

**IDENTITY AND INDIVIDUALISM: TRACING THE PLIGHT OF INDIVIDUALS IN
POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S WORKS**

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Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal's works are known for their nuanced exploration of characters within the socio-political context of post-independence India. She addresses the complexities of identity formation, examining how personal choices, political events, and societal expectations intersect to shape the individual's sense of self. Her narratives often highlight the struggles of individuals who find themselves at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, personal desires, and societal pressures, providing readers with a rich tapestry of characters whose stories mirror the broader challenges faced by individuals in the evolving landscape of post-independence India.

Keywords: Identity, Tradition, Modernity, Desires, Landscape.

Nayantara Sahgal, a prominent Indian author, has made significant contributions to Indian literature with her insightful works that often explore social and political issues. Her novels reflect a keen understanding of the complexities of post-independence India, and the themes of identity and individualism are central to many of her writings. The novels of Nayantara Sahgal, not only constitute an impressive segment of the Indian English novel but also sum up the saga of India's struggle for freedom and the changes it has brought about in the traditional social set-up in India. Although Mrs. Sahgal is unique in her artistic sensibility as well as in the particular manner of possessing the resources of national experience in terms of imaginative projection, she also reflects, like the other Indian novelists in English, the consciousness of change, and the strange and sudden ways in which it has come to shape the character of individuals and the temper of the collective life as well as the competing structures of human values and human destiny.

The major legacy of cultural change in modern India has been the new historical sense, containing in itself a feeling for the past as well as an awareness of the future, as both dramatize themselves in the personality of the present. Sahgal's work has a certain dialectical quality which has been generalized into its wide cultural connotations in terms of social tradition and political

change in the country. Her work affirms the life-giving quality of the capacity to absorb and assimilate change and transform historical stimulus into cultural adjustment. But unlike some other Indian novelists in English who indiscriminately affirm the Indian cultural milieu, she seeks to excoriate the diseased and the decadent part of the Indian tradition.

She does not, however, go with Mulk Raj Anand in making loud and strident protests against the concept of conformity to tradition in favor of some alien idea of social justice; on the contrary, she dives deep into the sustaining springs of the composite cultural tradition of India and comes up to affirm that aspect of the Indian tradition which possesses and promises a survival, value. She is thus neither an out-and-out conformist nor a thoroughbred non-conformist. She is neither too submissive to the dictates of an orthodox tradition nor too much in love with revolutionary romanticism. She accepts the composite character of the Indian tradition and affirms its catholicity which allows for the human being maximum freedom. She, therefore, achieves for her protagonists an identity commensurate with, or sanctified by, the cultural individuality of the Indian tradition.

The climate of ideas that one encounters in her fictional world holds up freedom as the seminal concept that motivates all characters and stimulates the action in the novels. It must be said, however, that freedom in Mrs. Sahgal's novels is not the declaration of political independence with or without violence, the end-product of a revolution or the result of conspiratorial concentration of troops, or the consequence of political assassinations and massacres; it is usually a deliberate choice or communication with one another or self-identity or courage of conviction the fearless expression of one's personality or simply 'being' itself.

In Mrs. Sahgal's system of values, the human being is the nucleus of social dynamics. Freedom, Peace, and Progress are mutually related concepts and the resultant factors. Thus, for example, when freedom is the input in the context of the individual consciousness the output is the dialogue, or communication or discussion. On the other hand, the individual dialogues or discussions result, in the social context, in a sense of belonging and commitment to the well-being of one another. The condition of peace is thus to be perceived as the product of common weal and concern for one another. Progress in the sense of economic growth, prosperity, productivity, and social development, is the output of the collective commitment of countless individuals. Hence the emphasis on the freedom of the individual self in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

In A Time to be Happy Sanad's problem is self-identity and awareness of himself about his own culture and country. "I must become familiar with my own country" (269) is Sanad's final decision which rounds off the action; while the narrator concludes, after a mock dialogue with the portrait of Sir Charles Kittering, a symbol of British imperialism, moving out of the Club premises. The darkness of a star-lit night is preferable to the stale and gloomy atmosphere of the Club, a relic of the colonial past. The choice is made deliberately both by Sanad and by the narrator as free individuals. In This Time of Morning, the problem is posed as one of communication - an aspect and attribute of Freedom. Kalyan and Rakesh conclude that "discussion always helps"; and Rakesh sits down, collects his thoughts, and begins to talk. Both in Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow, Sahgal shows her artistic maturity by focusing our attention on the issue, of freedom from various points of view, insofar as she projects it simultaneously at the political and personal levels and affects the equivalent of freedom in the form of comradeship through the characters of Vishal Dubey and Raj, respectively.

The two books of autobiography and her newspaper and magazine articles are more directly representative of her point of view, with Jawaharlal Nehru, the courageous champion of freedom, as the central consciousness. As the blurb of Prison and Chocolate Cake claims rightly, it gives us the "living portrait" of Nehru who springs from the pages as a man of friendly humanity and joy in life which made him a beloved uncle, yet with an inborn greatness and dignity that inspired awe and adoration even in the little niece who played and joked with him." Sahgal matures into a mother in her next book From Fear Set Free and deals with such adult problems as love and happiness in marriage. A Situation in New Delhi has a greater sprinkling of ideas in the realm of politics than any of the earlier novels. In its intertwined social and political themes, the novel generates such intense heat that the ideas it appropriates are melted into its movements and fused with the emotions of its characters into passionate gestures and sacrifices.

Sahgal accomplishes artistically the job of adjusting politics in a nonpolitical framework by socializing it and by presenting it through the medium of living men and women. Nayantara Sahgal is probably one of the most underestimated Indian novelists in English. With her considerable linguistic, resources and intimate knowledge of public affairs in India since her childhood, and line balanced attitudes, or what Kenneth Burke calls, 'equilibrium', she is likely to distinguish herself eventually as a major Indian novelist in English. Her last two novels - Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow - have established her artistic credentials beyond doubt. One may say with increasing confidence that the Indian novel in English as represented by Sahgal's unquestionably authentic fictional correlatives of the tempo of Indian life in the citadels

of power in Delhi and other urban cultural centers in India and abroad has not only come of age but has established itself in the mainstream of the national literature of modern India. While Sahgal's work is proof positive of the realistic trends in the contemporary Indian English novel, her technique is impressionistic-naturalistic. Her artistic vision is intensely moral with a deep respect for the possibilities of life; for, the ingrained influence of Gandhi and Nehru shapes and structures and sustains her work. It is, in the ultimate analysis, this kind of affirmation of the Indian tradition that should finally promote her to the front rank of Indian writers in English. She has both the creative capability and communicative competence of such a novelist, as evidenced, by the discussion of her novels.

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