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The Plans for Departure: Plot - its theme.

BA H-III - Paper - 7A
'The Plans for Departure' is one of the most celebrated novels of Nayana Sahgal, an Indian woman novelist of a great repute. Sahgal belongs to the first family of Indian Politics - the Nehrus - and has the first hand knowledge and grasp of Indian political vicissitudes as well as worldwide struggles for dominance. She is not only a literary artist but also a matured political commentator who reached the apex of glory by sheer dint of her sincere efforts and devotion. She is one of the first Indian writers in English to make a mark on the international readership. In the present novel, she depicts political and social unrest frothing to burst against the unjust and inhuman governance of the Britishers. She also paints the gloomy but the real world political scenario in which human lives and human feelings are mercilessly subjected to the altar of political ambitions of the world powers.

'The Plans for Departure' is a superb creation of Sahgal. The central theme of the novel is based on the common story of love and mystery. It is set in a continent poised for Revolution, both in the existing social and political set ups and a world on the edge of war. The novel centres round an imaginary hill station of Himapur. All the major characters are made to stay at or pay casual visits to this remote place, rich enough in natural wealth. The novel begins with an expression of displeasure

at a lumpy outlet. As it happens, Sir Nitin, an eminent biologist comes to this place to spend his summer. As he is an old bachelor, his Didi hires a Danish woman, Miss Hansen who assists him as a secretary. Miss Hansen, a staunch supporter of Feminist movement, comes to India for one year visit, before her marriage with Nicholas a diplomat. She is tall, fair and unconventional. She walks on foot and avoids rickshaws and Coolies on human consideration. She shares the agonised feelings of Indian leaders with Madhav who works Telak, the living spirit of the Freedom Movement. She imparts physical education to children and attends occasionally organised parties.

Anna develops love for Henry Brewster, an enigmatic personality who represents imperial authority but is sympathetic. His wife deserts him and marries Pryor, a symbol of unscrupulous authority. But just after the mysterious death of Lulu, the wife of an obsessed Missionary Marlowe and discovery of skeleton of Stella's dog, Hansen gets utterly confused and bewildered. She thinks Brewster to be the murderer of his wife and hurriedly plans for her departure from India. However, at the end she laments her wrongly conjured opinion and calls Brewster a martyr when she meets Mr. Pryor and gets the news of his death as a fighting soldier.

Sahgal has wonderfully delineated human passions with all their ebbs and tides. Love, the basic Citadel of human relation, displayed

its varied shades and colours. Miss H. is the logical heroine of the novel, a member of an English family. But her love, when it is consummated, after a slight hesitation during her stay at Himmapur, is a marriage. The selfless love of Brewster for Stella ends into his heavy dejection and forgoes while the selfish love to Stella culminates in a union with the lust of Arjor who abandons his betrothed wife. Similarly, Mrs. G. who loves for Marlowe ends in her mysterious death.

In short, this novel gives a realistic picture of human relation which is distorted by adverse situation created by circumstantial problems and individual arrogance. Similarly, the changing political atmosphere in India as well as the world is its first-hand commentary in the novel. Saigal's feelings for politics and her command over English are rather more impressive than her art as a novelist.