Abstract

The Ph.D thesis entitled *Cross-Cultural Vision and Schizophrenic Imagination: A Study of Select Novels of Nayantara Sahgal* examines the cross-culturalism embedded in the personality of Nayantara Sahgal due to her strong sense of nationalism from her family of freedom fighters, the Nehrus, as well as a broad outlook from her western education. A schizophrenic imagination is the natural outcome of her cross-culturalism that gives her “a fluid identity that doesn’t fit comfortably into any single mould.” The researcher examines Sahgal’s cross-cultural vision and schizophrenic imagination as evident in the select novels.

The researcher gives an overview of culture and its impact on post-colonial societies and an account of the life and works of Nayantara Sahgal in the first chapter. The second chapter “Political Ambivalence and Post-Colonial Identity” explores the dual cultures at work in the select novels of Sahgal. This chapter examines the crisis of ideology in Indian politics, an oscillation between Gandhian humanism and Nehruvian socialism, a sense of ambivalence among the rationalist intelligentsia due to cultural pulls of nationalism and colonialism. Nayantara Sahgal is one such representative writer with a dominant ambivalence. This chapter also analyses the cultural colonization, the result of colonial education which made the colonized hybrids of two different cultural systems. The protagonists of Sahgal
emerge with a hybrid postcolonial identity due to their ambivalent stand which is discussed with reference to the select novels.

The next chapter entitled “Women at Cross-Roads: Gender Identity in a Cross-Cultural Context” deals with the emergence of women in her novels as influenced by the socio-political situation as they pass through stages of tradition, transition and modernity. In this chapter too we find Sahgal’s ambivalent stand as she is not traditional or modern completely, and she doesn’t portray her women characters in the traditional manner as virtuous stereotypes. Her women characters belong to the elite class and they try to abolish gender discrimination but Sahgal does not propagate a separate female world like the radical feminists. Her women try to stand on equal footing with men. Sahgal tries to voice that the gender roles are largely cultural constructions which should be redefined (in keeping) with the demands of a progressive society.

The fourth chapter “Religio-Cultural Issues: An Investigation of Sahgal’s Select Novels” deals with the pluralistic character of Indian civilization. Religion and language are the major sources of cultural diversity. Religion is a major part of culture which dictates behavior, values and a whole way of life. Sahgal affirms her faith in Hinduism at the same time she welcomes transition as it is an inevitable sign of growth. Sahgal, brought up under the secular atmosphere of the Nehrus, easily accepts the ‘cultural otherness’ and her novels portray this quality. To Sahgal India’s fabulous joint culture has remained open and assimilative, imbibing, cherishing and integrating many religious cultures including that of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists
etc. to form a composite culture. Sahgal feels that all religions and culture go a long way in establishing the modern Indian Identity.

The final chapter “Summation” condenses the researcher’s argument in the light of the proposed hypotheses in the introductory chapter and identifies further research possibilities in the related field. A new historicist study of Sahgal’s political novels and a comparative study of Sahgal’s novels with those of Kalki or N. Parathasaraty’s Tamil political novels like *Alaiyosai* or *Kurinchi Malar* could be made. This chapter recaps the arguments made in the preceding chapters and affirms that Nayantara Sahgal with her western liberal education is broad-minded and secular with regard to marriage, religions and women’s issues. Her divided self has imbued her with a schizophrenic imagination and a cross-cultural vision which makes her a post-colonial writer of the best kind.