CHAPTER - 8

SUMMATION
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According to Roger Sharrock, a Poet is "not a camera but a consciousness".¹ This observation can be applied to a novelist as well. The novels of Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai are not photographs of life but projection of life as perceived and transformed by the novelist's imagination. The two novelists appear to be modernist. They dramatise actions in which the self, the family and society are sometimes in conflict and sometimes in harmony.

In the novels of Anita Desai, familial disharmony results in a kind of self-alienation which forces the protagonists to search for an emotional centre within, which they can cling to in times of difficulties. Voices in the City presents the inner disharmony in Nirode's family which is the result of his mother's "misbehaviour". His frankness makes his friends unhappy and he begins to feel that he lives in a hostile society. Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain has an identical state of feeling. Bye – Bye, Black bird converges on the theme of Indians abroad and shows that even those Indians who live abroad suffer from a sense of isolation. Cry, the Peacock is Maya's effort to discover some meaning in her

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life. An oppressive sense of fatality hovers the whole narrative. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* marriage and marital harmony and disharmony are brought to a central force. In *Clear Light of Day* Bimla's self is wounded by the callous behaviour of her parents and her brother. In *Custody* is also a re-creation of the problems and the agonies of the wounded self. *The Village by the Sea* is significant in the sense that there is a sense of hope and capacity for endurance which children show in times of crisis. "Anita Desai's narratives not only give shape to separateness and connectedness that emerge from a family saga, but dramatize the way in which the self receives wounds, which are either aggravated or healed by the socio-cultural matrix, which is its soil and sustenance."²

Writing in *The Statesman*, Nayantara Sahgal expresses her view of the function of literature. It involves a writer's commitment to a 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

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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.3

The quotation cited above shows how Nayantara Sahgal's novels tend to be rooted firmly in the socio-political milieu of India. The values in a state of clash in her novels are Gandhian ideology and the aggressive rise of materialistic self-interest. In other words, the theme of social change having a bearing on the line, according to a set of values, is one of the novelistic preoccupations of Nayantara Sahgal. She follows the canons of realism in depicting this theme. She further orients her fictionalisation to a showing forth of the quest for truth, for the assertion of humane self and for freedom. She makes a plea through her novels for the "oxygen of understanding" to inform communication and promote comradeship and freedom from fear.

Her novel A Time to be Happy offers a fictional enactment of the expectations roused in the people by the advent of freedom. In an incongruous situation of the English culture superimposed upon traditional Indian culture, Sanad

Shivpal struggles to find his identity. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand who concentrates upon direct message giving, Nayantara Sahgal shows a concern for achieving some aesthetic distancing. *This Time of Morning* is a sociological study of urban characters in contemporary India, as Kai Nicholson has pointed out: "a sociological study of urban characters in contemporary India". But it presents a yearning for freedom which is the typical technique of Nayantara Sahgal to make fiction, image her perspective of the society in India. As K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar points out, *This Time of Morning* can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English. In the words of Prof. K.R. Srinivasan 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."

From the foregoing analysis, a few points emerge. Nayantara Sahgal seems to write novels largely for the rest of audience. The dominant feature of her style is that of the contemporary journalism, but this sort of style is not

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evocative. There seems to be a lack of feeling, a lack of commitment in her characters. Without conviction, they seem to drift as the situation dictates. But in spite of this, the novels are interesting, readable and are valuable because they present a credible picture of what the country is and how it is shaking.