CHAPTER V

SUMMING UP

The first generation of important women writers began publishing their work in the 1950s. During this period, Nayantara Sahgal emerged as one of the most significant voices in the realm of Indian English fiction. Nayantara Sahgal has been active on the literary scene as both a creative writer and a political columnist for more than four decades. She has the unique distinction of being the only political novelist on the Indian English literary scene in 1950s. Her work has a strong realistic base and reflects not only her personal values but also the changing values of a society exposed for the first time to both freedom and power. Sahgal is one of the distinguished Indi-English writers who writes in the stream of national consciousness. She has the honor of being the first Indian woman novelist writing in English dealing with political themes.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are set against the socio-political backdrop of the country. They deal with man’s quest for his identity, man-woman relationship, East-West encounter and preoccupation with Hindus and Hinduism. Lakshmi Sinha puts this in a nut shell: “Nayantara Sahgal’s literary world in a broad sense can be termed personalized fiction. History, politics, autobiography and personalities intermingle in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.” (Sinha, Sextet 42)

The writers and novelists in particular have exhibited their consciousness of the developments of the political events of the country in their works. They have made use of it as the start of affairs in their works reacting and commenting on them. Nayantara Sahgal chose to write against political background because she breathed in an atmosphere oozing with political fermentation. The twists and turns of human
relationship, placed against the spectrum of Indian freedom struggle, form one of the fundamental concerns of Nayantara Sahgal’s novels. Her men and women behave as normal human beings do – succumbing to their ego, committing errors, taking wrong decisions, exposing their weakness and rising above them, sometimes in triumph. They have various facets of their personalities, for example, they live in the capacity of professionals, politicians, friends, parents, spouses and lovers.

Characters in Nayantara Sahgal arrive to achieve their identity, which they ultimately discover. She establishes the value of freedom as the first requisite to the development of the self and secondly the need of communication, without which an unbridgeable gulf yawns between individuals, leading to serious consequences as break up of relationships like marriages. Maintaining relationships is essential for man, not only for a healthy social life but also for his own psychological and emotional well-being. Nayantara Sahgal’s sympathy lies with men and women who are forced by their milieu to fumble in the dark for their self awareness. She is a culturally advanced onlooker and R.S. Singh points out that this is the reason why she gets upset regarding some social inhibitions prevailing in India. She represents that carefree class of Indians who are least concerned with the enslaved state of the country. Nayantara Sahgal’s characters are culled from upper strata of Indian society with an admixture of few foreigners. They comprise men and women who are bureaucrats, ministers, academicians—all trapped in their predicament, constructed to fit into the design of her moral universe and the novelist elicits belief in their deep lying potential. Characters in her fiction are the essential elements of the novel. About characters and their relationships, Miriam Allott opines: “We recognize the true novelist by the strength with which his realization of the actual world and of
individuality triumphs over his abstract speculation, his oddities and opinions.” (Allott, *Novelists* 145)

Nayantara Sahgal’s art of characterization is appealing. She portrays her characters as emotional beings. The human concern is paramount in her characters. Her men are painted as normal beings pulsating with life and women as struggling to achieve a respectable place for them. Nayantara Sahgal does not lose sight of feminine virtues which constitute feminity to woman-loving, caring, dedicated, inspired, motherly and educated. She does not portray them as mute and unsusceptible to their needs.

Nayantara Sahgal’s women too suffer from the gnawing fear of loneliness. She is deeply concerned about the problems of the new woman, intelligent, educated and a careerist, trying to etch a dignified image for her in a patriarchal and male-dominated society. Freedom of expression, communication, and understanding are the pre-requisites to all relationships. Man and woman, both constitute a healthy society and are complementary to each other. One cannot negate the other, but both require recognition of their identities. Nayantara Sahgal implicitly states, they themselves should discover first, only then can they expect the world around them to recognize.

As a Socio-political novelist, Nayantara Sahgal strictly adheres to her ideal of freedom as an essential and indispensable ingredient for the progress of a country and an individual. In all the six novels taken for study, she expresses this philosophy and her deep love for India and for humanity. Regarding a writer’s relation to his milieu John W. Alridge remarks:

> When writers are embarrassed or provoked by existing social conditions and pressures into making a political case or arranging their
work to confirm to the requirement of some programmatic vision of society, the result can be disastrous in the extreme. (Alridge, The Politics 156)

Nayantara Sahgal has been touched deeply by socio-political condition of India before and after Independence, and her disenchantment leans towards mild satire but the result is never disastrous, because her ultimate aim is humanistic. The study analyzed in all its implications the novelist's projection of the rot in the personal and the political domain in its essentially human idiom.

The fiction of Nayantara Sahgal is an intensive exploration of the society, the thematic patterns in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal with special focus on the political motif. Beginning with a critical survey of the development of Indian English fiction right since its inception from this perspective, the diverse dimensions of the themes in Nayantara Sahgal's novels are analyzed in depth. Isolating her concern with the plight of individual, the study analyzed the use of the novel as a chronicle of changes in the modalities of the distribution of power. Going deeper into the psyche of the dramatist personae, the study bares the chains of faith within, inhibiting all action, untangles the individual exploited in cultural, sexual, social and political conflicts. The study examines the novelist's Gandhian concern for the human factor. Breaking fresh ground, the study first isolates the novelist's prescription of a way out of the impasse to stem the rot and then scrutinizes the diverse strategies on rendering the ideological in artistic terms and of combine the personal and the political plane in unique artistic amalgam.

Nayantara Sahgal’s six novels taken for study, thus not only constitute an impressive segment of Indian English novel but also sum up the saga of India’s
struggle for freedom and the changes it has brought about in the traditional social setup in India. Although Nayantara Sahgal is unique in her artistic sensibility as well as in the particular manner of projecting national consciousness, she also reflects the consciousness of change. The novelist pictures the competing structures of human values and human destiny. The major legacy of cultural change in modern India has been the new historical sense, containing in itself a feeling for the past as well as an awareness of the future, as both dramatize in the personality of the present.

The novelist interprets variegated aspects of political life in depth and through her active involvement in politics, she emphasizes the humanistic values she upholds and the “novel becomes a concern for the quality of life.” (Jain, Nayantara 141) Her concern with politics is just a part of her humanistic concern because each of her explorations into political life reveals her newer and deeper insight into the human psyche. This deep-rooted political consciousness of Nayantara Sahgal makes her the only political Indian women novelist of her period. Her six novels discussed in the study, emphasize the basic fact that politicians and individuals are inter-dependent and they greatly influence each other. Sahgal strongly believes that it is the conscious moral obligation of all right thinking people to protest against injustice and wrong. The autobiographical element once again comes uppermost when Sahgal’s heroines are seen rebelling against established social inequalities and Hindu ambivalence. Her literary achievement lies in her ability to transmute the social, historical and political forces of her time into the organic structure of the novel.

In the fictional depiction of her women attempting to free themselves from repressive relationships, she is more direct in her feminist sympathies. She makes a systematic and sustained effort to demolish the deeply ignored attitudes regarding
women, before indicating ways in which a new image can be formulated. A great deal has been said about Nayantara Sahgal’s feminist stance in her fiction. In the novels of Sahgal, there is a very sensitive depiction of the way women suffer due to the sexist bias in the patriarchal society which gives a subordinate position to women. Though Sahgal has been hailed chiefly as a political novelist, her feminist concern is quite obvious and her fighter spirit quite vocal in her fiction. The fictional world of Nayantara Sahgal from A Time to be Happy to Mistaken Identity shows her deep concern regarding the state of women in the parochial society.

Nayantara Sahgal has published nine novels and two autobiographies, besides a history book, Freedom Movement in India, and a political treatise Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power. She has been well known for her views on the Emergency in India and fight for Civil Liberties. Nayantara Sahgal’s first book Prison and Chocolate Cake, an autobiography, was published when she was only twenty-seven years old. The second autobiography, From Fear Set Free, was written during a critical phase in her marriage. Both the autobiographies become important because they provide the basis for a better understanding of the novelist and her novels. The first book describes the powerful associations and experiences of Nayantara Sahgal’s childhood and provides invaluable insight into the shaping influences of her life. The political consciousness, which dominates her literary creations, is real and inseparable from her surroundings. Her social and cultural milieu has always been Indian. Her major contribution to the art of fiction in Indian English writing is the genesis of the political novel in its present form. Her main contribution has been her deep involvement and concern with politics. She has developed the scope of the political novel, widening its area of content and adding a
new dimension to it. Politics, in her novels, is not the concern only of politicians, but is an all pervasive influence, affecting life at all levels.

In her novels, on the one hand, she exposes the power-hungry politicians and their madness for power, and on the other hand, she highlights the ardent freedom fighters and their sacrifices for their motherland. In all her works, there is a juxtaposition of two worlds: the personal world of man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. Husband-Wife alienation resulting from lack of communication, East-West encounter, extra-Marital relationship, existentialist problems and temperamental incapability form the major themes in her novels.

Besides politics, her fiction also focuses attention on Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Almost in all her novels, Nayantara Sahgal has gone deep into the female psyche. In novel after novel, she explores the nature and scope of the trauma of womenfolk. She is able to go deep into the psyche of her female characters and study them with sympathy and understanding. As a woman novelist, she recognizes that her primary obligation is that of advocating the emancipation of women. In her novels she vividly describes how woman is exploited even during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. Nayantara Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships, the loneliness of living alone and private terrors.

Nayantara Sahgal’s women characters suffer because they refuse to submerge their individuality and cling to their personal identity at all costs. She shows women suffering in marriage-life and then deciding to come out of the suffocating bondage by preferring divorce. She depicts her women deciding to prefer divorce rather than live a stifling life of injustice and agony. Her women like Saroj, Simrit,
Rashmi and Anna all leave their husbands or break the marriage which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. In novel after novel, Nayantara Sahgal gives expression to humanistic values, according to which a woman is not to be taken as sex object and glamour girl but as an individual in her own right. Nayantara Sahgal depicts her women struggling to retain her selfhood and to breathe freely in the suffocating environs of loveless marriages. Having personally experienced the trauma of a failed marriage, Nayantara Sahgal exhibits the dilemma of women trapped between traditional assumptions regarding womanhood and the stirrings of individuality very sharply and skilfully. Nayantara Sahgal highlights a clearly feminist function in her scathing exposure of the hollowness of man-woman relationships based on socially predetermined patterns of gender inequality. Nayantara Sahgal delineates marriage without emotional involvement, love without respect and sex without passion as the causes for unfulfilling marriages in her novels.

Nayantara Sahgal's novels are meaningful as chronicles of a larger narrative. Her novels are microcosm of life itself, the life which she keenly perceived around her. In this study an attempt had been made to analyze the major themes like East West encounter, feminism, social consciousness and political happenings. Nayantara Sahgal’s struggling characters put up a strong fight against the heavy odds, but do not succumb to the circumstances. Nayantara Sahgal Stauchly believes that the growth of individual consciousness which should culminate in self-identity is possible only in candid expression of one’s feelings, in communication done in free atmosphere. A.V. Krishna Rao points out: “Every major character in the novel strives towards realization of freedom as a basic human value.” (Rao, *Historical* 146)
The opinion quoted above is written with reference to *This Time of Morning*, but is equally valid for all of Nayantara Sahgal’s novels. National consciousness and individual consciousness are linked together in her works. The narrator, for instance, in *A Time to be Happy* relinquishes his wealthy family business to devote himself to Gandhian austerity. No exalted goal could be achieved without self-sacrifice. C. Paul Vergese is of the view that: “The twentieth-century concept of individual freedom rests on a view of the welfare of society as not being apart from the welfare of the individuals that constitute it.” (Vergese, *Man* 274)

Therefore, man cannot be judged as an island, or separate entity, disconnected from his milieu. Nayantara Sahgal’s vision of a normal human being is that of a healthy product of an equally healthy society. Nayantara Sahgal’s disillusion and disenchantment with post-Independence Indian political scenario holds true even today, with politicians exerting their clout, corruption rampant in corridors of power, expectations from the promises extended before elections and non-fulfilment of those promises. However, her novels do not carry a pessimistic note. There still lies hope in those sensitive persons who can think, as the narrator in *A Time to be Happy* on his last visit to the village Industries Fair in Saharanpur sensed a deep contentment at the thought that at last India was restored to her consciousness. The British had left and there was still a lot to fall back upon, while taking a round of the fair, the narrator was elated by a feeling which he sensed after years was expressed in these words: “To me each painted toy and article of wood was a symbol of courage and determination to survive.” (*Time* 274)

The novelist philosophizes that man’s consciousness progresses from uncertainty to certitude with a deliberate effort. India immediately after independence
required strong-willed leaders who would handle newly earned democracy with care. Sahgal is one of those Indo-English writers whose specific aim is to create sensitivity in people towards their immediate present. The vision of Sahgal for universal brotherhood as the sole alchemy today to hold peace is well expressed in her novels. Finally Nayantara Sahgal arrives at the concept of the new women. K.C. Bhatnagar indicates that Nayantara Sahgal,

Becomes an opposite of the Lib movement in India in advocating a new freedom for the traditional Indian women on the lines of the new women in the West, the freedom to choose her own life partner.

(Bhatnagar, *Indo-English* 120)

The new Indian woman of whom Bhatnagar mentions, is not yet born, according to Sahgal and is her dream. The writer eagerly awaits such a woman who would confidently take decisions, fight against those forces that are resolved to kill her spirit. Centuries of subjugation have created a stunted growth of woman in India. Though in ideology she is metaphorically called a ‘Goddess’ and in Sanskrit the well-known axiom goes thus, ‘Gods dwell in the place where woman is worshipped’, yet in practice male chauvinism has portrayed all her women, major and minor, as dependents on male friends and companions for their survival. Though they revolt against their traumatic present and get separated from their husbands as Simrit and Saroj they did seek another emotional companion for their support.

Nayantara Sahgal, as a typical twentieth-century novelist fulfils these expectations of viewing her characters against their historical back drop as Hilda Pontes puts: “Here we have a novelist who writes in the stream of national consciousness.” (*Nayantara* 57) Simultaneously, she is not confined to Indian borders
but tries to objectify Indian consciousness into universal consciousness. She observes
the ultimate aim of novelist, that nothing lesser than the truth to be told. Through
truthful exhibition of situations and people, her vision of a thoroughly developed
human being, a world citizen, intelligent and loving is voiced vociferously. About the
function of a (Indian) writer, Nayantara Sahgal writes:

To be relevant to his culture a writer’s imagination...has to be able to
create the men and women and situations of the Indian environment
and the Indian reality. If a writer can do this, make people feel with
him, stimulate thinking he is fulfilling in function. (Sahgal, The Indian
35)

Her novels, thus, present the problematic situations of Indian policy and
provide solution to political confrontations, social evils, and individual conflicts thus
educating the readers politically, socially and psychologically. She recommends a
system of freedom and liberalism with a strong urge for humanistic concern which
alone makes social change meaningful. Her work places before us a view of the
politico-social ethos of independent India in its passage through a phase of
transistorizes of values on being exposed for the first time to both freedom and power.
Her novels drive home the need for moral values in politics and the need for
meaningful action and an awakening from a state of apathy in order to arrive at an
understanding of the self and its relation to society thus fulfilling the requirements
of a novel has been pointed out by Joan Rockwell :

Fiction is not only a representation of social reality, but also a
necessary functional part of social control, and also paradoxically an
important element in social change. It plays a large part in the conduct
of politics and in general gives symbols and modes of life in those less easily defined but basic areas such as norms, values, and personal and interpersonal behaviour. (Rockwell, Fact in 125)

Though the major contribution of Nayantara Sahgal to the art of fiction in Indo-English Writing is the political novel, the uniqueness of her contribution lies in her widening of the scope of the political novel by making politics sound as an all pervasive influence, affecting life at all levels. In her novels, politics and personal life of individuals are intertwined, interrelated, and equated wherein the political conditions depicted go beyond a particular political event to envelop the totality of politics. For a writer whose major concern is freedom-individual freedom and related values-it is natural that she deals with many kinds of threats to freedom.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels provide the backdrop against which the novel’s action at the individual level is set thus intertwining the social and political worlds which make an impact on the individual consciousness. According to A.V.Krishna Rao:

Nayantara Sahgal is perhaps one of our best socio-Political novelist’s to-day. She is authentic and vivid in rendering the contemporary Indian urban culture with all its inherent contradictions impose controversies.

(Rao, Nayantara 98)

The novels taken for study are realistic record of Indian struggle for freedom and its aftermath and the changing social and political scene. She is not only aware of the changes, but also their impact on the individual sensibility and collective life of the Indian psych. Her vision is, however, not restricted as her final concern is with human values and man’s destiny. Indian culture with its past traditions, the present
issues and the future trends—nothing escapes her all pervading vision. She does not believe in blindly clinging to the outworn traditions. She is liberal, humanistic and cosmopolitan in her outlook and gives space for human beings to grow. Her concept of freedom is not merely political. It includes the full expression of one’s personality and discovering of one’s true identity. Her characters show faith in an individual’s capacity to communicate and reach others through debates and discussion. She believes that all progress and social or political freedom is possible where people are brought up and nurtured under the impact of Gandhian ideology and Nehru’s faith in the human spirit. Jasbir Jain feels, “Her work has a strong realistic base and reflects not only her personal values but also the changing values of the society exposed for the first time to both freedom and power.” (Jain, Nayantara 178)

Nayantara Sahgal writes from the depth of her being. If her style is clear and simple, it does not mean it is austere and bare, shorn of literary embellishment or subtlety. It is analytical and reasoned, but full of portraiture, metaphysical charm, humour, irony, satire, sarcasm; in fact, all the weapons a stylist has in the armoury to express herself effectively. Humour too never fails her. Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are a study into history as she weaves into her narratives the social, political and cultural history of India. She covers a period between 1930 and 1975; a period which is significant in the history of the country for its mass awakening. Nayantara Sahgal does not portray India’s social or political history in continuum but concentrates on specific issues crucial to the time, which become epoch making moments in history and are of vital importance to the framing of an ideology.

An astute and dedicated observer, Nayantara Sahgal has commented extensively on the Indian social and political sense and on the wider relationship of
India with the rest of the world in the “age of globalization” of which, she believes, one needs to take a qualified view. In her journalism, which complements her fiction as well as in her addresses at various forums, she advocates a cosmopolitan spirit deeply rooted in one’s native culture. She says, “My continuing character is India and my books have been about contemporary hopes and fears, set in political situation, and the implications of political events on people’s lives.”(Sahgal, Voices 5) Her implicit point is that political struggles must be waged in tandem with the larger struggle for social regeneration and that a sense of humanity consists in recognizing the indivisibility of human dignity. Nayantara Sahgal raises original and radical questions that break through traditional categories of thought to open up new possibilities for social conduct. Her vision, therefore, never degenerates into a sentimental and politically immature humanism.

The feature and strength of Nayantara Sahgal’s fiction is that she relates the different levels of the country’s past through the credible mechanism of the web of human relationships built around avid, thinking and responsible characters. Drawn as part of specific time-space continuum, the characters are moulded by events and happenings around them and show a strong awareness of their situations in all their varied dimensions. They constantly interrogate events, happening and problems which are rooted in the actual. Nayantara Sahgal’s novels clearly portray the manifold changes that have occurred in India, both in the political and social spheres since independence. Nayantara Sahgal’s fictional probe into the cancerous proliferation of social hypocrisy and political pretence in modern India is incisive like that of a surgeon’s knife but is tempered with compassion and love. Its analysis and interpretation of the human predicament is informed of newer and truer insights into the human psyche.
Nayantara Sahgal eminently succeeds in keeping the aesthetic distance and balance between the outer reality manifested in society and the inner reality concealed in artistic sensibility. She proceeds from restlessness to tranquillity and from rootlessness to rootedness, carefully avoiding the pitfalls of melodrama and propaganda en route. She affirms life and confirms her commitment to the idea of freedom as a fundamental value and as an enduring vision.

Nayantara Sahgal too, takes the responsibility of underlining the socio-political problems and also provides reasonable solutions to it through the novels taken for study. Her novels, filled with the socio-political happenings of her period, aptly serves as a medium to apply sociological approach on her writings and make a research. Sahgal’s writing mirrors the changing patterns of the society, imbibing of new cultural perspectives and its effect on the lives of the characters everything in an interesting way. As well as her works portray the political scence of that period with an unbiased look. The six novels selected for the study serve this purpose completely.

**SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The available critical materials also show other areas of study that can be attempted in Nayantara Sahgal’s literary creations and writings. Apart from fiction, Nayantara Sahgal’s autobiographies, journalistic writings are worth study in their own right, and are certainly readable and stylish in their own way as fictions. An elaborate study on Nayantara Sahgal’s letters, journals, papers and historical books will provide a deep understanding of the social milieu. For those who are interested in comprehending the political influence of that period and its aftermath, Nayantara Sahgal’s works lay a valid platform. Many absorbing reflections and insights which provide a different perspective to the reader can be enunciated. For a reader who is
interested in the features of Hinduism and who feels to trace out the traditional characteristics of Indian society, Nayantara Sahgal’s works have a wider scope.

Nayantara Sahgal works stand as a monument record of the socio political happenings of the period. Further study is possible at various aspects, as Nayantara Sahgal’s pieces of writing paves way to research under various lights of criticism and perspective. Topic related to feministic concerns with a light to create a new virtuous women, can also be taken for study in depth. Hence the ascetic and aesthetic views are essential to bring out the greatness of the writer.