INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal has established herself among a remarkable group of women writers like Santha Rama Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and R.P. Jhabvala. A.V. Krishna Rao rightly observes thus:

An interesting aspect of the modern Indian enlightenment has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility. Women in modern India have not only shared the exciting but dangerous responsibilities of the struggle for independence but have also articulated the national impulse and the consciousness of cultural change in the realm of letters: the feminine sensibility has achieved an imaginative self-sufficiency which merits recognition in spite of its relatively late manifestation. ¹

Nayantara Sahgal gives us, a gifted raconteur that she is, a vivid picture of our country still in transition, and passing through the birth pangs of a new socio-political order. In the process she depicts, with a delicate sensivity, the intellectual and emotional upsurges in a

traditional society in the throes of change both in its psychological and moral landscape. Mayantara Sahgal's growing reputation as a novelist with a significant social purpose rests on her seven novels. These apart, she has two pieces of autobiography and numerous newspaper articles on contemporary political themes which reveal her acute concern, as a keen and sensitive political analyst with a sense of commitment, with the struggle between dedicated endeavour and the hunger for power. Belonging as she does to a family which dedicated itself to the upholding of Gandhian idealism, Mayantara Sahgal has inherited and cherished a system of values which stresses cultural catholicity stemming from a yearning for freedom and liberalism and an urge to have the humanistic concern pervade the being of man. Sahgal's awareness of the unique imprint which the early influences made on her creative choices and aspirations is evident from what she wrote while giving a self-portrait in her *Prison and Chocolate Cake*:

Our growing up was India's growing up into political maturity - a different kind of
political maturity from any the world had seen before, based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace. (p.15)

There is thus an inevitability about her choice of dramatizing the contemporary Zeitgeist. Social change can be meaningful only when the human being remains the ultimate concern. This view of Sahgal's is effectively put forth in *This Time of Morning* through Kailas who emphasises that dedication cannot be sacrificed at the altar of expediency.

In all my dealings with human beings I have discovered no magic formula for change - not as long as you consider the human mind and its willing co-operation necessary to your task ... We have made the human being the unit and measure of progress, so we can never at any stage abandon our concern with him. (p.198)

Mayaendra Sahgal's projection of the individual and national consciousness is closely inter-linked with her portrait, in fictionalized terms, of men who is the unit and measure of progress. This is where her novels are seen to be more of an artistic construct than either fictionalized autobiographies or political novels which
stand precariously on the border between fiction and non-fiction. Kamala Markandeya's *Some Inner Fury*, essentially the story of an individual caught in the vortex of socio-political forces, offers a fictional account of Kitsamy's alienation from the Indian cultural environment, and in course of doing so, it evokes a vivid picture of the Quit India Movement of 1942. Padmini Sengupta's *Red Hibiscus* and Mrs. F. Das's *Into the Sun* - to speak of the fiction from two other women - also depict the history of the Congress movement under Gandhi's leadership. But the distinction of Nayantara Sahgal lies in the fact that she makes fiction blend imaginatively with reality more especially as she proceeds towards her later novels, such that a vivid sketch in narrative terms of the socio-cultural milieu in the pre and post-Independence situation is offered. This is what Mark Schorer calls the "achieved content" which involves a form of rhythm imposed upon the world of action by means of which our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed.²

The major contribution of Nayantara Sahgal to the art of Indian fiction in English is the political novel in its present form. Sahgal's concern is not with a single political event or a set of related political events or even a predominant political trend in a state of exclusion from creative configurations. Her art does not involve documentary presentation of historical or political facts. It concerns itself with a deep and abiding faith in individual freedom and the quest for national identity. The novelistic technique in *A Time to be Happy* involves the unfolding of the theme of the quest for identity from the perspective of a self-conscious narrator, who projects a view of Sanand Shivpal's personal crisis interwoven with a view of the Satyagraha movement of 1942, the Bengal famine, and the year of India's Independence in the explication of the theme of growth and maturity. There are novels like Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan* which attempt to project the tragedy of the Partition in ruthless, down to earth terms. Maneck Malgonkar's concern in *A Bend in the Ganges* is
with two decades of Indian history beginning with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the early thirties and ending with the post-Partition riots in the Punjab. A Bend in the Ganges, as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out, is "not so much a story of the men and women as of places and episodes, not an integrated human drama but an erratic national calendar."3

K.A. Abbas' Inquilab reveals a method which is different from that of Malgonkar. In Inquilab also history is important, but not entirely in itself but as it makes its impact on individuals. Anwar's development is largely determined by events of national importance. Every major political incident of the decade between Jallianwala Bagh and the Gandhi-Irwin pact is recorded in Inquilab, but the linking thread is Anwar's involvement in each crisis. Nayantara Sahgal, on the other hand, is concerned with the reality of the contemporary

"situation" and with analysing the depravities of political, public and individual life set against the background of Gandhian sacrifice and dedication. Through a concern with this she is able to project a wider vision of the values she upholds. The political concern is placed within the framework of the humanistic concern. This Time of Morning which parallels C.P. Snow's Corridors of Power in its depiction of the centres of political power offers a vivid treatment of the inalienable freedom of the individual against the backdrop of amoral politics of power and complex ideologies and social relations. In Storm in Chandigarh there is a greater integration of theme than in the two earlier novels and the political and personal themes meet in the person of Vishal Dubey who commits himself to the value of the inviolability of the human self thereby asserting the idea of freedom as a "habit of mind or a way of life." If The Day in Shadow portrays the theme of the survival of the sensitive individual in a ruthlessly materialistic society against the background of the passing of Gandhism, A Situation in New
Delhi reveals Sahgal's uncanny understanding of individuality which does not mean rejoicing in a "crushing conformity". Usman in *A Situation in New Delhi* is truly and deeply involved in the larger issues of life and rejects the idea of progress which precludes from consideration human values. In *Rich Like Us* and *Plans for Departure* Nayantara Sahgal shows herself to be a greater weaver of plots, and with skill and imagination she presents a compassionate and perceptive picture of her passion for truth and freedom. Her major contribution, as M.N. Sarma and Jasbir Jain have noted, is the continuation of the humanistic tradition. She explores how freedom and related values are a primary need for men. Though the world of Nayantara Sahgal is limited in the sense that she confines herself to a creative rendering of the mores of the urban society in general, her narratives are in the realistic framework within which she explores man-woman relationships and the validity of traditional values. Her concept of morality, free as it is from the

limitations of conventional definitions, is also in the humanistic tradition with Vishal seeing in Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh an innocence and a chastity not related to her physical life and Simrit in The Day in Shadow attaining freedom by shedding the feeling of guilt associated with her broken marriage. Nayantara Sahgal's fictional encounters with the political and urban social reality of India belong to the mainstream of the national literature of modern India and they reflect the realistic trend of the contemporary Indian novel in English. In an article in Span, dealing with what is defined as the "poetics of engagement," Nayantara Sahgal asserts that no living literature can claim immunity from the social and political consequences and influences around it. She further says:

Fiction cannot be written as in the past. A story must have some implications for the collective fate, or be meaningless. And as for the question of whether art and other commitment can mix, has this not been answered by the creation of new forms to express new visions in music, paint and words? In emergencies above all, we realize that the
individual soul and the collective fate are integrally part of each other. The success of the mix can ultimately be judged only by the final test of any work of art: its power, and the reverberations this produces long after it is seen, heard, or read, sometimes from generation to generation.5

Nayantara Sahgal's novels do indeed possess the power and the reverberations which make an impact on the reader. This power is achieved by means of the creative comment on the milieu and by means of the expression of the spirit that is one's own in a language which is not one's own.

5Nayantara Sahgal, 'First Person Singular,' Span, 27, No.2 (Feb. 1986), p. 11.
MAYANTARA SAHGHAL'S FIRST NOVEL, A TIME TO BE HAPPY

Nayantara Sahgal's first novel, A Time to be Happy, is a fictional enactment of the growth and maturation of a young, anglicized Indian against the backdrop of India's struggle for Independence. Though none of the chief characters in the novel, except the narrator, takes part in the national movement, the story of Sanad is told with unmistakable political undertones. Sanad joins the flourishing British Textile firm, Selkirk and Lowe, in 1942, the year of the 'Quit India' movement. His marriage with Kusum coincides with the advent of India's Independence. Marital bliss eludes him until he severs his western ways and finds his roots in his own culture. In fact, the growth of Sanad Shyapal, the hero of the novel, records in fictional terms the growth of national identity. In the vivid fictionalization of the agonising self-recognition of an upper-class anglicized Indian, A Time to be Happy offers a concrete dramatization of the contemporary consciousness on diverse levels of awareness.
A Time to be Happy, as its narrator views it, is avowedly the story of Sanad - not the chronological, but the transformational story - employing the technique of the flashback. The story which begins with an account of Sanad's desire to resign his job with a British firm ends with his decision not to do so since he gets it renewed on his own terms. During the days of his vacillation, his father and brother advised Sanad against resigning his job. Before taking his decision Sanad seeks the advice of the narrator, who left his father's prosperous textile industry to become a social worker under the impact of Gandhi. In Sahgal's novels the response of a character to the events in his life is characterized by reflection and self-awareness. The past impinges on the present. Sanad's request offers scope to the narrator to relate his past and trace the genesis of his predicament.

Sanad's plight is a result of his conservative upbringing. In fact, the characters in the novel can be divided into two distinct groups: the conservative group which is suspicious of all change and refuses to be affected by the tumult of ideas around them, and those who believe
in the inevitability of change. With the exception of Sanad, the Shivpal family belongs to the first group. The narrator and the Sahais, with the exception of Madan Sahai, belong to the second group. Sanad Shivpal, who initially belongs to the first group, under an awakened conscience, finally makes his pilgrim’s progress to the second group.

Govind Narayan, the head of the Shivpal family, still lives in a feudal era with his amusing reluctance to participate in any kind of active life around him. Though he has turned instinctively to our heritage, he is an "intensely practical person." Brought up in an old, traditionally conservative mould, he "regards all change as his personal enemy, plundering his peace." This ease-loving person stays outside the national movement because participation in it would disrupt for him the normal flow of life. In his opinion, it is sensible to accept the Raj and use it to one’s own advantage.

Success in the Raj depends on social contacts. Westernization is a pre-requisite to it. Hence the Shivpal

1Nayantara Sahgal, A Time to be Happy (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1975), p.18, p.5. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
family is steeped in western mores. Sanad's uncle, Harish, apes the white man so thoroughly that it looks as if a wearied white man has transferred his burden to Harish. Except for his dark complexion there is nothing to vouch for his Indianness. Sanad's brother, Girish, is a duplicate copy of Harish. They are more British than the British. Like them Sanad too has been moulded carefully to provide him with the veneer that makes him nearly English. He belongs to what Rakesh in This Time of Morning calls, "the Goosy, Goosy Gander generation." He knows no other India. Success comes to him quite easily as it comes to other social climbers. But this type of success, in Sahgal's opinion, is of no avail since a new world is coming into existence in India.

The epoch-making struggle and the slowly evolving socio-political situation in India demand changes - both sociological and psychological. Sahgal's fictional concern is with the changing tradition of modern India. As the narrator observes, people who were alive to what was happening to India in the turbulent decades of the 30s and the
With his feudal outlook Govind Narayan belongs to the past. He tells Sanadi:

If this is the age of the common man, as you say, then I am not common enough for it, that is all. I must believe what I have always believed and live as I have always lived. (p.5)

Like Govind Narayan, Madan Sahai is "so immersed in the past that he could not face the present squarely" (p.186). They fail to see the dynamic world around them. Nationalistic impulses and Gandhi's exhortations leave them untouched. When his sons decide to take part in processions and picketings, Madan Sahai is upset by their behaviour. He tries to dissuade them. He pleads with them not to involve themselves in political matters. He tells them, "It is madness to put yourself in danger" (p.186). It represents the views of the upper class anglicized families who are content to be static, to live in "languid luxury" and to toe the line of the British. If Madan Sahai lives in the past, his sons live in the future. They cast their lot with the common man. They are ready to risk arrest. They come out of the shackles of apathy and lack of initiative which
are common to the youth of this languid, opulent society. To be static is fatal. To be dynamic is to take a higher view of culture. The children of Madan Sahai are dedicated to the pursuit of such a viewpoint.

But Sanad is alien to this culture both by his upbringing and by his western education. He is trained to be a success in the British regime in which Anglophiles cherish segregation as an accomplishment. But the dawn of freedom has ushered in, in the words of Sanad, "an age of the Common Man" (p.246). Govind Narayan, in his talk with the narrator, confesses that he is "not common enough to appreciate this approach" (p.246). He laments that there is change everywhere. He complains that Lucknow is no more a clean city for he has seen banana peels outside the very gates of Government House. The narrator and Veena, Sanad's sister, find an untidy atmosphere even at Claudette's. As the author observes in the novel, "The old ways had gone, and the new had not yet come" (p.249). In this period of transition what can the Anglophiles, who have so far been sitting in their ivory towers, do? People like Sanad are not brought up "to fit into the sort of regime the congress
is ushering in" (p.245). Mr Ivor, with his refined sentiments, is of the view that the trained civil service is the legacy the British would bequeath to Independent India to run the new regime. But people like Sanad are as much strangers to the common man as any Englishman is. If they have to serve people in Independent India, where accent is laid on the common man, a sweeping change must come in their attitude. They have to recognise the sovereignty of the common man whom they have so far been trying to shun. It is this kind of transformation in Sanad that Nayantara Sahgal is interested in depicting in this novel.

A Time to be Happy is aptly divided into three parts: the first part is about the western background of Sanad, the second about the oriental culture of Kusum and the third relates to the encounter between Sanad and Kusum. Sanad, the "Carbon copy of an Englishman" (p.235), comes to realize his alienation from his own culture and people. He chooses to find his roots, suffers agony in making this choice and finally emerges as a changed man. Sahgal here attempts to project the nation's consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of an individual. The dawn of marital bliss on Kusum and Sanad symbolises the East-West
compromise. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

The conflict between the two cultures of East and West is nowhere so obviously spelled out as in Nayantara Sahgal's first novel, *A Time to be Happy* and nowhere is the resolution so unambiguous and simple.²

But the process of artistically rendering this East-West resolution is not so simple as it appears to be and therein lies the quality of Sahgal's fictional art. Sanad Shivpal, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to the privileged class. His Englishness has been a matter of pride and prestige. Yet he is not depicted as an anglicised puppet. He differs from others who ape the westerners blindly. He possesses a vitality or restlessness which is absent in them. Even Mr Trent likes Sanad for "he has gumption to stand up to him" (p.108). He has a healthy regard for tradition. In Calcutta he goes to the parties and meets men and women of higher circle in their complete westernised life. In them he finds "a mimic uniformity that has nothing whatever to

do with our own roots" (p.96). His conscience is awa­
kenned by three incidents. The incident at Lalita
Chatterji's party is a very significant one. The opulence
within and the starvation death without makes him realize
that it is a masquerade world. There is an ugly rotting
structure underneath it. The incident in her room upsets
him completely. After that party he avoids her house as
he would avoid the plague. His avoiding her house meta-
phorically signifies his attempt to escape from the bewitch-
ing influence of the western world. Later his meeting with
Raghubir further convinces him of the artificiality of his
own position. This process of awareness is completed when
he encounters Kusum who comes from a family with the
nationalist spirit.

As M.L. Malhotra observes, "Sanad's inner turmoil
and adolescent confusions are very competently depicted"3
by Sahgal. In his talk with Mr Ivor, Sanad laments his
situation of rootlessness and alienation. He feels he is

3M.L. Malhotra, "Nayantara Sahgal: The Angry Young
Woman," in Bridges of Literature: 23 Critical Essays in
Literature, by M.L. Malhotra (Ajmer : Sunanda Publications
"midway between two worlds, not completely belonging to either" (p.151). His voyage of self-discovery has to be charted through human relations and social situations which are labyrinthine maze. He says only the peasant in the field is the true representative of India. But the gap between Sanad and the peasant is so great that they "haven't even a language in common" (p.151). Having realised his alienation, he now desires to find his identity. So in spite of his desire to go to England to see "the original" of which he is a carbon copy, he refuses to visit England:

Not till I can go as an individual instead of as the carbon copy of an Englishman. (p.235)

Sanad's sympathy for Raghubir when the latter gets wounded in the congress-organised procession is almost a psychological compulsion as it arises from his guilt complex. It is at this moment that he meets Kusum. He learns about her life, her brother, Sahdev, his participation in the freedom struggle and his death. Firmly grounded in traditional Indian culture, Kusum appears to Sanad to be a personification of the missing ingredients in his own personality. His marriage with Kusum is thus motivated by his
desire to overcome his alienation from Indian life.

Marriage alone does not automatically bring happiness in Sanad's life. Kusum's marriage with Sanad is half-way between the two worlds of orthodoxy and freedom. They are in love, but their responses are timid and tuned to conventional expectations. Moreover, their backgrounds are entirely different. The early months of their marriage are tense and unhappy. Talking about this estrangement Kusum tells the narrator, "sometimes I feel Sanad and I are so far apart. I'm so awkward in his world" (p.243). But they are genuinely interested in overcoming their difficulties. They have a will to understand each other and save their marriage. It needs a bit of exploring of each other's world. Sanad decides "I must become familiar with my country" (p.271) and he desires "to discover my country a little" (p.269), and thus wants to redress the balance. Alienation necessitates the sentimentalisation of the objects one has been alienated from. In the case of Sanad it has become an obsession to know the people. Apart from marrying Kusum, through her, he tries to come close to the people by learning Hindi and spinning.
In the process of acquiring self-awareness, as Asmani observes, Sanad "shows signs of tremendous development." He grows out of mere adolescent fancy for aping the western way of life into a staunch supporter of Indian values and Indian way of life. Besides regaining his roots, he staunchly defends his learning of Hindi and spinning. Mr. Trent considers Sanad's behaviour a temporary sensationalism and quite unbecoming of his position in the firm. Then Sanad defends his action and says the traditions established in the firm during the past century cannot hold good for ever. He goes to the extent of saying the firm must change its traditions and keep abreast of the changing trends of the country if it is going to serve any purpose in Independent India. Sanad is no longer puzzled and uncertain about his future. Instead of resigning his job, he gets the contract renewed on his terms. As Prof. A.V. Krishna Rao observes, this final decision of Sanad is highly significant as "it bridges symbolically the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the cultures of the East and the West, at the end of the novel."
Nayantara Sahgal is concerned with the plight of an estranged individual in the changed socio-political conditions of India in the aftermath of Independence. Sanad who is brought up to be a success in British India finds the western pattern slowly slipping away. He tells Mr. Trent that all Indians who, like him, cultivated the western gloss and veneer would soon find themselves belonging to a "hollow race." The recounting of his past life through the flash-back technique is meant to illustrate the genesis of Sanad's predicament. This story is seen through the point of view of a serene Gandhian social worker. Besides presenting the socio-political milieu of the time and the cross currents at work, this contrast of cultures makes Sanad's alienation quite evident and his transformation significant. In this story, as Mary Ross observes, "politics enters only as they bear on the lives of the characters."

Thus in spite of M.N. Sarma's observation that

A Time to be Happy is an "immature work" the novel shows a subtle interweaving of the post-Independence political situation and the questions of selfhood and nationality which it raises.

The freedom struggle brings only political freedom but not individual freedom - at least to those who, like Sanad, still look up to the West. In this regard, the opening paragraphs of the novel clarify the author's point of view. Sharampur symbolises the spirit of India - a slowly changing one on which the incongruous and absurd English culture is "superimposed." It stands for the values and attitudes that Nayantara Sahgal herself upholds in the novel. Writing thus about Sharampur, Sahgal gives us an image of the incongruity and absurdity of the superimposition of the English culture on the Indian soil and Culture:

The 'Englishness' had been a matter for pride and prestige. It had meant so much in the old days ... It might have been appropriate in Bombay or Calcutta where city life had drawn the English and the Indians together in a curious

mixture of modernity, but here in the U.P., the heart of India, where men still greet one another with 'Ram Ram,' where the carved images of many-armed gods and goddesses reign over the countryside on festival days, where 'Divali' is still a blaze of earthen lamps, the 'Englishness' had only seemed fantastic. (pp. 1-2)

Sahgal's choice of locale is very significant. She does not merely confine it to the geographical centre; she infuses it with the power of participating in the action in a symbolic way. The very environment of the club symbolizes the exclusive nature of the Britishers. But after Independence the club is thrown open to the Indians and the British have to rub shoulders with the natives. The club symbolizes the need for such changes throughout the country.

A more healthy approach is exhibited by Veena Shivpal. She takes kindly to the changes in the transitional period. Since transition can never be smooth, Veena says, instead of condemning it or gloating over it one must try to understand it. Veena tries to understand it, "Not by tying myself into knots about it as Sanad does," as she says, "nor by behaving as though I were an
Englishman marooned among savages, like Girish" (p. 250). She feels proud of her country and is willing to accept the changed circumstances. Living in Delhi, the young capital of new India with all its crowding "refugees and flies," excites her like one's own child even if it is ugly. Veena represents real service in its purest form, born of love.

The entire "hollow race" must change like Sanad. Then they can face complexities with confidence. They can usher in what Mc Iver calls "the Universal Culture." Then political freedom and personal freedom can form a unity. Only that ushers in a time to be happy about.

G.P. Sarma's charge that there is no happy fusion of the political and the social aspects in the novel is untenable. Had Sanad been born at a different time and not in that transitional period, his life would have been eventless. The tensions of the transitional period are put to creative use in the novel.

The impact of western education is discernible in the minor characters too. Harish has no resemblance to the British either by his tradition or by his intrinsic
temperament. Yet except his dark complexion there is nothing Indian about him. His marriage with Maya who hails from a traditional background sows seeds of potential conflict. Maya's utter loneliness makes her unapproachable. Lack of communication has completely alienated the couple. Maya does not hanker after trinkets, which women normally expect: 'What she wants is a recognition of her existence:

Not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even whether we live or die is not important unless it is important to someone. (p.68)

The East-West encounter disrupts their marital bliss and turns Maya into an "apathetic wife" and "a slab of marble." Her unhappiness is symbolised by her childless marriage. Her marriage is like a "sterile," "exotic" bloom without any fragrance. With his hila sahib ways, Harish, a typical "brown bureaucrat" is presented, with an undercurrent of irony, as more English than Englishmen themselves. His snobbishness is a source of endless entertainment. But later he evokes pathos when, with the advent of Independence, a shotiwalla, whose tribe he always hated and kept at arm's
length, suddenly becomes his boss. The novel, in fact, describes the process by which Sanad saves himself from such a pathetic life.

Girish is a duplicate copy of Harish. Under his influence his wife, Devaki, is completely westernized. There is an awry change in her. Like Lalita Chatterji she merely adopts the facade of modernity without any corresponding change in her viewpoint on any of the significant issues of life. In her we find not the essence of freedom but the trappings of freedom. It is revealed through the ironical comment on her hair. The long hair was cut to fashionable length. "She was pretty, but she looked like anybody else" (p.105). Her bobbed hair neither adds to her beauty nor asserts her individuality. Instead of making her find her identity, this change has simply rolled her into an enormous mass of anonymity. It is a pity that this "brave girl," after marriage, has shown less awareness than Maya. Harilel Methur, "the black Englishman" suffers from inferiority complex. During his stay in England, his desire for recognition found vent in magnanimous gestures, extravagant spending and weakness for
silver blondes. The Renos - Sir Ronu with his vast wealth, and Lady Ronu with her seductive charm - belong to the same group. Yet no one is caricatured or grotesqued, not even when Nayantara Sahgal employs her sense for amused detachment, in the delineation of Ammaji and her son, Harish. As Shyam Asnani observes, the novelist's "talen
temps comedy with sympathy and illuminates stupidity with understanding. The dramatic strength of the novel springs from Nayantara Sahgal's portrayal of the way the upper class Indians live and from the fact that even the most withdrawn of them is deeply implicated in the historic changes shaping their lives. On one level the novel is a charming and intimate chronicle. On another, it is a comedy of manners. But the novel is so over-populated that most of the characters are surface characters; they fail to emerge as individuals. However, this range of character portrayal makes it possible to emphasize the central problem - that of adjustment to changes in society. As M.L. Malhotra points out these minor characters are of "consid-

rable interest, whose excision from the novel, though artistically justified would detract from its total charm."

A *Time to be Happy* is the only novel in which Sahgal uses the omniscient first person narrative. The unfolding of the story in the first person is seen to be one of the most effective narrative devices. Besides being an eye-witness to the incidents, the narrator is actively involved in the destiny of the central character. Thus he is gifted with a double-edged perspective on the happenings and episodes in the novel. That he is a Gandhian social worker offers justification for bringing in the political struggles of the period into the novel. With his multi-dimensional personality, easy, happy-go-lucky style of narration and rather intimate associations with the various persons in the story, the narrator offers an appropriate point of view. His serenity and wisdom act as filters through which the agonies and trials of youth are perceived with an amused detachment. This accounts for

the leisurely, sprawling narrative and the absence of any urgency and tension in the central character. But as M.N. Sarma thinks this witness-narrator should have exploited such possible complexities as tonal shifts and ironic suggestions.

The narrator's job is to record the confessions of the hero in a definite order. He digresses here and there and apologises directly to the reader. He brings in his own history pleading, "it is difficult to avoid the subject of oneself altogether in any account written in first person" (p.75). As in K. Nagarajan's The Chronicles of Kedaram, in Mayanta Sahgal's A Time to be Happy we come across a self-conscious narrator who takes the reader into his confidence about the difficulty of his task. He makes Thackeray-like pauses to consult the "dear reader" or to confess his short-comings.

At times, as in the incident with Maya, this observer-narrator gets emotionally involved. Meenakshi Mukherjee objects to this on the ground that it blurs the focus and says:
This indicates a definite confusion in technique because the narrator's love for Maya contributes nothing to the total design of the novel and has no relation to Sanad Shyam's personal crisis which avowedly is what the novel is about.\(^{10}\)

Meenakshi Mukherjee's statement that the novel is avowedly about Sanad's personal crisis says less than needs to be said about *A Time to Be Happy*. The novel is about the challenge that a changing society poses. The characters help to project different approaches to life and its problems. In this novel the focus is on the new class structure emerging in the post-Independent India where old values are called in question and new loyalties are being evolved.

While the East-West encounter in the case of Sanad brings him into the fold of traditional Indian culture, this awareness must work in the direction of an emancipated attitude in the case of women. They must learn that what is required is not the burial of the self, but its awakening.

Maya wants to be recognised as an individual. But there is no corresponding response from her husband. It distresses her. She becomes incommunicative. The narrator and Maya suddenly realize that communication is possible between them, that they are in love. But Maya is quick in accepting reality when she realizes that marriage ties are indissoluble. Divorce or extramarital relationship is quite unimaginable to her. Maya’s newly awakened love finds fulfilment in social work. She tries for self-realisation within the bounds of marriage and through social work. In this desire for self-realisation Maya is the forerunner of Mayantara Sahgal’s later heroines.

By the end of the novel if Sanad is still resolute it is no longer due to obstinacy, but because of his conviction. He feels a unity of being with the peasant. The narrator’s participation in the Satyagraha movement colours his whole viewpoint and makes it possible for characters like Sohan Bai, Kunti Behen and Khadi-clad social workers to appear in a novel dealing mostly with the upper classes of the society. Maya asserts her self which has achieved
identity with the Indian soil and its concerns through
social work. Thus social concern becomes a symbol of
a way of life, where duty is more important than personal
happiness. Like Tagore and Saratchandra, Nayantara Sahgal
extends and enriches the Indian creative tradition stressing
the significance of the humanistic and social concern.

Nayantara Sahgal's choice of the backdrop of India's
struggle for Independence helps her to bring together the
man, the moment and the milieu paving the way for a symbo-
lic bridging of the gulf between the East and the West.
The final stress on the idea that happiness consists in
being free rounds off the action of the novel bringing
about an intertwining of the socio-political themes and
the quest for identity.