Chapter Five

Summation

Nayantara Sahgal belongs to a generation of writers whose childhood days fall within the colonial period. Though her creativity as a literary persona continues till the present, Sahgal’s work has been critiqued and evaluated from different perspectives – as a feminist, as a political writer as a writer of social documentaries and as an advocate of Gandhian ideologies. But none of these frames are adequate to evaluate Sahgal’s works. There is a need to place these works within the larger contexts of history and the process of decolonization. Though she resists being placed in categories like colonial or post-colonial, it is not possible to avoid the use of such terms as she has lived through these stages and has captured the political scene from the 40’s to the 70’s with an uncanny understanding of the undercurrents, of the processes at work and of the men and women who have been at the helm of affairs.

Like the novels of Mulk Raj Anand whose shape is determined largely by their involvement with the history and politics of pre-independent India, Sahgal’s novels weave aspects of India’s social, political and cultural history into their narrative framework and subject them to a close critical examination. As R.K. Narayan’s focus is on Malgudi with its wealth of characters and history, Sahgal gives us the equally small if far more powerful world of wealth and
power; not the imaginary world but the real one of which she had a chance of observing at close quarters.

Nayantara Sahgal’s literary work spans nearly five decades with her first work, an autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake* appearing in 1954 and her first novel *A Time To Be Happy* in 1958. She has covered her life, memories of her childhood, her parents, her grandparents and the early years of Gandhian India in her autobiographies namely *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), *From Fear Set Free* (1962) and in her letters *Relationship: Extracts from a Correspondence* (1994).

Three of her early novels *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) are autobiographical as far as they build on her own emotional experiences and conflicts. But they are also political as they capture the political happenings and environment of the newly independent India, the changing face of bureaucracy, the shifting value structures and loyalties. Her fifth novel *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) marks a break with autobiography and concerns itself with the nature of power and political governance. The new leadership is obsessed with the idea of progress and development and has abandoned all concern for human beings. The novel clearly captures the unrest prevalent among the student community and in the country as a whole during the 70s and 80s, because of economic disparities, social inequalities and the non-involvement of the upper classes in nation-building activities.

The later three novels published between 1985 and 1988 are different from her earlier work as they move away from the present political events to the
early decades of twentieth century. *Rich Like Us* (1985) begins with the National Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and moves back to the nineteenth century through the personal life history of Sonali and Rose. *Plans for Departure* is concerned with the years of 1912 to 1918 and *Mistaken Identity* with 1929-1932 and the novels focus on interpreting the complex cultural formations of these periods within a historical framework. Her latest novel *Lesser Breeds* (2003) tries to prove the validity of Gandhian ideals, especially non-violence, to install sanity in the present age of technology. It marks a different trend from the earlier novels. In totality her novels present a history of the processes of decolonization, beset with the crisis in humanistic values which stood discredited once they came to be placed outside power structures. There is a tension in all her work between two oppositional discourses – one of humanism which calls for consideration, compassion and reaching out to others and the other of power which is spurred on by aggressive ruthlessness in pursuit of its goals.

Sahgal like a majority of her other contemporaries, went through the western system of education, governesses at home, an English medium school (Woodstock, Mussourie) and four years at Wellesley in America. The education system, a gift of Macaulay’s *Minutes* of 1835, was designed at alienating the student from his background. This sense of alienation is described by Sahgal as the “schizophrenic imagination” divided as one was between the alien language and system of thought which represented power and the claims of the political and cultural reality prevalent at home. Sahgal also investigates the cultural consequences of the Indo-British connection and the changes in the Indian identity, as they assimilate the colonizer’s culture and language without giving up
their home grown culture. Thus Sahgal is gifted with a cross-cultural vision and schizophrenic imagination.

Nayantara Sahgal’s singular most achievement is her perceptive depiction of the political scene. M.K. Bhatnagar’s tribute to her as a political novelist in *Modern Indian English Novel* is that she could sense and show the danger in the new trend, years before the country had actually experienced such a trend. The political situation in India at present proves her prediction right. The quarrel over boundaries, sharing of water and electric power with the neighbouring states, the popularisation of separatist movement, the mushroom growth of terrorist movements like naxalites, maoists etc, the narrow sensitive issues raised by the caste based political parties and their narrow minded leaders create a positive hell in the political arena of India.

Sahgal acknowledges the Gandhian dream of democracy and nation building from the bottom up, throwing the lime light on the villages and striving to create a welfare state for the weakest and poor slowly disappeared in the post-independent era. Under Nehru, a secular approach was combined with a developmentalist idea of the nation. The post-independent India’s development was focussed on economic line followed by an inevitable social change. Gandhian nation building was planned in the Indian way whereas Nehruvian nation building proceeded along secular and developmental lines in English way. Sahgal’s stand with regard to the nation’s development is both Gandhian and Nehruvian. She supports some ideas of Gandhiji as she feels human beings and their well being should not be sacrificed in the name of progress and
development. At the same time, she supports Nehru’s socialist principles to build a New India.

Sahgal’s novels reveal the fact that the class that came to identify most closely with Nehru’s secular ideology was the English speaking upper middle class elite, that had stood the most to gain from the state-planned economic development; mostly the industrialist and bureaucrats received license permits from the Indian government. Nehru’s land reform to put an end to feudal landholdings and redistribute land among the poorer tenants didn’t succeed as the rich land owners helped the Congress to emerge as a strong political party influencing the votes of their poor tenants to Congress.

Sahgal mentions in *Rich Like Us* how Indira Gandhi’s proclamation of National Emergency in 1975, attempted to find an authoritarian solution to the nation’s existing problems with little success. During this period all civil liberties were suspended and censorship was imposed on the press. Emergency succeeded in welcoming the capitalistic invasion of foreign companies eroding the secularist and democratic norms of Indian politics. During this period, majority of the writers remained silent, whereas Sahgal was frank in establishing her anti-establishment views. She wrote letters to the Authors Guild of India, protesting against the censorship and suspension of civil liberties. She resigned membership of the Executive committee of the Guild, when the Guild refused to put on record a protest against checks on freedom of expression. Her friends warned her that she was “marching out of step” and would be arrested on MISA one day, but Sahgal was not cowed down by these threats.
To Sahgal the Emergency was seen as an attempt to find an authoritarian solution to the problem of inducing political consent in a period of great fragmentation and lack of support for the Prime Minister. According to Prakash Chandra Upodhyaya in “The Politics of Indian Secularism”, Emergency rule undermined the existing structures of popular democracy from which secularism derived its nominal legitimacy. During Emergency, there was a definite erosion of secularist and democratic norms in Indian politics in the 1980s. National Emergency was canonized as a critical event by Salman Rushdie in his *Midnight’s Children*, by Rohinton Mistry in *A Fine Balance* and by Nayantara Sahgal in *Rich Like Us*. In *Midnight’s Children*, the ever-widening split between state authority and the people including representatives in opposition parties, labour unions and other organizations, occurs as an allegory in the magician’s ghetto, the place where the narrator Saleem finds a home after losing his family and fighting in the Pakistani army. The resistance to monolithic Indian identity which left little space for other identities – especially Muslims, is represented in the novel by the multifarious group of midnight’s children, who were channelled into a single Indian identity.

*A Fine Balance* uses realism to present a political critique of the Emergency, portrayed as a period of great suffering for the lower castes and the dispossessed. In this novel, there is a sense that the efforts of the Indian developmental state have not delivered the promises of independence. Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* is a critique levelled against Indira Gandhi’s claim that her declaration of Emergency was intended primarily to assist her in alleviating the poverty of the masses and ensuring that the poor could fully participate in the
human rights conferred on them by the Indian constitution. But in reality it was a period in which even the fundamental rights of the people and press were threatened, leading to an autocratic regime.

Economic liberalization and manipulation of communal issues became the policy of the Congress in the 1980s. The end of the eighties was the beginning of the era of globalization in which the sovereignty of nation states has declined and modes of exchange operate with increasing ease and speed across national boundaries producing configurations of power that exceed the boundaries of nation-state. Globalization is linked to the broader history of modernity and the inequalities produced and reproduced in capitalism and colonialism. The impact of globalization on literature is manifold with positive and negative association. The theme of hybridity multi-rootedness, and cultural clashes are increasingly prevalent in the literary texts.

If anything seems to characterize globalization at the turn of the century, it is the phenomenon of the extraordinary and accelerating movement of peoples throughout the world. The increasing refugee crisis in every western country is just one manifestation of the long-standing circulation of peoples in what Edward Said has called “the voyage in”. Diaspora does not simply refer to this movement but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home that such movement produces. Many writers including Indians, address the complex issues of identity, subjectivity and exile, of the cultural engagement, exchange, assimilation and circulation in their literary texts.

But according to Sahgal many of these diasporic writers who live in the west are not affected by the several turmoils and rough winds assailing India.
They are so removed from their country men, physically and psychologically, that they are unable to portray Indians or the texture of their daily life. For James Clifford, the diasporic writers establish a new world order of mobility, of rootless histories and the paradox of global culture is that it is “at home” with this mobility, rather than in a particular place.

Salman Rushdie’s words in *Imaginary Homeland* seem to give an apt reply to Sahgal’s queries when he says that writers like him, the emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim the past. When he wanted to write his past childhood experience in Mumbai, he was in North London. From London, he had to imagine his homeland, and his India was only one version of the million possible versions.

Unlike Rushdie’s, Sahgal’s identity crisis is the result of the East-West encounter and the collision of cultures with the establishment of hegemony in British India. The impact of colonization and the deprival of dignity had maimed and scarred the Indian psyche. At the same time it had aroused the Indians to anger, admiration and imitation of the British culture too. Love and hate, opposition and friendship, rejection and adoption could all engage the same human heart and create a complex Indian identity. It is this “fractured psyche” and ambivalent post-colonial identity that Sahgal’s protagonists experience in her novels.

As a writer, Sahgal feels that her roots are in India. Her writings are proof of her Indian sensibility. Yet her contact with America has given her a duality of vision. She is able to observe the Americans and Indians in the same manner. She does not extol the virtue of monoculture. She doesn’t glorify the west nor the
east. She remains balanced and objective in the cross-cultural interaction since what one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests and a value people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individuals and nations.

Before Independence, Sahgal was able to experience the contrasting cultures from close quarters in British India. Cultural dualism forms the matrix of her vision. Through cross-cultural interaction she is able to explore human relationship and portray the Indians and westerners laying bare both the strengths and weaknesses of both cultures. In her first two novels *A Time to be Happy* and *This Time of Morning*, the complexities of the Indo-British encounter are analysed with discrimination. She dramatizes its effect on the institutional framework of the country which in her view is of key importance for understanding the turn of events in post-independence times because it passed on, virtually without any significant change, from the colonial set-up into the administrative machinery of free India. After independence, the elite Congress leaders perceived themselves as the rightful heirs to the British government and not to Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi represented the subaltern masses as they couldn’t represent themselves. Gandhiji’s dictum of Indians as homogeneous was not accepted by the masses entirely. They wished for narrow sensitive identities based on their own community/caste/religion etc., which endangered the homogenous Indian identity of Gandhiji. Gandhiji’s notion of national identity of Indians is predicted on what Gayatri Spivak terms ‘chromatism’ or basing on skin colour.

Sahgal has described India in her later novels like *Storm in Chandigarh. The Day in Shadow* and in *A Situation of New Delhi* as a uniform piece of
territory breaking into a welter of separate, sensitive identities, resurrected by the neo-colonial politicians for selfish purposes. *Rich Like Us* describes how during Emergency foreign companies succeeded in entering into India, eroding democracy and making it meaningless. Sahgal describes the long distance the country has travelled from Gandhian ideology to global materialism. Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi are constructed as polarized opposites in *Rich Like Us*. The novel suggests that Gandhi, knowing the poor people’s wants and needs, was the true leader of the poor, while Indira Gandhi, seeking only her own and her son’s glorification was a false leader. Her politics of the poor only reinforced the already-existing class structures, keeping the poor in their traditional place, on the underside of power, while helping the rich to hoard wealth.

According to Sahgal, the modern Indian politicians are neo-colonialists and globalization is a reincarnation of the old myth of colonialism where essential power in the shape of finance and industry, armaments and technology is still controlled by the west. There is an unwritten agreement between the modern politicians and multinational corporate giants which use the third world lands as dumping grounds for toxic waste and brook no interference in the capture of markets. Sonali in *Rich Like Us* is demoted and shunted out of Delhi when she interferes in power politics. Sahgal reveals the powerlessness of the ordinary, in front of the giant machinery of politics, which opens its mouth wide to swallow the helpless “good Samaritans” easily, leaving no trace of them.

Sahgal’s novels deal with the hegemonic relationship in politics, society and family. Man-woman relationship, which is in its essence a power relationship is dealt almost in all her novels which are women-centred. Women have been
subjugated both by traditional culture and social attitudes. Feminine virtue is defined through adherence to norms – to the norms of patriarchy. Sahgal in her novels deals with women placed in different situations facing different kinds of oppression. Her women are not career women, except Sonali in *Rich Like Us*. They belong to the educated elite society, where conflict arises not due to financial crisis but rather due to marked differences of attitude.

Sahgal’s women ask for space for themselves as they contest primitive patriarchal attitudes of men. Men want to possess not only their present but also their past and future. Sahgal’s women in their fight against patriarchy, take a flight from the virtuous stereotype and virgin bride role prescribed by the ancient myths. Sahgal clearly depicts politically it is a world in which it is all right for a man to have a multiple relationship before or after marriage, whereas it is not all right for women to have pre-marital or extra-marital relationship. Women should be monogamous, not only within marriage but also before and after, in childhood and widowhood which moulds their whole existence to the dominant male principle.

Sahgal does not agree that sexual morality is gender-based. The chastity and virtue, Sahgal endows to her women characters are courage and freedom; freedom to be oneself, the value which Sahgal cherished much. Women were conditioned from the cradle to accept the patriarchal norms without questioning. Such women were good role models and were respected in the society as chaste. Sahgal has portrayed a large number of relationships of married and unmarried people of different generations. In her earlier novels arranged marriages which stand on the solid rock of compatibility, in spite of the little disturbances, are
described. For example, the marriages of Govind Shivpal and Lakshmi in *A Time to Be Happy*, and Kailas and Mira in *This Time of Morning*. Sahgal also brings in rich sexuality, male indulgence and the possibility of love for a man other than the husband, as it happens in the case of Maya and the narrator in *A Time to Be Happy*, but both are tied by social codes to take any other decision. Sahgal depicts characters like Uma with adulterous relationship, bringing a permanent shame to her husband Arjun. Women like Rashmi (*Morning*), Gowri (*Storm*) and Mara (*Storm*) have short lived affairs with other men without any uneasiness. Similarly Devi’s fulfilling relationship with Michael and Usman reveals that physical expression is needed even in widowhood by women though traditional norms are against it. Sahgal’s stand on women and female sexuality and the concern with a woman’s right to her body is both unconventional and subversive.

From amongst her early contemporaries of the fifties – Kamala Markandaya, Santha Rama Rau and Attia Hosain, she can be singled out in relating to the issue of sex, to individual freedom and the desire to free a woman from being treated as a possession.

Nayantara Sahgal is against the custom of stigmatizing a divorced woman. In *The Day in Shadow* she problematises this. Simrit and Som are unable make their marriage work due to their different preferences and attitudes. Simrit allows herself to be exploited and bears the burden like a beast. Sahgal is against such women who bear patiently their difficulties with an “enduring passivity”. *Rich Like Us* presents multiple women of different generations – the great grandmother who commits Sati, the Kashmiri mother who is dominant over her Maharashtrian husband who is gentle and receding, Rose who knowingly walks
into a second marriage but does not betray her ideals, Mona who resists her husband’s second marriage in her own way, by trying to commit suicide, Nishi who submits to Dev because she comes from a many daughtered family. To all these women, marriage is once for life and it is better to remain within marriage safe and secure. Sonali who is an IAS officer remains unmarried till the end. Her love and physical expression of it with Ravi Kachru is free of any guilt. However, Sahgal doesn’t romanticize motherhood like other women writers. Other than Saroj’s obsession with her “flutter” in Storm in Chandigarh, nowhere do we find Sahgal glorifying motherhood. Raj’s reference to Simrit’s children as “litter” in The Day in Shadow shows Sahgal is far from romanticizing motherhood.

Human beings are moulded by different forces which act on their characters. The different forces are religion, culture, upbringing, education, experience and power (presence or absence of it). Religion especially plays a very important role as all religions share a basic faith in human values and the primacy of moral life directed towards goodness. But in practice the stress on religious identity creates barriers, and leads to intolerance, hatred and division and the closing-in of the mind. It becomes a major agent of aggression as different religions confront each other in the national space. Sahgal’s novels contain characters who are moulded by religio-cultural forces and its influence on their attitudes and mental make-up, is described by the novelist. Those who have to fight for their survival acquire a fighting instinct and they tend to sideline human concerns as men like Kalyan Sinha (Morning) and Gayan Singh (Storm).

When ruthlessness and efficiency are combined in a man, he becomes more appealing than men in whom goodness and passivity form the character.
Kalyan Sinha and Gayan Singh are the powerful politicians, aggressive and ruthless, who are born poor but make their way up in the world of politics by their strong sense of self, energy and drive which easily make them powerful like Milton’s Satan in Paradise Lost. The readers are able to see the dangers and attractions of these characters against much sensitive calm and intelligent Gandhians like Harpal Singh (Storm) and Kailas (Morning). In both the characters, it is their environment and brought-up which make them powerful and appealing.

Religion is a major concern in Sahgal’s works. Debates on religious issues are embedded in her novels. Religion is of importance because it spills over into our cultural attitudes, governs our actions and marks our identity. Men act in accordance to their beliefs. So Sahgal feels one’s religio-cultural background has a strong stay in their character. The pervasive influence of Hinduism is seen in A Time to Be Happy, when the narrator explains the concept of “Karma” to McIvor and when Kailas explains to Rakesh about the “loftiest metaphysics” in This Time of Morning. In the discussion between Vishal Dubey and Trivedi about the traditional tasks of Brahminism and the inspiration of its ethical text The Bhagawad Gita reveals the novelist’s faith in Hinduism. At the same time, Sahgal is not blind to its shortcomings. Kalyan Sinha (Morning) feels the Hindus are stagnating in turgid waters. Dubey feels (Storm) that the Hindus need a tearing up from their roots. In The Day in Shadow the passivity and casteism of Hinduism is critiqued and doubts are raised whether it can meet the demands of modern age.
Sahgal gives equal space to other religious characters in her novels. Christianity is identified with western culture and the foreign characters who appear in her novels are Christians. Neil Berensen (Morning), Michael Calvert (Situation) and Rose (Rich) make a positive impact as they are honest and dynamic in human relationship, respecting others’ freedom and treating them equally. Rose’s compassion to the poor limbless beggar seems to have come from the strength of Christianity. Islam first appears in A Situation in New Delhi, where Usman is the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. A follower of Shivraj, Usman is not merely an idealist but a dynamic person eager to fulfil his mission as an educationist. He tries to implement an education plan to bring about a social change which is not approved in the parliament. He doesn’t sit and brood over the failure but rather takes a decisive action, to resign and lead the students in their demonstration. Sahgal in her novels stresses the idea that religio-cultural ideas mould one’s character, and evolve a set a values like compassion, tolerance and integrity which are needed both in the personal and the public world – in the personal world to create a good living relationship and in the public to develop policies and implement ideas for the development of the nation.

Sahgal chose to write the language of the erstwhile colonizer for as she says in “The Testament of an Indo-Anglian Writer”, that she is an Indian by blood but western by the virtue of her English-medium education. She chose to write in English because she had the reading and preference for it over a large number of years and it was natural for her to express her thoughts in English. But articulating Indian sensibility in a foreign medium was a challenge to all Indian English writers, which Sahgal took fearlessly. Sahgal’s style is elegant and
graceful, polished and refined, for it is something which comes from inside though it bears the subtle influences of writers she admired.

Sahgal follows the flashback technique, as the scenes move from the present to the past and vice versa. This technique is adopted from her first novel *A Time to Be Happy* in which the story oscillates between pre-independent and post-independent India. The story is narrated by a middle aged bachelor Gandhian, who slips into the past, in nostalgia. In *This Time of Morning* and in her other novels, the novelist assumes the form of an omniscient narrator, thereby establishing a close link with characters and situations which are revealed through his eyes. Though the main protagonist is Rakesh, there are many characters in the story claiming the readers’ attention like Kailas, Rashmi, Kalyan Sinha etc., and the story is peopled with the elite circle of Delhi, its rich businessmen, ministers and bureaucrats. *Storm in Chandigarh* too abounds in flashback techniques of Vishal Dubey recollecting his unhappy married life while Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh recollect their past, through flashback, revealing how their present status in politics is an outcome of their past life. The impact of the Partition of 1947 is well brought out by the juxtaposition of the two characters Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh. The former has turned tough and exploits the new situation for his own ends while the latter has metamorphosed into a more human individual.

*A Day in Shadow* has two levels of plot structure, one is that of the courageous woman Simrit, fighting her way out of a broken marriage while the other is of the life-styles of politicians, business magnates, journalists and bureaucrats. The inner struggle of Simrit which hinders her from compromising
with her husband’s male chauvinism occupies much space in the novel. Though Som, Simrit’s husband is westernised and modern, he is orthodox in expecting his wife to be submissive and docile. The flashback technique is adopted here and there while Simrit recalls her early married life with Som.

The structural design of *A Situation in New Delhi* is not complicated. The novel depicts India’s suffering after the tragic demise of its beloved Prime Minister Shivraj. Devi, Shivraj’s sister finds herself a fish out of water in the new and valueless situation. Rishad, her son also joins the Naxalite group to bring about a social revolution by violence. The “situation” in New Delhi resulting out of the death of the Prime Minister Shivraj is emptiness, hopelessness and violence. The situation in the university campus of New Delhi reveals the hopelessness and violence of the students. The present situation is compared to the glorious past with Shivraj’s clean administration and Devi’s emotional relationship with Michael Calvert follows the back step movement. Though there are frequent back and forth movements, the consistency and coherence in totality of the plot is maintained by the novelist.

Sahgal’s novel *Rich Like Us* is a perfect sample of her narrative technique and her expertise in handling plots, sub plots and characters. The incidents are arranged against the backdrop of Emergency and the oppression arising thereby. Nayantara Sahgal chooses a very effective narrative device for the authentic portrayal of the contemporary socio-political chaos – the double perspective. The omniscient author’s stance is alternated by the first person narrator’s (Sonali) view points. Sonali and Rose (the British wife of an Indian businessman) belong
to two different classes and races, but both serve as the author’s mouth-piece in voicing the disenchantment with post-independence developments in India.

Sahgal’s literary journey from her first novel to her latest creation reveals her increasing linguistic competence. In her works she employs stylistic devices like metaphor, simile, compound words or hyphenated expressions and vernacular words to facilitate effective descriptions. Sahgal makes competent use of the English language due to her exposure to it right from her childhood. The lucidity of the English language seems so impressive that it appears natural to her as her own mother tongue. Foreign expressions like *Joice de Vivre* and *Savoir-faire* and a number of words of Indian origin derived from Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and Hindi are used as a part of her style.

Nativization of the English language and the novelistic form to accommodate the native idiom and narrative technique is one of the features of novels of colonial consciousness. Sahgal’s *A Time to Be Happy* is richly sprinkled with native idiom. Bakhtin’s concept of “heteroglossia” is to understand the notion of competing languages and discourses in a text, where the idioms of different classes, races, genders, generations and locales compete for ascendancy. Sahgal has used native words such as *Pan, Shervani, tabla, diyas, sahib, dhoti kurta, congress wallas, tamasha, tanpura, thal* and so on which are dexterously interwoven in the colonizer’s language with an expert skill. As a writer who mediates between two worlds, European and the native in the colonial situation, or modern and traditional in the post colonial situation, Sahgal has chosen to write in the language of the erstwhile masters with an Indian flavour.
Irony and sarcasm are used by Sahgal with a telling effect. Rose, while thinking about her parents who were killed in a bomb blast feels “God had saved the king not her parents. Some people were for saving, others were not” (Rich 179). This expression is packed with irony and sarcasm. The following passage from *A Time to Be Happy* is a wonderful example of her poetic style and usage of smile and hyphenated words. “Flame-coloured cannas flapped large satiny petals and orange-and-black-striped tiger lilies stood like rows of soldiers, lifting fierce little faces to the shining day” (*Happy* 28).

Sahgal uses artistically the ancient myth of *Ramayana* and cultural symbols in her novels. When Sahgal describes the site of Salt Satyagraha at the Bharadwaj Ashrama (*Morning*) where Kailas and a band of workers break the law, Sahgal says it is the legendary site where Rama and Bharat had met during Rama’s exile. Similarly in *Rick Like Us*, Rose, a British woman is surprised by the saga of Draupadi in *Mahabaratha* which she witnesses in a play with Mona. Similarly the plight of Sita, who was turned out alone and pregnant into the forest, is described to Rose.

Nayantara Sahgal has been active on the literary scene for almost four decades and has published nine novels, two autobiographies, besides a history book *Freedom Movement in India* (1970) and a political treatise *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1978). She was also a political columnist and has a gamut of articles to her credit; but somehow Nayantara Sahgal has not yet received the critical attention she deserves. Her first two novels *A Time to Be Happy* and *This Time of Morning* were considered documentary. In fact Meenakshi Mukherjee has said of *A Time to Be Happy* as not a successful novel but merely an
interesting social document. This comment also applies to This Time of Morning. A common accusation seen in the reviews of Sahgal’s novels is that her novels have a recurring theme and her characters are stereotypes. It is said that the main characters are carried to the next novels with different names. It would be oversimplification to say that Rakesh and Rashmi are carried over into Storm in Chandigarh with new names, but certainly there are strong resemblances between them and Vishal, Saroj and Simrit and Raj Greg of The Day in Shadow. The three men namely Rakesh, Vishal and Raj are intelligent and sensitive political and social observers. Rakesh belongs to the Indian Foreign Service, Vishal to the Indian Administrative Service and Raj a Member of the Parliament. They have a close link to politics and society. Similarly the three heroines, Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit are sensitive thinkers and feelers who endure the pain of a mismatched marriage, till they are saved from the crisis by a man. In many ways they resemble their creator. Sahgal’s novels are also criticized for a lack of conventional finale, yet the protagonists solve their personal problems by sublimation of the self and gaining fulfilment.

Some critics are of the opinion that Sahgal’s social milieu is rather limited. Her novels are peopled with the affluent elite class, the class to which Sahgal herself belongs. The values which she projects are more of the middle class values, for she believes the middle class has responded rightly to the right values due to their education. They do place humanistic concern over economic needs which Sahgal supports in her novels. Similarly as far as religion is concerned, she is secular and broad-minded. According to Sahgal caste too had lost its punch as caste groups once called lower have moved into powerful
positions in politics. Indians, at least the educated middle class, are ready to forgo their caste identity but it is politics that keeps caste alive.

The world of politics that Sahgal portrays from close quarters is one of power. Against it, heritage, human values, idealism, justice are all nothing. Political rights, it was felt, were the privilege of the upper classes and if the lower classes were being sacrificed then there was no cause for unhappiness. Western concepts have overlaid the national heritage and we don’t have a good understanding of our culture. The problems of the present are blamed on colonialism but Sahgal asks how long we are going to put the blame on colonialism. The Indian leaders who are neo-colonialists are equally to be blamed for the stagnation the country faces. The need of the hour is the courage involved in taking a strong stand against injustice and tyranny, which Sahgal’s protagonists do in her novels. The idealism, the individuality, the concern for moral values the faith in the human being as an agent of change for the better, the belief that means must match the ends etc., are Sahgal’s recurrent themes which are inspired by the philosophies of Gandhi and Nehru.

After an in-depth reading of Sahgal’s select novels on the above said basis, the researcher has arrived at the following findings:

▸ Sahgal’s political consciousness is fraught with an ambivalence, prompted by the crisis of ideology in Indian politics, an oscillation between Gandhian humanism and Nehruvian socialism.

▸ Sahgal establishes through her fictional works that ‘hybridity’ has become the postcolonial identity of the ex-colonised peoples, for the colonial impact has left an indelible impression in the psyche of the colonised.
Sahgal binds the personal life of her protagonists with the political fate.

Sahgal’s novels are concerned with the present decadence of India, and how creative use can be made of its past.

Sahgal’s cross-cultural vision has endowed her with a craving for emancipation from the traditional role assigned to her gender, but she cannot totally free herself from tradition. So the ambivalent state between tradition and modernity becomes a dominant tract of her consciousness.

Sahgal sees marriage, in her generation, as standing midway between an indissoluble institution instituted by tradition, and a flexible and less stable institution as seen by the younger generation. For her, the law facilitates divorce, while tradition and sentiment rage against it.

Sahgal is ambivalent in her portrayal of women, for though she struggles to abolish gender discrimination, she does not propagate a separate female world like the radical feminists. Rather, she envisions an organised whole world blending female rights with the male culture.

Sahgal’s cross-cultural vision lends her a modern outlook which opposes the virtuous stereotypes prescribed by patriarchy. Her women characters represent courage as the new ideal of virtue.

Most of Sahgal’s characters, like their creator, find themselves precariously balanced between a westernised, liberated life style, and the restrictions imposed on them by a traditional patriarchal culture.

In her attitude towards religion, Sahgal is neither an out and out conformist nor a thoroughbred non-conformist.
A staunch faith in Hinduism does not deter Sahgal from condemning the popular and superstitious rituals associated with Hinduism.

Sahgal’s Muslimised Hindu characters and Hinduised Muslim characters stand testimony to her cross-cultural vision.

The lengthy discussions and debates on Hinduism and Christianity found in her novels, reveal her cross-cultural vision.

The researcher has identified a few further research possibilities in the related field. A new historicist study of Sahgal’s political novels would be a potential field of research. A comparative study may be made of Sahgal’s political novels with those of Kalki’s and N.Parthasarathy’s Tamil political novels like Alaiyosai and Kurinchi Malar, where the protagonists’ personal lives are bound up with the political happenings around them. An exploration of Gandhian ideology in Sahgal’s fictional works is also a field of research which may be rewarding.

To sum up, Nayantara Sahgal is among the top ranking women novelists of the post independent Indian fiction writers. In this thesis, her skill as a political novelist, as a post-colonial writer with dual perspective, her feminist views and religio-cultural attitudes are dealt in different chapters. Sahgal’s work can be juxtaposed along with the political novelists of her age like Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar. Sahgal’s corpus with its feminist thrust could be compared with the modern feminist writers and it may be noted how advanced she is, in her feminist ideology even before fifty years or so. Some of her novels may be read with a post-modern outlook. Her divided and pluralistic self has
imbued her with a schizophrenic imagination and cross-cultural vision which makes her a post-colonial writer of the best kind.