were the pioneers of the
early stage of Congress. The following statements of Sir Surendranath
Banerjee, the first President of the Indian National Congress, bring out
the objective of the Congress and his as well as other pioneers’s praise
for English culture:

We have no higher aspiration than that we
should be permitted into the great confederacy
of self-governing states of which England is the
August mother. 18

And,

We of the Moderate Party believe that the
connection of English with India is a divine
dispensation ordained for the holiest end.19
The Indian English novels which reflect the second phase of The Indian Freedom Movement are – *The Prince of Destiny* by Sarat Kumar Ghosh and Hindupore by Siddha Mohan Mitra. Both these novels were published in 1909. The theme of the novel, “*The Prince of Destiny*” is the futility of any attempt to revive the India of ancient times or to create a new nation by blending two races – Indian and British. The story of the novel is the perfect embodiment of this theme. Here Barath, the crown prince of Barathpur, receives his education at the Cambridge University. While at the University, he receives the news of his father’s death. He returns to Barathpur and is crowned the king of the country, where Vashishta has already been appointed Dewan. The Dewan is a traditionalist who does not see eye to eye with the king when the latter introduces changes in the administrative set up as framed by the British Government. King Barath marries Nora instead of Suvona who was his sweetheart before he had left for England to receive education. Vashishta resigns his post. Meanwhile rebellion breaks out in Barathpur. At the end, the traditionalists, who want to free India by the armed forces, are defeated. Vashishta dies. The situations of life and politics prove too hard for Barath and he burns the garland of Nora and throws its ashes into the Ganga. He marries Suvona whose bed, though, he does not share and advises her to adopt a son to be his heir.

S. M. Mitra’s novel, *Hindupore*, too, is written on a political theme. According to G. P. Sarma, “It is narrower in scope and shallower in depth than Ghose’s *The Prince of Destiny* in so far as Mitra attributes the Indian unrest to the misbehaviour of the British
rulers and their lack of respect for Indian culture alone.”  

The novel has two parts. The first part depicts good British character whereas the second part presents the dark side of the British character. In the first part of the story Lord Tara, with Miss Celitia, the hospital Superintendent at Cuttak, visits Raja Man Singh in response to the hearty invitation from the latter. At the palace, he is attended by Kanala whose peerless beauty captivates his heart. He proposes for Kanela and his proposal is readily accepted by Raja Man Singh. They get married at Puri. Their marriage ceremony is presided over by both Hindu and Christian priests. The second part of the story present the dark side of the British character through the portrayal of Jonathan Toddy, who prevents Raja Man Singh to board the train at the Benares station when the latter is going to Calcutta with Lord Tara and his associates. Toddy flies into fury when an Indian asks him to let Raja Man Singh enter the compartment and he aims a blow at him. The Indian, however, tries to escape and he falls on the hinges of the door. Although it is the mistake of Jonathan Toddy, it is the Indian who is arrested. This novel, like S. K. Ghose’s The Prince of Destiny, shows the second phase of the Indian freedom struggle. G. P. Sarma rightly says: “S. K. Ghose’s The Prince of Destiny and S. M. Mitra’s Hindupore together delineate the second phase of the Indian freedom struggle exhaustively and well with all their faults as work of art.”

The third phase of the Indian freedom struggle started after the failure of the leaders of the second phase failed to materialize their dream of self-Government. The leaders of this phase are known as extremists. They were – Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala
Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh. They believed in militant form of nationalism. They favoured the idea of grabbing freedom from the unjust rulers instead of begging for it. Thus the Congress was divided into two factions – Moderates and Extremists. In this phase there started also what is known as the Terrorist Movement which was for throwing away the British Rule through violent means.

The Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916 saw the reunion of the two factions and the pact between the Muslim League and the Congress. It was about this time that Gandhiji appeared on the political horizon of India. Through him the political consciousness percolated to the grassroot levels of Indian society. About the impact of Gandhiji on the people of the country, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in The Discovery of India: “And then Gandhi came, he was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scale from our eyes, like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people’s minds.” After the death of Lokamanya Tilak, the leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Gandhiji.

The appearance of Gandhiji on the political stage of the country and his horizontal as well as vertical attitude towards life gave an impetus to the flowering of the Indian English novel. M. K. Naik, an authority on Indian English literature, sees an inextricable link between the political consciousness and the Indian English novel. He says, “Upto the 1930’s there was no Indian novelist who could claim sustained and considerable achievement in fiction originally written in
English. Then came a sudden flowering, and it is significant that it came in the 1930’s – a period during which the glory that was Gandhi’s attained perhaps its brightest splendour. The Indian freedom was already more than a generation old, yet with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, it was so thoroughly democratized that freedom consciousness percolated for the first time to the very grassroots of the Indian society and revitalized it. It is possible to see a connection between this development and the rise of the Indian novel in English, for fiction, of all literary forms is most vitally concerned with social conditions and values.”

The various national movements launched in the Gandhian era get mirrored in the novels produced in this period.

K. S. Venkataramani’s *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) is the first Indian English novel which reflects an important aspect of the Indian freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. The novel embodies. Through the life of Ramachandran, the novelist gives vent to Gandhiji’s theory of winning Swaraj through rural reconstruction. After repeated failures at the B.A. Examination, Ramchandran sells out his lands to Murugan and goes to Madras and settles there as a clerk. In the meanwhile Murugan becomes an outlaw. After his promotion to the post of Deputy Tahsildrar, he is sent to Nagalapuram to investigate into the criminal activities of the outlaws. He goes there and is rounded up by a number of outlaws. Murugan is one of these dacoits. He recognizes his master and along with his fellow-dacoits surrenders to him. Ramachandran becomes District Collector He, however, resigns his post and settles down as farmer. G. P. Sarma has rightly described *Murugan The Tiller* as “a novel depicting primarily the
Gandhian ideal of going back to the village, and secondarily emphasizing the need for the traditional Indian way of life.”

_**Kandan the Patriot** (1932) is the second novel of K.S. Venkataramani. Kandan is the leader of the freedom struggle in Akkur village. He has resigned I.C.S. to join the freedom struggle. Inspired by the rural reconstruction programme, he makes the villagers give up drinking toddy. This irks the landlord of the village whose toddy business suffers as a result of this step of Kandan. When Rangan, an I.C.S. and patriot, comes to Akkur, the workers in the estate of Mirasdar are in agitation against Mirasdar who holds Kandan responsible for this agitation and wants to teach a lesson to him through Rangan. But Rangan, to his surprise, finds Kandan to be his friend and Mirasdar is frustrated. Rangan, too, resigns his job and joins the freedom struggle. At a meeting in Tanjore, Kandan is mortally wounded in police firing. While dying, he asks his followers to struggle to their last breath for the freedom of the country. Their assurance makes him breathe his last peacefully. Professor Srinivas Iyengar’s following comment on both the novels of Venkataramani is quite appropriate. “Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics as Kandan is an exponent of Gandhian politics.”

Mulk Raj Anand’s excellent novel, _Untouchable_ (1935) has for its theme the eradication of untouchability – a cause dear to Mahatma Gandhi. Bakha, the hero of the novel, has to suffer a lot both physically and mentally for being an untouchable. In the novel three solutions are suggested for the problem of untouchability: Christ (conversion of Christianity), Gandhi (adoption of the Gandhian way of
life) and the flush-system. This is the social aspect of the novel. But the novel shows also the impact of Gandhiji on the political scene of the country. This impact is finally expressed in a dialogue between a rustic and a Babu which Bakha hears. The rustic asks the Babu whether Gandhi will be able to free India from the British rule. The Babu replies that Gandhi has a power to change the whole world and the British Government is nothing. This reply fills the heart of the rustic with fresh vigour and hope. According to G. P. Sarma, “The novel... deals with the Hindu social problem of untouchability against its political background, depicting at the same time the people’s faith in Gandhi as their leader in the national movement and his magnetic influence on people.”

The Sword and the Sickle, another novel by Mulk Raj Anand, deals with the freedom struggle between the 1920’s and 30’s. As the title indicates the novel is concerned with the peasants’ movement aimed at not only achieving the freedom of the country but also at putting an end to the exploitation by the Indian kings and landlords who were agents of the British Government. The movement is led by the leaders who are devoted to Gandhism as well as to Marxism. According to Kai Nicholson, “In Anand’s The Sword and The Sickle, Gandhi himself is involved in the plot, and his talk with Lalu Singh portrays Gandhi’s presence among the peasants of India.” After his release from the prison camp in Germany, Lalu Singh returns to his village where he finds his family disrupted by economic forces. Along with the landlord’s daughter Maya, he leaves the village and meets a political leader of Uttar Pradesh, who is leading the peasants’
movement. They come to a village near Allahabad where he stays with Rampal Singh the declassed count, Rampal Singh – unites the peasants to protest against the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Lalu Singh meets Mahatma Gandhi and feels inspired to join the peasants’ movement. With Lalu Singh, Rampal Singh organizes the peasants of Rajgarh and Nasirabad states to fight jointly against the landlords who are regarded as the agents of the British Government. But the reactionary forces supported by the British Government do not let the revolutionary plans succeed. The novel highlights people’s growing awareness of their rights which led to the intensification of the national movement. According to G. P. Srarma, “It highlights one important aspect of the national movement – the communist movement of the time as it gained ground in the village.”

K. Nagarajan’s *Athawar House* is a chronicle of a joint Maratha family in Madras with Gopinath as its patriarch. According to A. P. Pandey, “The national movement seems to be functioning as a strong force behind the story of the family. But a close and intimate study of the novel shows how people of various places unite under one umbrella construct with the fervour of nationalism.... The three divisions of the family chronicle are arranged in accordance with the history of the freedom struggle.” The novel spans a period of sixteen years of the freedom struggle – from the passing of The Rowlatt Act in 1919 to the withdrawal of The Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934.

*Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, one of the most distinguished Indian English novelists, is a famous Indian English novel on the national freedom struggle of the Gandhian era. It is an old grandmother who
tells the story of the national struggle of this period in the Kanthapura village in which she herself had participated to a newcomer for his edification. According to Srinivas Iyengar, “The theme of Kanthapura may be summed up as “Gandhi and Our Village”, but the style of narration makes the book more a Gandhi Purana than a piece of mere fiction. Gandhi is the invisible God, Moorthy is the visible avatar. The reign of the Red-men is Asuric rule, and it is resisted by the Devas, the Satyagrahins. The characters sharply divide into two camps : The Rulers (and their supporters) on the one hand and the Satyagrahins (and their sympathizers) on the other. There are various other divisions too : orthodoxy is pitted against reform, exploitation against sufferance, the planter against the coolies, the corrupt official against the self-respecting villager.”

The village Kanthapura, of which the novel tells the story, has been rightly described as “India in miniature,” for what happens in this small village of South India reflects the happenings of the whole country in the thirties. A.P. Pandey is of the view that the political references to Sarojini Naidu and Kamladevi with which the novelist catches the spirit of the age “show that Raja Rao intentionally designed a novel to be read only as a political novel. He openly states it to be mainly concerned with the influence of Gandhi and that the inhabitants of Kanthapura can freely treat themselves to be the followers of Gandhi.”

M. K. Naik’s comment on this novel is quite appropriate : “Kanthapura is an unforgettable picture of the impact of the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and non-cooperation on an obscure village in South India during the 1930’s.”
K.A. Abbas’s two novels, *Tomorrow Is Ours* (1943) and *Death For Defeat* (1944) deserve mention for their political contents. In the first novel Parvati’s father joins the Non-cooperation Movement in 1920 and is imprisoned for this. The rigorous imprisonment becomes the cause of his untimely death. Being a Staunch supporter of the movement, Parvati gives up her studies and faces a lot of difficulties in earning livelihood. Parvati and her father represent the sufferings of the patriots of their time who did not hesitate to make the greatest possible sacrifice for the achievement of the country’s freedom. The novel present the national as well as “the international political scene disrupted by the Second World War.”33 The second novel, *Death For Defeat* deals with an aspect of Gandhiji’s fast and is imbued with the spirit of nationalism.

Amir Ali’s *Conflict* is remarkable for depicting the participation of college students and villagers in the freedom movement of the country. The novel tells the story of Shankar, a brilliant student studying in a Bombay College. He opposes India’s stand to support the British in The Second World War. He tells the villagers about the important national and international affairs and infuses in them the spirit of freedom. According to G. P. Sarma, “In so far as it shows the involvement of college students in the freedom struggle, it can easily claim a special place in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction, for no other novel depicts this exclusively.”34 This novel is significant in one more respect. It introduces a Muslim, Rashid, participating in the freedom struggle and thereby adds an important aspect of Muslim participation in the freedom movement of the country.
Bhabani Bhattacharya wrote *So Many Hungers* (1947) against the background of The Quit India Movement and The Bengal Famine of the early forties. The novel is a forceful voice against exploitation – political, economic and social. The novel depicts a three-member family – Kajoli, a young lady, her mother and her younger brother – suffer the acute pangs of starvation owing to famine which is largely the making of the hoarders and black-marketeers like Samarendra Basu and Lukshminath, Kajoli takes to prostitution to solve her acute, problem of starvation. The author suggests that many a woman was forced by starvation to take to the streets. In this way she becomes a representative figure. Samarendra Basu loves to kowtow to his British masters, but his son Rahaoul, a professor of – Astrophysics, plunges into the freedom movement after the arrest of the participants of the Quit India Movement of 1942. Rahaoul’s brother, Baruli, joints the army for fun. According to Manmohan Bhatnagar, “*Hungers* presents a moving spectacle of persons ruling under economic and political depredation. The political message that self-rule is a must even for individual self-fulfilment is presented not through ideological debate but through Rahaoul, the protagonist, who comes to realize it on his pulse. Again, the nexus between the black-marketeers and the alien rulers is made all too patent not through rhetorical argument by making man like Samarendra Basu and Ablabandhu kowtow to the British. The strategy used here is of making human agents act in a manner which leads to the ideological as an inseparable conclusion.”

G. P. Sarma praises this novel for its unique quality. He says: “A unique quality of this novel is that it portrays realistically the agony of
the age, it depicts a quality which perhaps no other novel of this category published till 1947 possesses.”

Political novels written after India achieved Independence on August 15, 1947 deal either with the freedom struggle or with the political scenario of India after Independence. About the themes of the Post-Independence Indian English fiction, Srinivas Iyengar says, “After the advent of Independence the most serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by the tragedy of the partition; how inspite of the freedom there is continuing (or galloping) corruption, inefficiency, poverty and cumulative misery; how, after all, the mere replacement of the white Sahib by the brown Sahib cannot effect a radical cure for the besetting ills of India.” Following is a brief survey of the political novels written in Independent India.

Mulk Raj Anand’s *Seven Summers* (1951) is the story of a boy of seven years, Krishan Chander, who is also the hero-narrator of the novel. He is conversant with the political and social developments in the early years of the 20th century. He also knows that Indians are dissatisfied with the foreign rule. He is aware also of the ideals of The Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, which was regarded as the nationalist organization. The second novel *Morning Face* (1968) covers the period of the First World War. Here we meet the same hero in his late childhood. The novel deals with his involvement in the freedom struggle. It depicts the horror of the Jullianwalla Bagh massacre and the hero’s reverence to Lala Lajpat Rai, who is considered an incarnation of the freedom struggle. The third novel
*Confessions Of A Lover* (1976) shows the maturity of the same hero which corresponds to the further development of the national struggle for freedom. According to A. P. Pandey, in these novels “the growth and development of the hero at different stages – childhood, adolescence and youth – reflects the corresponding development and growth of the national movement at different stages.”

Khwaza Ahmed Abbas’s political novel *Inquilab* (1955) has for its background the phase of the freedom struggle from 1919, when the Jullianwalla Bagh massacre took place to, 1931 when Gandhi – Irvin Pact was signed. The novel has a vast canvas. The novelist, concentrating on a group of Muslims, takes the reader to Delhi, Aligarh and the North. Anwar, a merchant’s son by a prostitute Chhamia, brought up by a Muslim, Akbar Ali, is the protagonist of the novel. He tells the story of the freedom struggle during the above-mentioned period from his memory. Since he was not a member of any political party, his account is unbiased “But the very vastness of the canvas,” as Dr Manmohan Bhatnagar observes rightly,” proves the undoing of the novel as it gets reduced to the status of reportage.”

K. Nagarajan’s *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961) deals with the political scenario of the stormy days of the political struggle in Pre-Independent India. The novel reflects life in a town against the changing patterns of history. It “seems concerned primarily with the recording of the attitudes of different sections of society in a particular period of history.” Zeenat Fatehali’s novel *Zohra* (1951) records the impact of the National Movement upon the upper class Muslims. *Wounds of Spring* (1961) by S. Menon Marath mirrors the author’s
national consciousness. In this novel he shows the impact of changes on a matriarch Nayar family in Malabar during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Lambert Mascarenhas’s *Sorrowing Lies My Land* (1955) has for its theme the freedom struggle in Goa. This theme gives political character to the novel. According to Srinivas Iyengar, the novel “is an excruciating picture of Goa in the years before the liberation in 1961…. Tobias, the central figure in Mascarenhas’s novel is elaborately and convincingly drawn…. One by one he is deprived of his supports: one of his sons enters the church, another migrates to Africa, his wife dies, his friends look askance at him. Yet is he most heroic just when he is pushed to the extreme edge of helplessness and solitariness. So too, by implication, Goa had her bravest, finest hour, when her body was bruised by oppression, but her spirit stood defiant, facing the future with courage and faith.”

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) “projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August 1947.” This novel is regarded as “the first novel in English on the partition.” The novel tells the story of a village *Mano Majra* where the Hindus (of the only Hindu Village), Muslims and Sikhs live in amity, following the Gandhian ideals of peace and non-violence. But after partition the character of the village undergoes a change. The Muslims are asked to evacuate the village and go to Pakistan by train. Now some educated people plan to avenge the massacre of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan by killing the Muslims sitting atop the compartments of the train with a rope tied one foot above the engine
across the track near a bridge. In this way they plan to kill about five hundred Muslims. But it is the sacrifice of Jugga, a rough sikh, whose Muslim beloved, Nooran, is travelling in the same train to Pakistan that makes the plan of the avengers fall through. Jugga manages to get at the rope and slash it away. The rope snapped at the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went to Pakistan. M.K. Naik records his appreciation of the novel in these words, “The impact of partition on a small village on the Indo-Pakistan border is shown here with pitiless realism of description and the swift tempo of the narrative carries the reader along.” G. P. Sarma, with his keen insight, points out the author’s intention in writing this novel in his comment on it in these words: “It depreciates the part played by the educated people of the country in fanning the situation and causing the devastation, making an irony thus of the whole movement for freedom.”

It was about two years after the publication of Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* that Nayantara Sahgal made her debut as a political novelist on the horizon of Indian English literature. This shows that she had a rich tradition of Indian English political novel when she wrote and brought out her first novel *A Time to be Happy* in 1958. Politics forms the theme of not only her first novel but of all the other novels she has so far written. It is in this sense that she is regarded, and rightly too, as an exponent of the political novel in English in India. Her intimate knowledge of the political affairs in both pre-Independence and post-Independence eras of the country has enabled her to write political novels which have won her worldwide acclaim. There is a very close relationship between her life and her
novels. While addressing the colloquium at Radcliffe Institute, she explained the close link in her life and works in these words:

I grew up during the national movement. My parents went to jail repeatedly during our fight for freedom. My father died as a result of his last imprisonment released too late to be cured of the serious illness he had contracted in jail. My uncle became our first Prime Minister. I was born and brought up within the atmosphere and hopes and ideals of the Congress party. Its leaders were familiar to me. Our home was their 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....

Nayantara Sahgal has so far penned nine novels. A Time To Be Happy is her first novel. It was published in 1957. The novel spans the pre and post-Independence periods and is set in the city named Sharanpur. In the novel are impressively presented the political events of Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement and the freedom of the country from the foreign yoke which ushers in an age of common man. Sanad, working in a British Firm, is the hero of the novel and the novel is chiefly the story of his life of the transformation of the Anglicised youth into a nationalist fired with the Gandhian ideals. His marriage with Kusum has been, as A. C. Pandey says,
symbolically presented to imply the marriage of India with freedom.” Their adjustment to new situations symbolizes free Indians’ efforts to adjust themselves to the novel situations which the freedom has brought with it. When Sanad is offered by the manager of the Selkirk and Lowe Company to go to England for orientation, he declines the offer with these significant words: “I told him about my desire to discover my country a little before I went to England. I told him Kusum was teaching me Hindi and that I was learning to spin.”

The novel throws light also on the impact of The Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement on the common man which made him to struggle for freedom with greater zeal. It deals with the movement which farmers in response to Gandhi’s call for non-violent struggle for the country’s freedom. It distinguishes the true followers of Gandhian ideology and the self-seekers who put on a show of being Gandhians. There are characters like the narrator, Kunti Behen and Sohan Bhai. These characters wear clothes made of the hand spun cloth known as Khadi before and after Independence. But on the other hand, there are people like Sir Sonu Chatterji and his wife Lady Lalita who were supporters of the British before Independence but after Independence they encourage the use of Khadi in order that they might gain political advantage. There are people who react to the achievement of Independence differently. Govind Narayan, Girish, the elder son of Govind Narayan, and Harish, the brother of Govind Narayan, who all share the mentality of the Nawabs, fail to find feet in the era of common man which Independence has ushered in. On the other hand there are Sanad, Maya, the wife of Harish, and Veena,
Sanad’s sister, welcome freedom and are happy with it. In this way life on the political plane as well as life on the personal plane are finely – integrated in the novel.

Nayantara Sahgal’s second novel *This Time of Morning* was published in 1965. Much of the action of the novel takes place in Delhi. It deals particularly with the rise and fall of Kalyan Sinha, one of the pillars of the Government. According to Dr. (Smt.) Sudarshan Sharma, the novel “depicts the post-Independence generation to whom freedom is no longer a dream, but reality, being side by side with an older generation which has struggled to achieve freedom.”

The characters of this novel can be divided into two groups. On the one hand, there are characters who serve the nation selflessly, and on the other stand those who are always busy achieving their selfish ends. To the first group belong characters like Kailash Vrind, Abdul Rahman and Mitra whereas into the second group fall Kalyan Sinha, Hari Mohan and Somnath.... These two groups thus stand in sharp contrast with each other as far as morals and ideologies are concerned. Rest of the characters in the novel – Rakesh, a young and unmarried I.F.S. officer, Mira, Kailash Vrind’s wife and Rashmi, their daughter, and Uma, Mitra’s wedded wife, and Prakash Shukla – have also important roles to play in the novel. Though Kailash Vrind, an exponent of Gandhian principles, is the Prime Minister’s trustworthy and reliable associate, The Prime Minister has all praise for Kalyan Sinha’s “ability to shed all non-essentials and go directly to the heart of the matter and get things done.”
Kalyan Sinha is the Director of The Peace Institution. His dynamism holds many a man in spell, but his dislike for human race makes him a repulsive figure. Prakash Shukla does not want him to cause damage to people. So he tells Kailash sarcastically, “We must help Kalyan down from his heights or later the fall may be worse.” Prakash Shukla wants him to be removed so that Gandhian values may be restored at the Government level. He engineers an agitation against him. Kailash Vrind, who follows most of Gandhiji’s principles becomes anxious about Kalyan’s future. This shows the nobility of his soul. Kalyan is removed and in his place Kailash is installed as Director of the Peace Institution. This symbolizes the Gandhian principle of achieving good ends through good means. It is in the fitness of things that Kailash, a Gandhian is installed as the Director of the Peace Institution in place of Kalyan Sinha, who is opposed to the Gandhian principle of non-violence.

Nayantara Sahgal’s third novel “Storm in Chandigarh” was first published in 1969. In the opinion of G. P. Sarma, “This novel is a significant work portraying in detail a chaotic period during the transition from one phase of Indian politics to another.” The novel deals with the bifurcation of the Punjab into two states after Independence – Punjab and Haryana with Chandigarh as their common capital. It shows the conflict between Gyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab, who represents the new breed of politicians busy in achieving their selfish ends through hook or crook and Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of Haryana, who, committed to sound ideology, believes in love, truth and non-violence. In order to
demonstrate his power, Gyan Singh announces a general strike in Chandigarh, making his followers clamour for Chandigarh and Bhakra Nangal. Thus there breaks out a war between the two Chief Ministers. The old Home Minister in the Government of India, the last surviving figure of the Gandhian era left in the public life, who has steadfast belief in the Gandhian ideas, deputes Vishal Dubey, a civil servant, to Chandigarh to see the strike does not succeed and no untoward incident follows it. On reaching there, he finds that Gyan Singh is not ready to budge an inch from his stand and Harpal Singh, disgusted with Gyan Singh’s ideology of violence, wishes to withdraw from active politics. He says to Vishal Dubey, “I have no heart for this job.” It is at this point that Vishal Dubey plays the jamvant to the Hanuman of Harpal Singh. He exhorts him, “It would be a mistake to yield to the strike threat... Face it, keep the work going. Appeal to your loyal workers and officers. Enlist their support.” Thus, under the influence of Vishal Dubey, Harpal Singh decides to advert the imminent danger of strike through democratic means. In the meanwhile, the Home Minister suddenly dies and out of respect for him, Gyan Singh calls off the strike. Dr. A. V. Krishna Rao’s following comment on the confrontation between the two Chief Ministers in the novel is quite appropriate: “The confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is more significant than a mere clash of personalities; it is, more fundamentally, a conflict of ideas; the cult of violence and the creed of non-violence.”

If there is a storm or crisis on the political plane in the novel, the man-woman relationship is not exempt from it. There are three
married couples in the novel – Inder and Saroj, Jit and Mara, and Vishal Dubey and Leela. These couples facing adjustment problems provide a social theme to the novel and make it a fine embodiment of the author’s socio-political consciousness.

*The Day in Shadow* is Nayantara Sahgal’s fourth novel which was published in 1971. Like *Storm in Chandigarh*, this novel presents an odd combination of old and new generations of politicians. Manmohan Bhatnagar’s observation on the combination of political and personal themes in this novel is quite significant: “In *Shadow* also the political theme and the personal theme are inextricably intertwined in that they are afflicted by the same disease.” Here Sardar Sahib, an Ex-Minister of State for Petroleum and Raj, an M.P. are inspired by the Gandhian ideals and put nation above every other consideration. They perform their duties conscientiously. On the other hand, there is Sumer Singh, the new Minister of State for Petroleum. For him his political goal is of utmost significance. He does not let any ideals come in the way of the realization of his inordinate political ambitions. He has a dual personality, for he affects morality in public life but his private life is devoid of all morality as wine and women have an upper hand in it. The characters on the social plane are Mr. Som Raman, a junior executive in Lansdowne & Co., Mrs. Simrit Raman, a freelance writer and their son, Brij, and others. Som resembles Sumer Singh in his lack of faith, high ideals and human values whereas his wife Simrit, like Sardar Sahib and Raj on the political front, has made high ideals and faith in human values an inseparable part of her life. By depicting the lives of these characters the author emphasizes the fact
that departure from the Gandhian ideals of truth, non-violence and selfless service to nation will lead only to upheavals on the political as well as the personal front. Jasbir Jain’s following comment nicely sums up the spirit of the novel in these words, “The problems in The Day in Shadow” are the problems of the country unable to come out of the quagmire of colonial experiences. Political and social events were completely divorced from moral considerations. Gandhi and his name were merely useful words for keeping up appearance and for evoking an emotional response.” 54

Nayantara Sahgal’s “A Situation In New Delhi” deals with the decline in political values in the Post-Nehruvian era and analyses the Naxalite Movement which aimed at ushering in a new social order through violent means – a social order which will ensure for all a life free from wants. In the words of A. P. Pandey, “The novel is an excellent delineation of the unnecessary interference of the government machinery in academic circles, the clash between two groups holding opposite views to attain their desired ends, marginalization of the old and dedicated politicians, tides of the Naxalite Movement and degeneration of human values in Delhi.” 55 The characters in the novel fall into two groups – “Those who are ruthlessly driven by the progressive urge and those who are possessed by humanistic considerations.” 56 To the first group belong Rishad, Naren and Skinny Jaipal and to the second group, Devi, The Education Minister, Shivraj, the Late Prime Minister and Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. The novel opens with the death of Shivraj, which is symbolic of the passing of the age of Gandhian ideals
of truth, non-violence and human consideration. The author is critical of the unnecessary interference of government in the academic sphere—interference in the matters of discipline and appointment and of indifference to the wise suggestions of the experienced academician of no less eminence than Usman for improvement in education. Usman, The Vice-Chancellor of the Delhi University, expels some students for raping Madhu, a student of the University. But he is forced by the Government to take them back. Further, neither The Education Minister nor the Vice-Chancellor is consulted in new appointments. Such is the interference of the administration in the Post-Nehruvian era. Disgusted with the situation, Usman resigns his post and decides, without any prop of post, to work for setting up a new social order to suit the changing situations. This is what the novelist says about Usman’s philosophy of bringing about social revolution: “He didn’t belong to the breed that need power in order to do things. Sometime he felt he came from infinitely older, deeper roots in the soil than even Shivraj, the acclaimed hero with much-vaunted ancestry. He hankered for a village past, for a form of Government, one that did not build up and up into a formidable state apparatus. His would build down, with maximum power to the small community. How else in India, would exhausted resources, human and natural ever recover their strength.”

The novel shows also how the faulty political measures result in the Government’s failure to control The Naxalite Movement, Rishad, son of Devi, the Education Minister, is opposite of Usman in that he wants to bring about social revolution through violence. Feeling that
the older generation is not interested in change, he joins the Naxalite Movement to instigate the public to adopt violent means to effect a meaningful change in the society. He fails to realize that a revolution has to involve people and begin with oneself. He does not realize also that violence like power can become an end in itself. Naren, the leader of the Naxalites, gets badly wounded while hiding and his long illness makes his group lose all sense of direction. In this way the volunteers of the movement are trapped in their own net. The novelist hopes that one day non-violence will be taken recourse to by the people for solving all their problems.

Nayantara Sahgal’s next novel, “Rich Like Us”, published in 1985, deals with the functioning of political and administrative machinery during the Emergency declared in India on the 26th June, 1975. The Emergency was proclaimed by the Late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi apparently to improve the deteriorating law and order situation, but in reality to save her post after declaration of her election to Parliament null and void by the High Court of Allahabad as well as to perpetuate a family rule. The political theme of the novel is presented through the consciousness of Sonali Ranade, an I.A.S. officer in the Ministry of Industries, who has inherited sound culture of dedication from her father, an ex-civil servant. Dev wants to start a soft drink company called Happyola in collaboration with foreign concern. For this purpose he establishes links with politicians. He invites Mr Neuman to promote the foreign collaboration. Mr. Neuman greases the palm of the Minister concerned and he approves of the collaboration. But Sonali does not approve of the foreign collaboration
as it is against the existing policy of the Government. Because of her refusal to confirm the foreign collaboration, the Petroleum Minister who has taken bribe in the case, gets her transferred and demoted and in her place Ravi Kachru is appointed Joint Secretary in The Ministry of Industry. Ravi Kachru, who feels no qualms of conscience in doing illegal things to further his own ends, dances to the tune of the Minister and the proposal of Dev and Mr. Neuman is approved immediately.

The novelist dwells also on how people were deprived of their fundamental rights during the Emergency. Their freedom was curbed and they had to cast looks around before speaking to be sure if any policeman was not there. This fact is brought home to the readers’ mind by the novelist through Sonali’s description of a boy who was arrested for talking on the pavement: “I could see his glasses lying there, cheap black horn rims for the next passer by to pick up or crush under foot, If human feeling failed me, had my professional training failed me too? What must an administrator do who sees a citizen kicked and cuffed for standing on the pavement talking? And If I had never before seen power and authority so nakedly displayed on the pavement, wasn’t something very wrong the day it was?”

Besides narrating the story of Indian Emergency and its evil consequences and the degradation of the democratic values of which it was a direct result, the novel tells also the story of Rose, the Cockney memsahib, brought by the worldly Ram from London to a family that neither wants nor welcomes her.
The *Plans For Future*, published in 1987, is remarkable for the delineation of the social, political, historical, and cultural backgrounds of the colonial past of the first two decades of the 20th Century. The central figure in this novel is Miss Anna Hansen who is a feminist, a woman ahead of her times, enjoying a year of travel before her marriage to an English diplomat. It is through her consciousness that the novelist draws a picture of the Freedom Movement under the dynamic leadership of Lokamanya Tilak whose slogan “Freedom is my birth right and I will have it” ethused people to struggle for full self-rule, his imprisonment and his profound scholarship evidenced by his great book *Gita Rahasya* written while he was undergoing imprisonment in the jail, “a wooden cage” for what the rulers had termed his seditious writings. The enthusiasm with which people welcomed him when he came out of jail comes to life in the following words of Anna: “He has had a hero’s welcome on his return. The judge who condemned him as a common criminal (and the stupid English on the jury) must be wicked or mad. I sat at the meeting, Nicholas, understanding not a word, yet understanding it all, so vividly could I see the spoken passion of these people taking other forms in days to come, though the rain and hail were as deafening as the charge of several light brigades on the roof.”

Though Khudiram Bose represents the earlier stage of the terrorist movement in India, the way he laid down his life at the altar of freedom showed the joy with which people were ready to sacrifice their life for freedom. It is remarkable that Khudiram Bose put the noose round his neck with a smile on his face. Anna has come to
Himapur as a secretary to look after the research of Sir Nitin Basu, an eminent Botanist, teaching at the University of Allahabad. While living at Himapur, she comes close to loving Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate of Himapur, whose wife, Stella, deserts him to enter into wedlock with Pryor. Among other Europeans in Himapur are Marlowe Croft, a Christian missionary and his wife Lulu who does not support him in his missionary work. Her fascination with Henry Brewster and her involvement in India’s growing political unrest makes her re-think about her future. But the mystery of Stella’s departure and the death of Lulu which she suspects to be murder and of Juliet (the Spaniel) being beyond her comprehension, she makes plans for her departure to England. The novel also touches upon the problem of untouchability in India and the problems of women in India and abroad. Thus the novelist has skillfully woven together the strands of politics, love, mystery and social concerns in the novel.

*Mistaken Identity* was published in 1988. In an interview to Rajnish Watta, Nayantara Sahgal talked about this novel in these words, “*Mistaken Identity* is about many things: the conspiracy trials of the 1920’s, the decadent *Zamindari* system in the U.P. I think of it as an offering to my Hindu-Muslim culture, and I think it has a growing relevance in the present climate of all kinds of religious madness.”\

The novel deals with the social, communal and political uprisings during the preceding decades of Independence, Lahore Conspiracy, Dandi March, and the Khilafat movement form the backdrop of the novel. Bhusan, the hero-narrator of the novel, is arrested on mistaken identity and the arguments put forth by the
defense counsel during his trial prove of no avail. But at the end he is released. There are two groups of freedom fighters – the Gandhians represented by Bhaiji and the communist revolutionaries represented by Comrade Pillai, Comrade Yusuf, Comrade Sen, etc. Though these two groups are ideologically poles apart from each other, they both desire to struggle to bring about the end of the British rule in the country. They are arrested for disloyalty to the British Government and without trial thrown into moffusil jail. Bhai and Sen die before the verdict of their acquittal.

Bhusan’s love-affair with Razia gives rise to communal riots, but his marriage with Yusuf’s daughter proves a happy event in the concluding part of the novel. Bhusan’s mother, who is ill-treated by her husband who illegally marries second and third times without her consent, leaves her palatial prison house to live with Comrade Yusuf and find fulfilment. In this novel the novelist has skillfully presented the historical reality with three hangings. Dr. R. A. Singh says: “Besides referring to Gandhi and Kamal Pasha, the historical scene is made more immediately relevant by citing the Lahore conspiracy case involving Bhagat Singh and others who had avenged the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.”

The Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi finds a fine treatment at the hands of the novelist. On March 12, 1930 Gandhiji set out with his followers from his Sabarmati Ashram for Dandi Sea-shore. It was on April 5, 1930 that Gandhiji and his Satyagrahi’s violated The Salt Act by picking up salt lying on the sea-shore. This is how Nayantara Sahgal describes the event: “Gandhi has reached to Dandi beach, a
distance of two hundred and forty miles from his base, to disobey The Salt Act and manufacture salt on the sea coast.”

So strong is the wind of patriotism that blows in Vijaygarh that it oversways its Raja who had supported the British Rule for his individual benefits, but now begins to support the revolutionary movement indirectly. In this way the ending becomes a political revolution. But in the marriage of Bhushan with Yusuf’s daughter and in his mother’s rebellion against her husband, the Raja of Vijaygarh, it symbolizes social revolution also. As Jasbir Jain puts it, “While Bhushan is forging new ties, the mother is getting rid of old ones. This is where the meaning of the whole novel comes through. The ending comments on the role of history and that of human nature. Man moves towards his destiny to meet it. He is also a maker of his own destiny, it doesn’t exist in abstract.”

Lesser Breeds is Nayantara Sahgal’s ninth, and so far the latest, novel. It was on April 30, 1990 that Nayantara told Jasbir Jain about the near completion of this novel in these words: “I am working on a novel: it is nearly finished but it is very hard for me to say what it is about. It is at two levels. The present is in New York, the past in India. A young girl from a nationalist family is studying in New York. The past concerns the effect of non-violence on a whole household. In some ways it is a kind of parody of what non-violence does to the households and others who are believers in it the kind of strange household it produces.” The novelist gives two epigraphs – one from Rudyard Kipling’s poem The Recessional, and another from a
devotional song of Eknath, a great Marathi saint, which was dear to Mahatma Gandhi’s heart. They run as follows:

If drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not thee in awe
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the Law.
And,
Vaishnava jan tó tene re kahiye je
Peed parayi jaaney re
(Him we call a Vaishnav who knows the pain of others)

These epigraphs distinguish the European and the Indian attitude toward the common man. Whereas the lesser breeds outside Europe are meant for punishment at her hands in which she takes delight. Those in countries like India emulate the example of saints to give meaning to their life by helping the needy and mitigating the sufferings of others.

Edgar Knox tells Lady Hartley one of the tales collected by his sister to describe the non-violent struggle being waged by Indians under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership to end the British Rule. He tells her that this fairy tale of Asian origin ends with the Prince being rewarded with three beautiful wives and the Negro slave being punished for his treachery most brutally. He further tells her to her shock, “Fairy tales do have some pretty ghastly endings. My sister says their most horrific punishments are designed for those whom Kipling called the lesser breeds.” Later, under the influence of the Guest from Hiroshima, who was lucky enough to survive the fire of the
atom bomb dropped on the city, Edgar’s sister, Leda, starts collecting tales of another kind “Contemporary tales told her by sufferers of orgiastic operatic punishments designed for the lesser breeds outside Europe.” These tales of suffering undergone by the lesser breeds at the hands of the mighty make non-sense of such Europeans’ talk of ‘all mankind’ and ‘one world’.

The story of the novel takes place in India and the United States of America, and spans a period of 36 years from 1932 to 1968. Nurullah, a young man of twenty three, comes to Akbarabad. He is a teacher of English who teaches English Literature to the first year students at the University. He encounters a non-violent resistance movement against the British rule. He thinks that India cannot achieve freedom without resorting to violent means in a violent unequal world. He is introduced by Robin-da to Nikhil, who lives in his domed mansion with his widowed mother, his six-years old daughter, Shan and a distant relative. One day Nikhil suggests to him that he come and start living in the mansion. When he asks his mentor Robin-da whether he should move in, the later tells him to do so and thereby avail himself to study the Movement first hand. But he does not speak his mind. The novelist gives us an insight into Nurullah’s mind with these words : “How could he mortally offend his mentor by saying there was nothing to study in a Movement that had never so much as sent a shiver through the Raj – except once when a furious mob had burned a police thana with constables inside it. But even that had come to nothing when the Mahatma had called the Movement off and said the violence had run a rapier through his body so let us pray.”
This brings out clearly his opposition to non-violence adopted by people like Nikhil under the Mahatma’s leadership. During the ten years from 1932 that he lives with Nikhil’s non-violent family in the domed monument he remains resistant to non-violence.

Nurullah teaches Shan. “Correcting Shan’s education was systematically broadening his own.”\(^{68}\) Shan goes to the U.S. for higher education under the care of Edgar Knox. After her father’s execution, she returns to India. She fights an election to Parliament successfully and becomes the Commerce Minister. She impresses her audience in the U.S. with her witty and thought-provoking speeches. Nurullah is satisfied with her performance. He says, “The Minister is a hero in her own right” and Eknath congratulates him on “his handiwork”\(^{69}\) (which Shan is). The author points out: “He had only freed her from her convent text books and pointed her to a new way of seeing. But yes, he had watched her performance in New York with a teacher’s love and pride.”\(^{70}\) She was killed in an air crash.

The story is told by the novelist to Pete Ryder, a young student of politics ‘researching’ non-violence and its use of soul-force. There are fruitful discussions on violence and non-violence in the novel. The novel makes a very interesting reading. The lively descriptions of many an incident associated with the freedom struggle and with the outcome of the dropping of the Atom Bomb on Hiroshima are an unforgettable experience.
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