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Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

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meet the author

Nayantara Sahgal



Nayantara Sahgal



Beginning with an autobiography, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Nayantara Sahgal has in the last four decades published fourteen books, besides numerous articles and short stories.

She feels that "in our conditions, life cannot be separated from politics" and her novels portray and interpret contemporary political realities and widespread disillusionment of the post-Independence generation. Her "recurring theme has always been freedom whether human, national, personal or, increasingly, feminist."

The Akademi Award-winning novel, *Rich Like Us*, has Emergency for its backdrop, and projects the failures, frustrations and exploitation of woman—a faithful wife, a middle-aged unmarried civil servant or a cockney English woman. There is a remarkable blend of the two worlds, public and the private.

Her first novel, *A Time to be Happy*, projects India's struggle for Independence and the changing socio-

political life of the country presented through the upper middle class. *The Times* has acclaimed its "endearing qualities: high literary accomplishment...polished entertainment... almost Austenian humour."

This Time of Morning gives a daring expose of the happenings in the world of politicians and administrators of the South Block as the power changed hands in 1947. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rates it as "one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English." *Sunday Times* hailed it as "an impeccable novel, most remarkable for its sheer effortless."

Violence of the sixties becomes the central concern in *Storm in Chandigarh*. The novel analyses the political crisis in the newly divided Punjab and Haryana, and portrays the personal tensions resulting in the failure of marital ties.

Taking off from the point where *Storm in Chandigarh* ends, *The Day in Shadow*



With sister Rita and mother
Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit



With daughter Nonika and son Ranjit, 1955

depicts not only the pulls and pressures of public life but also the pleasures and pains of the private lives of men and women of consequence.

A Situation in New Delhi fictionalises the uncertain state of education and politics in independent India, and was banned during the Emergency. It was first published abroad and then reprinted in India.

With her recent novel *Plans for Departure*, Nayantara moves away from her familiar contemporary political terrain. The major part of action takes place at a hill-station in North India between 1913 and 1914. The novel is about a young woman's rendezvous with India at a time when the status of both women and India was on the brink of change. *London Magazine* hailed it as "a subtle, sharply imagined novel, skilfully plotted and elegantly written." "Sahgal handles her ingredients—love, compromise, anguish, serenity, the

writing on the wall—with lucent sincerity and a feeling for both kinds of history, outward and inward," observed the reviewer of this novel in *The Guardian*.

Besides the eight novels, Nayantara has published half-a-dozen short stories in magazines.

Daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi and Ranjit Pandit and grand daughter of Motilal Nehru, Nayantara comes of an illustrious family which played a significant role in India's freedom movement. She has earned a name for herself as a keen and fearless political commentator. Her book *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* is remarkable for its political insight. The work originated from a paper—"Indira Gandhi's Emergence and Style"—she had presented at a conference held at the University of London. It was later reprinted with new material during her Radcliffe Institute Scholarship in 1976. Earlier she had written a text book on the

freedom movement in India for the National Council for Educational Research and Training.

She is a distinguished journalist. In fact her earliest writings were for newspapers. From 1965, she wrote regularly for *Sunday Standard*. She has contributed over three hundred articles to a number of national and international newspapers and magazines such as *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *India Today*; *Indo-Asia*, (West Germany); *Times Herald*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Dallas Times Herald*, (USA); *The Times*, *London Magazine*,

Vogue, and *Cosmopolitan* (Britain). Her articles are characterised by topicality, simplicity and boldness.

Nayantara's autobiography, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, covers her childhood and adolescence synchronising with the advent of Independence. *Times Literary Supplement* finds it "an unforgettable picture of the hopes, the unfaltering determination, the spiritual convictions which carried the independence movement to its triumphant conclusion." *From Fear Set Free* chronicles her life in India and abroad and gives some memorable anecdotes of her eminent mother.



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award from Vinayak Krishna Gokak; also in picture is Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, 1987

A Select Bibliography

NOVELS

- THE DAY IN SHADOW. New Delhi : Vikas, 1971. 236p.
- MISTAKEN IDENTITY. London : William Heinemann, 1988.
- PLANS FOR DEPARTURE. London : William Heinemann, 1986. 216p.
- RICH LIKE US. London : William Heinemann, 1985. 286p. 22cm.
- A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI. London : London Magazine Editions, 1977.
- STORM IN CHANDIGARH. London : Chatto & Windus. 1969. 256p.
- THIS TIME OF MORNING. London : Victor Gollancz, 1965. 224p.
- A TIME TO BE HAPPY. London : Victor Gollancz, 1958. vi, 275p.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

- PRISON AND CHOCOLATE CAKE: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE DAUGHTER OF VUAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT AND RANJIT PANDIT. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. 234p. Translated into Hindi, French and Japanese.
- FROM FEAR SET FREE. London : Victor Gollancz, 1962. 240p.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND OTHER WORKS

- FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN INDIA. New Delhi : National Council for Educational Research and Training, 1970. 125p. Translated into Hindi.



At home

- INDIRA GANDHI HER ROAD TO POWER. New York : Fredrick Unger, 1982. 260p. Published under the title INDIRA GANDHI'S EMERGENCE AND STYLE in 1978 by Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- SUNLIGHT SURROUND YOU: COLLECTION OF TRIBUTES TO VUAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT. Edited. New Delhi 1970. viii, 174p.
- A VOICE FOR FREEDOM. Delhi : Hind Pocket Books, 1977. 118p. Collection of miscellaneous writings, June 1976 to August 1977.

ON NAYANTARA SAHGAL

- JAIN, JASBIR, NAYANTARA SAHGAL. New Delhi : Arnold-Heinemann, 1978.
- KOHLI, SURESH, NAYANTARA SAHGAL AND THE CRAFT OF FICTION. New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House, 1972.
- KRISHNA RAO, A.V., NAYANTARA SAHGAL: A STUDY OF HER FICTION AND NON-FICTION. Madras : N. Seshachalam & Co., 1976, 98 p.

A fairly detailed bibliography of works by and on Nayantara Sahgal has been compiled by Hilda Pontes and published by Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1985.



Speaking at the Writers Meet, 1987

A Chronology

- 1927 Birth
- 1943 First visit to USA
- 1947 Graduation from Wellesley, USA
- 1948 Visit to Moscow
- 1952 Beginning of journalistic career
- 1954 *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, first published book
- 1958 *A Time to be Happy*, first published novel, Book Society England Recommendation
- 1972 Member, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi
- 1973 Writer-in-residence, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, USA
- 1976 Research Scholar, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Mass., USA
- 1978 Member, Indian Delegation to the UN General Assembly
- 1979 Interport lecturer, Semester-at-Sea, University of Colorado
- 1980 Member, Indo-British Seminar, London
- 1981 Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington
- 1984 Fellow, National Humanities Center, North Carolina, USA
- 1985 Sinclair Prize for *Rich Like Us*
- 1986 Sahitya Akademi Award for *Rich Like Us*
- 1987 Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Eurasia) for *Plans for Departure*
- 1988 Vice-President, People's Union for Civil Liberties

