CONCLUSION

Writing in *The Statesman* Mayantara Sahgal expresses a view of the function of literature which involves the writer's commitment to the quest for reality and for meaningful social action:

To be relevant to his culture a writer's imagination—not necessarily the language he uses—has to belong to it. The 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, and even inspire action because of what he writes, then he is fulfilling his function, no matter which language he uses.¹

This approach to literature shows how the novels of Mayantara Sahgal tend to be rooted firmly in the socio-political milieu of India. The diametrically opposed tendencies of adherence to Gandhian ideology and a total debasement of it in practice in the various spheres of life and political activity in the wake of the aggressive rise of materialistic and utilitarian approaches to life and civilisation have given rise to a

concern for meaningful social reality which becomes one of the major novelistic concerns of the post-Independence Indian writer. It is this theme of social change having a bearing on "life by values" and not "life by time" which is one of the ceaseless novelistic preoccupations of Nayantara Sahgal. In depicting this theme of social change, Nayantara Sahgal makes her locale and society conform to the canons of realism. The integrity and coherence that realism requires are both present in the raw material as well as the finished product that Sahgal gives us. The fictional terrain which Nayantara Sahgal reveals to us is such that it vividly places before us a view of the politico-social ethos of independent India passing through a phase of transitoriness of values. Apart from shedding light on the prevailing Indian socio-cultural situation, Sahgal's novels portray, with a sense of immediacy and by a system of contrasts, the values which ought to prevail in the quest for truth, for the self and for freedom. Joan Rockell says thus:

"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 socialisation of infants, in the expression of official norms such as law and religion, in the conduct of politics and in general gives symbols and modes of life to the population, particularly in those less easily defined but basic areas such as norms, values and personal and interpersonal behaviour.2

Through her novels, Nayantara Sahgal makes a plea for the "oxygen of understanding" which is possible in an atmosphere free from fear and where communication and comradeship are available so as to combat social, political and personal violence.

Set against the backdrop of the struggle for Independence, A Time to be Happy offers a fictional enactment of the expectations roused by the dawn of freedom. It portrays the struggle of Sanad Shivpal to find his identity in an environment noted for its incongruous superimposition of the English culture on traditional Indian Culture, as

the description of Sherampur suggests. The Gandhian impact traced in this novel is akin to the representation of Gandhi in Nagarajan's *Chronicies of Kadaram* in the sense that the influence is perceptible to a large extent in the realm of history and politics. But in the more serious and idealistic tone of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, which adopts the meandering, repetitive manner of storytelling that is part of the ancient literary tradition of India, Gandhi's impact, conveyed through Moorthy, transforms the life of an entire community so that an abundance enters the people's hearts and the collective hope submerges the individual loss. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand whose main intention is to get his message across, and who says in a letter, "the alleviation of pain and its expiation are the only values given to our intelligentsia at the present time,"3 Nayantara Sahgal shows a growing concern for achieving some aesthetic distancing, especially when she comes to her later novels. In spite of an occasional journalistic predilection for the depiction of life experience rather than art experience,

Mayantara Sahgal presents in fictional terms enduring human values which defy regimentation and assert the growth of a liberal, secular consciousness which stresses the value of the freedom of the self.

The sophisticated urban cultural environment of Delhi provides the backdrop against which the growth of Rakesh from a state of uncertainty to that of inner certitude is traced in This Time of Morning. The novel includes no doubt "a sociological study of urban characters in contemporary India" but the yearning for freedom it presents and the recognition and even the realization of this sense of freedom as a basic human value as depicted in terms of the interaction of character and character and character and situation shows a growing tendency on the part of Mayantara Sahgal to make fiction aptly image some of her perspectives drawn from the historical and political concerns of contemporary India. In the words of Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "This Time of Morning is written with much greater ease and sophistication than its predecessor.

and it can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English.\textsuperscript{5}

*Storm in Chandigarh* traces a conflict of ideas relevant to the post-Gandhi era. The confrontation between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is less a clash of personalities than an ideological conflict between the cult of violence and the creed of non-violence. Vishal Dubey who represents the authorial voice of "Higher Morality" irrevocably commits himself to the quest for reality and to the inviolable sanctity of freedom. He says, "there is a yearning for freedom in everything that lives ... And in people, since time began, sooner or later, in one way or another, the yearning bursts out and spills over. We haven't begun to realise that yet. Freedom is just an isolated political achievement for us. It hasn't become a habit of mind or a way of life" (*Storm*, p. 225). Freedom, as Nayantara Sahgal envisions it here, is something deeply ingrained in the being of man vitalizing his very capacity for action. It need not always work within the framework

of accepted social values and norms. It is because of
this that Mayantara Sahgal is called a non-conformist.
Especially in her treatment of marital relationships,
Sahgal advocates freedom from rigid imposition. She takes
cognisance of the failings and weaknesses of human beings
with a liberal spirit and in working out a solution to the
marital dilemmas and perplexities she strives for innate
truth and honesty to assert that.

A Situation in New Delhi offers a scathing criticism
of the revolutionary forces which seek to fill the void left
by Shivraj who symbolises a free, democratic republic of
virtue and temperance. A "situation" of power, a brazen
assertion of pseudo-radicalism or a faith in the volcanic
eruption of violence as a means to a peaceful end — all
these alternative choices are examined against the background
of reiteration of faith in the Gandhian value of sacrifice
and renunciation symbolically enacted as almost the resur-
rection of the dead hero or the dead ideal. Michael
towards the end of the novel believes that Shivraj will
live on. He says "perhaps we've been in too much of a hurry
to say he is dead" (p. 165). Sahgal's latest novel, Plans
for Departure, is even a more satisfying novel than Rich
Like Us which won the 1985 Sinclair Prize for Fiction.
It goes back to British India when the First World War had begun to cast its shadow and conjures up that period in the treatment of several kinds of departure: of a European woman to India from her English fiance, of a reformed Hindu from his religious heritage and from servitude to the Raj, of the conquerors in Austro-Hungary and India from their imperial domains, and of Europe from its own civilisation as a result of the self-inflicted destruction of the war. A discreet chronicler of the past who by subtle, inward-turned brush-strokes paints a picture of either Tilak's release from prison or the birth of the Labour Party, Nayantara Sahgal gives us in Plans for Departure an assemblage of "political renegades and moral misfits" through whom the humanistic outlook which pervades her fictional world is revealed: "Those of us who must grow old during this violent new century will need all our human resources to remain human" (pp. 195–6). There is further Nitin Basu's discovery that "Nirvana is not the law and order of his masters, nor the fire-breathing nationalism of his province. It was Work" (p.112). The passages cited
above reveal Nayantara Sahgal's concern with the humanistic impulse which informs and illuminates her work. Written at a period of Indiamania in the West, *Plans for Departure* gives us a feel of the hill-station with its communal bidi going round, trains of males unloading near the warehouse, and the sight of the corded tendons of the coolie's legs as he drags a rickshaw uphill. But Anna's mythological vision of the God Indra in *Plans for Departure* and the invoking of the episodes from the *Mahabharata* in *Rich Like Us* do not confer upon the narratives the kind of mythic dimensions which Raja Rao, for example, gives in his collection *The Cov of the Barricades*. If *Kanthapura* is a larger attempt at creating a *Sthala-purana*, Delhi, as Nayantara depicts it, is just "a place in the making," a place which is yet to acquire a personality. There is less of showing and more of telling here. This description appears ironic in the context of Somali in *Rich Like Us* delving deep into history, into the Moghul empire and the Persian form it had taken, in order that this historical sense would enable her to discover the true grain of her own being, her Kashmiriness. But in spite of the lack of the creative depiction of the image of a city in great flux, Nayantara Sahgal's recreation
of the urban environment in all its social and political entanglements reveals an intimate knowledge of Indian reality in the portrayal of which the English language which she uses with great ease is no barrier. She mentions thus in an interview:

It assumes that if you write in English you do not know India ... it is not a question of which language you use, but of how you use language, and whether you as a person are divorced from Indian reality.

Though Nayantara Sahgal does not infuse into the English expression the tempo of Indian life in the same way in which a man of "mixed sensibility" like Raja Rao does, she nevertheless conveys "in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" by projecting as one of her creative concerns the theme of national consciousness and the quest for identity in the face of a retreat from Gandhian idealism. Nayantara Sahgal's fiction thus establishes itself in the mainstream of the national literature of contemporary India and "the central core of her fictional

viewpoint is akin to that presented in Indian literatures ... at a time when Indo-Anglian fiction is slowly alienating itself from Indianness."