PREFACE

Mayantara Sahgal is a distinguished Indian novelist in English whose career as a creative writer spans a period of over three decades. Though she has not received so far the critical attention due to her, she is a novelist who merits recognition for her articulation of the national impulse and for her treatment of cultural change in her fiction. The novels of Mayantara Sahgal reveal her concern with contemporary social and political changes in India. Her creative concerns are typically those of the acutely sensitive Indian writers. She is essentially a writer who enriches the Indian creative tradition, a tradition upholding the humanistic values.

Mayantara Sahgal's novels show a remarkable degree of continuity. They are first unified by the background of Indian politics. This background supplies one major thematic concern: the plight of the individual in the power-hungry and materialistically-oriented contemporary society witnessing a rapid retreat from Gandhian ideology. The Peace Institute in This Time of Morning holds the mirror upon the cosmopolitan world
of politics. A place meant to fulfil the aspirations of
the peace-loving Gandhians, the Institute is entrusted to
the care of Kalyan who is no Gandhian in his ideology.
This is a basic dichotomy found in the heart of the contem-
porary political and social situation and creatively embodied
in Nayantara Sahgal's fiction. Associated with this theme
is the one of forming and formulating the national conscious-
ness within the context of a cherished value handed down to
us by the historic struggle for Independence. Freedom from
fear, comradeship and communication, these according to
Nayantara Sahgal, create the "oxygen of understanding" which
is essential for the flourishing in Society of the humanistic
concern. In novel after novel, in terms of a creative orga-
nisation of the raw materials of art, Nayantara Sahgal shows
her concern with the themes of sacrilege and sacrifice, the
efflorescence of immaterial, non-utilitarian human values
and the stultifying materialistic values. The novels of
Nayantara Sahgal trace the convulsive moments in the growth
of modern, secular India towards a democratic and humane
society. This growth is traced novelistically in terms of
the growth towards action and maturity of the central
character. Against the backdrop of Gandhian ideology, there is an attempt in the novels to present an identity crisis both at the level of the individual in political as well as the personal realms and at the level of the society itself. Given Mayantara Sahgal's view of the relevance of a writer's commitment to his culture and her faith in the social function of literature, her novels reveal her quest for meaningful social reality and action which is one of the typical concerns of the post-Independence Indian writers. With her last two novels, Rich Like Us (1985) and Plans for Departure (1986), she has established herself as a writer who, inspite of being a political columnist, displays her growing concern with the novel as an art form apart from showing how the endangered values of faith in rationality and moderation in the political as well as personal spheres must be fought for. In articulating these concerns Sahgal offers us valuable fictional correlates of urban Indian life in a phase of both growth and transitoriness.

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