Chapter VI

Conclusion

Women have been suffered for many years by the hands of discriminating forces. Sahgal in her novels has tried to explore these forces. Unlike other feminists, she shows a balanced approach in true Gandhian tradition. She does not hold men responsible for the pathetic condition of women. Instead, she blames the system itself. As far as the making of this system is concerned, she blames not only men’s cruel thought but also women’s unwillingness and passivity.

The world of woman is restricted in the four walls of house. Home is also a favorite thing for the novelist like Nayantara Sahgal to depict the emotional fulfillment and the lack of it. It is a place where the wide area of women’s emotions is portrayed.

In *A Doll’s House*, Henrik Ibsen portrays a woman confined in the family:

Helmer: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.
Nora: That I don’t believe any more. I believe that first and foremost. I am an individual, just as much as you are *(A Doll’s House 330)*.
The novelists like Nayantara Sahgal also accept the role of a preacher here at times and presents the pathetic condition of women in Indian Patriarchal Society. Women’s issues and her domestic world find significant place in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal in spite of the novelist’s preoccupation with other issues.

Understanding the novels of Nayantara Sahgal in a feminist context is thus important and interesting not because she is a woman novelist, nor because she writes about women like other woman novelists, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandeya and Gita Hariharan. She does not have the feminine problems in her little heart, but considers the feminist issues as radical feminist that leads to large feminine problems without presenting unnecessary details about her characters. She searches deeply the emotional fulfillment among her women characters. She has analyzed into the suffering love and passion of Indian women and presented them with a touching sensitivity.

Sahgal is one of the powerful voices of International feminist novelists. Sahgal’s novels like Mistaken Identity and A Time to be Happy explores the psyche of typical Indian women especially mother.
A Critical study of the feminist concern in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels also helps to express a perspective of attitudes which determines the constitution of the women. Women’s writing becomes a manifestation of woman’s potential and rights and a consciousness of the essential emotional and self identity which combine the experience of being female into an intrinsic imaginative continuum.

Sahgal’s approach to life is always positive; there is an affirmation of life amidst suffering. She has the policy of compromise between the two extremes of tradition and modernity, politics and feminism.

Her humanism is also evident from her choice of self-identity and freedom as her repeated theme. The various types of identity and her emotional request for different kinds of freedom are essentially an outcome of her humanistic vision. Freedom is necessary for women to realize her potential for a complete life.

Examining female-authored fictional works like Nayantara Sahgal’s novels provides crucial insights into analyzing the struggle that women have experienced as they work. To that end, her novels provides a powerful medium for portraying representations of women
as well as the patriarchal restrictions which have historically hindered their psychological development as fully functioning cohesive selves.

Through a detailed account of Sahgal’s novels from the point of view of her feminist approach, the researcher may safely arrive at the conclusion that Sahgal though not a militant feminist feels strongly against female-exploitation and male sarcasm to the issue of identity crisis for women. Her approach in this respect is quite positive. Female revolt is perceived as a measure to set right what has gone wrong, to cleanse the society of all evils against women. She does not concern herself so much with pointing a finger of blame at men, as with the exploration of ways which may lead to emancipation:

Emancipation is at the core of Sahgal’s novels; whoever offers a helping hand in her strife towards freedom of self is welcome, irrespective of his or her sex. Her women attain salvation not always by fighting against men, but at times by fighting with them. Again in this battle for self-determination, they do not overthrow the culturally ascribed identity, but rather they redefine and invest it with new meaning (The Mosaic world of Margaret Drabble and Nayantara Sahgal 103).

In this respect Sahgal’s contribution to the cause of feminism, cannot be damaged. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, Sahgal feels that
she could not be of any use to the society. But Sahgal has proved more useful than many a social worker and reformer in the sense that through her novels as well as through her writings she has successfully created an awareness about various problems and restraints that tend to crush the very existence of the most important members of society particularly women. She needs social justice for women, her focus being on freedom. In her great energy she politicizes the issue, yet her novels are certainly not political pamphlets. Her women march towards freedom but their march is not wild and boisterous, as they are very firmly set in the Hindu cultural background.

Sahgal herself has postponed the awareness of the evils against women, as before her marriage she had been ignorant of it. In her article “This Time of Fulfillment” she writes about her blissful childhood:

I was conscious of being continually stretched in mind and spirit of being encouraged to be venturesome, of doing the daring rather than the timid thing, of taking risks rather than playing safe and I was aware of the joy of being myself, like every other person a unique human being (This Time of Fulfillment 15).
It was only after her marriage that she became aware of, ‘the shocking assumption of inequality’ (3).

Sahgal shows a holistic approach to the problems of women, through her novels. She has raised various women’s issues and made great efforts to reach to their solutions as well. The issues of bigamy, sati, divorce and virtue have been deftly treated. In her earlier novels, most women live a slavery and self-satisfied life. They are never granted their free independent identity, yet they are not dissatisfied. Her early women are not aware of their suppressions. They are traditional women steeped in traditional values who see their husbands as gods. Govind Narayan’s mother and Maya are the only women who dare to live a life of their own. Out of these the task of Kusum and Devaki is not as tough as Maya, for they have understanding and compliant men for husband. It’s only Maya who faces problems yet dares to live alone as an individual. Yet even maya does not dare to break the marriage bond, though it’s as suppressing for her as for Saroj, Simirit and Rashmi. Though she wanted this fact she could have had the support of the narrator, just as Saroj has that of Vishal and Simirit of Raj. But in those times walking out of a marriage simply to find ones soul-mate was “solution only for fairy tales” (A Time to be Happy 71).
Sahgal’s first novel, *A Time to be Happy* presents only a piece of writing of that Sahgal was to elucidate in her later works. Though the world described in Sahgal’s first novel is not the dream world for women, yet most of the women characters seem to take to it like fish takes to water. Maya however, is not fit in this world as she dares to search for a world of her own. Though she practices restraints, she is yet far ahead of her times. Hence she faces opposition not only from her husband but also from his family. Lakshmi, though a woman, does not have any sympathy for her. She does not understand her aspirations and is rather confused at her madness:

> It’s not a laughing matter, she scolded. Don’t you think it is tactless of her? It’s embarrassing for Harish with her getting mixed up in the congress programme. Why can’t she join a music circle or a literary society or something he’ll approve of? (35).

Women like Lakshmi believe that the existence of a wife must necessarily be subordinate to her husband. If she does not follow the conditions of her husband, she must be crazy. Time and again Sahgal points at such women as join hands with men in oppressing their own kind. It is however, not her desire to harm husbands but ignorance that motivates these women against the ‘new woman’.
Sahgal is a symbol of all sympathy for women who are married into backgrounds different from their own. They need time and understanding from their husbands at least, to adjust to their new milieu, but they do not get these. Maya comes from a home full of happiness and joy and companionship. She needs Harish’s support to settle down in her new environment, instead, she is met with indifference which makes her to lose energy:

Married life had deprived her of the joyous atmosphere of that full bustling home without providing her with the warmth she sought, Eventually, I (narrator) suppose, she ceased to expect it-believed even, that she did not want it (42).

Social restrictions again have a major role to play as obstructions for women searching for fulfillment. Maya loves the narrator and seems to find her soul-mate in him, but she cannot dare to stay with him as society would not permit it. Though her successors, when they find an opportunity and they don’t waste a minute before moving out with their loves yet she is not allowed to do so as the times were still not ripe for such a step.

Gender-bias is the main cause for all women-sufferings that leads to infanticide of female – foetus in present times. In times of
Prabha Mathur, though such facility was not available, men enjoyed their desire in bigamy or even polygamy in order to become proud fathers of sons. This inclination against female child was not an evil encouraged by men, most of the time women subscribed to this view. Prabha goes to the extent of permitting Harilal to marry again so that he may beget a son. She tells the narrator: “I was so unhappy when she was born….that’s why he married again and not because he does not care for me” (200).

Prabha represents the lot of headless women who exist but do not seem to live. Like the Ranee of Vijaygarh (Mistaken Identity), she was given away in marriage at the tender age of fifteen but unlike the Ranee she adjusted so well to her husband that she does not find anything wrong about his marrying again for a son. Early marriage means to suppress a women’s soul even before she has become conscious of its existence. This is considered to be the best guarantee for a happy marriage:

For any young and inexperienced girl given in marriage to a man of my husband’s good and considerate ways, it was the only thing in life. And do you know why? Because all life was ahead to be discovered (201).
Prabha’s case is a typical example of this. She is so devoted to her husband that she does not attend her daughter’s marriage but she may ‘embarrass him’. Thus most of the time it is women’s lack of resourcefulness, lack of enthusiasm and unwillingness to disturb the surface harmony of their homes, which is responsible for their suffering.

Sahgal’s novels prove her evolution as a feminist, while in her earlier novels her women although quite modern are set basically in an Indian atmosphere. There are no working women in her earlier novels. For the first time it’s Simrit who enters a profession. But she is not a working woman in the real sense of the term. Though The Day in Shadow has another working woman, Pixie, whose portrayal in the novel is more as a single woman facing sexual exploitation, than as a working woman. A Situation in New Delhi has Devi as the central woman character, whose work involves public dealing. But as she has political powers she does not face the problems like ordinary working women do.

After seven years when Sahgal continues writing again after an interruption, she presents more emancipated women, though historically these women (Sonali) are placed in much earlier periods, than those in her earlier novels. It’s only as late as Rich Like Us that
Sahgal gives us a truly working woman in the person of Sonali Ranade. *Rich Like Us* incidentally has the first female foreigner of Sahgal…Rose. She has also freely portrayed women from foreign lands and foreign religious and cultures. *Plans for Departure* has Anna Hansen who is a Danish woman, quite emancipated. *Mistaken Identity* again has a traditional woman, who dares to break all bounds and marry the person of her choice, though he belongs to a different religion and also though she is living in a period when Razia and Bhusan Singh are separated because of their religions being different. This change cannot be attributed to the change in the values of society, but it is more the change in the attitude and thinking of the novelist. In an interview Sahgal confessed that this rani of Vijaygarh, was highly an impossibility Sahgal confessed that this rani of Vijaygarh, was highly an impossibly in her times. The extracts from the book of the interview are worth mention here:

N.S : …I didn’t know, I longed for her to be free but I didn’t know she would free herself when she freed herself. It had to be. It could not be that she stayed behind in the dark and remain buried there.
J.J : Would you say this can happen in real circumstances In India today?
N.S : It is highly unlikely. Today it might happen, but not in 1929-30 (*Nayantara Sahgal 135*).
Sahgal takes up the problem of divorce in The Day in Shadow. Simrit in fact presents the qualities of her own image. She is suffered not only by the cruel terms of divorce settlement but also destroyed because divorce means the end of a long relationship. In her letter to E.N. Mangat Rai dated March, 1967 Sahgal writes:

How in heaven’s name do people marry and divorce so blithely and with such apparent ease in the West? The predominant feeling is of having been axed, lopped off like a dead branch instead of kept like the living branch one is (Relationship 219).

It is clearly seen, that though she is all for freedom of woman, this ideal state can be, and must be achieved within the holiness of home, Even her Saroj leaves her home with a heavy heart only when she is convinced that it is not home anymore. Sahgal writes:

Wives have exercised varying levels of freedom, with no destruction to their marriages or themselves and in this respect the village culture has shown far more tolerance than that of the more rigid urban middles class. (8).

The positive and non-radical feminist ideology of Sahgal is evident in the fact that though women are disillusioned they never lose faith in the institution of marriage. Of marriage. Rashmi makes Sahgal’s views clear when she says, ‘If marriage can be unhappy. I suppose it can be happy too……..’ (26). Sahgal’s women do not lose faith in men. Despite having been suppressed by their husbands, these
women finally seek for solution with the help of some understanding men. Simrit finds emotional fulfillment in Raj, Saroj seeks for happiness with Vishal, Rashmi gets respect with Rakesh and Bhusan Singh’s mother marries Comrade Yusuf.

According to R.A.Kartini, polygamy which causes immense suffering to women is also dealt with in her novels. There is Harilal who marries twice, yet he does not stop his frequent visits to brothels. Then, there is more sophisticated Ram who again marries twice but keeps getting involved with other women too. If his wife enquires him, he mentions the example of Lord Krishna and keeps moving from one woman to another without ever getting disease by the prick of conscience. On the contrary, when a woman dares to enter into an affair she is excluded from the society.

Motherhood, which is supposed to be a boon to women has been seen in a different light by Sahgal. In India it is supposed that a woman gets fulfillment when she becomes a mother and Sahgal’s women seen to cater to the idea. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* finds shelter with her children, whenever she is rejected by her husband. Rose in *Rich Like Us* though not Indian, is involved in the desire to become a mother, as she feels that Mona has an edge over her simply
because she has given Rama a son. But Simrit of *The Day in Shadow* has different experience. Sahgal strongly feels for the plight of such women. She says:

> Children are what hold them to ransom. Woman can’t move out of that situation and is compelled to suffer what she has to suffer. It is a modern kind of Sati where you remain and suffer and immolate yourself *(Nayantara Sahgal 176)*.

Simrit’s son is enticed by his father’s wealth and her daughters become a burden to her when she is already crumbling beneath the heavy burden of taxes after the divorce. In the hands of Som, daughter becomes a device to torture Simrit as a punishment for having divorced him. Sahgal wants to prove that women can be strong enough to walk out of a suppressing marriage, even when they have many children to look after. Talking to Jasbir Jain, Sahgal says:

> And that’s (not mentioning the number of children Simrit has) a conscious thing on my part, because I wanted to give the impression of a woman burdened with God knows how many children and she still goes on. *(Nayantara Sahgal 187)*.

Her first novel was published in 1958 and her last in 1988. Thus the feminist concept of these novels brings the reader not only the onward march of women in India but also the growth of the writer’s mind during almost thirty years. The novelist may have evolved but
there has not been significant change from the novel she had been a strong advocate of women’s cause and her humanistic, positive approach has been evident in her first novel itself.

While trying to define her novels, V.Mohini Madan writes that they are: “Multivalent, offering multiplicity of unique perspectives, imbibing the spirit of the age…her novels are very modern in the choice of theme” (Indian Literature 124).

In her novels the focus shifts from the social phenomenon to the Individual character. V.M.Madan notices a Growing sense of Individualism in the novels of the last three decades and notes it “more specifically in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal” (Indian Literature 125).

In This Time of Morning Sahgal makes her credo clear by holding that the “only thing that matters is human being”(132). This faith in human beings is continued through all her works. In fact this shows her strong will to establish the concept of equality between sexes. All human beings are important- men as well as women, none is more equal than the other. It is from this humanistic approach that her concept of feminism takes birth. It lends positive tendencies to her
feminist interest. While discussing Sahgal’s The Day In Shadow
A.V.Krishna Rao comments:

Mrs. Sahgal’s fictional probe into the cancerous proliferation of social hypocrisy and political pretence in modern India is incisive like that of a surgeon’s knife but is tempered with compassion and love. Its analysis and interpretation of the human predicament is informed of newer and truer insights into the human psyche (Nayantara Sahgal : A Study of her fiction and nonfiction 69).

After having bitter and heart-breaking experiences she does not lose faith in the institution of marriage. It is because of her healthy approach only. In a letter to E.N.Manhgat Rai, she expresses this belief of hers:

A long relationship like marriage has for years and years sent out too many shoots and tentacles. Its holds spread out and go deep down. You can cut of the plant that shows but the undergrowth persists. The pattern of marriages is ineradicable, if one has ever put anything of oneself into it (Relationship 197).

This faith is also expressed by almost all of her protagonists. Rashmi finds herself in confusion over the issue of divorce. Even taking the decision to separate becomes difficult “For some ironic reason it was anguish to kill even what was better dead” (This Time
of Morning 14). In *A Situation in New Delhi* Usman shows his faith in the bond of marriage when he returns to Nadira, despite her feelings begging for love and faith and tells her: “There’s so much uncertainly ahead, you and I must depend on each other a great deal. I shall on you” (*A Situation in New Delhi* 137).

Sahgal’s next novel *Storm in Chandigarh* has one such victim Saroj. Saroj’s husband Inder as a sadist uses chastity as a weapon against Saroj. He hates her for her pre-marital relationship, and at the same time gets pleasure in it for it gives him the right to feel righteous and to have grievance. In fact, this is simply a pretext on his part. If nothing of the kind had happened, he would have still thought of something to torture and torment Saroj. Inder is himself enjoying the bliss of two worlds, that of Saroj and Mara, but he keeps raking the past of Saroj, simply to humiliate her. The conversation that goes on between them, throws light on the depression of the situation:

> And then, there must have been others. There were not others. No others who went that far. But there must have been others. There were not, she turned to him wildly, it’s finished. Want me to do about it now? What do you want? You should be ashamed of what you did. Aren’t you? (*Storm in Chandigarh* 104).

On one hand, he indicates his suspicious finger at Saroj, for her one mistake in the past, and on the other hand if Mara even hints at
the possibility of an extramarital relation between Saroj and Vishal, he excludes her from the family:

That kind of remark disgusts me. The thinking behind it disgusts me. There was time when such things couldn’t be spoken, or even thought, except with shame. There’s no shame now- a –days, no barriers. Everything taken lightly, and women talk and behave like men (136).

This may make the voice reasonable to many, but considering the fact that it comes from a man who is remorseless enough to get involved with another woman; sounds outrageous. This, then, is the double-standard which Saroj has to bear with. Inder is deeply involved with Mara, but he simply can’t imagine his wife’s relationship with anyone. The psychology behind this is that men are free to enjoy their fancies but women must at all cost practice restraints. This type of thinking is nurtured by a man who is himself not at all conscientious. Inder is not only involved with Mara, but he has also had many sexual experiences before marriage, “He had been precocious and successful in sex, robustly collecting experience where he found it” (170).

Inder’s misunderstanding nature thrusts itself on Mara, when she visits him in his office and finds it plain and business like without
any personal touches. She suddenly realizes that he was a man who understood only flesh and blood and its promptings, and asks Inder, “What are you interested in apart from yourself?” (Point of View 72). Inder has not only been ill-treating his wife but he could also not prove himself a good lover to Mara.

In the novel Jit and Mara who are forced to accept unwelcome situation towards the end. Mara who has moved for quite a long time finally discovers her refuge in the warmth of husband Jit’s love. She says what she had never been able to say before, “I need your help” (Storm in Chandigarh 234).

The faith is continued in Simrit too, though she undergoes the hell of divorce. The fact that she got married again and enters into a bond with Raj, is proof enough that though she is disillusioned with Som, She still does not consider marriage as obsolete. Here it may be noted that though Sahgal thinks, ‘home is sacrosanct’, personally she does not feel live-in relationship are wrong. She had herself been living with E.N.Mangat Rai for quite a few years, prior to her getting married to him. Even her decision to marry was enforced by political and not personal considerations.
Simrit in *The Day in Shadow*, is a continuation of Saroj, in her battle, for survival in a man’s world. Simrit is an intelligent and otherwise strong woman. She almost prevents herself so that her marriage works. But at the end of it, she finds herself being shown the door by her husband Som is not a sensitive person, for whom material comfort is the judgment of a good life. He doesn’t accept the existence of soul- especially in women. He is a selfish husband and wants Simrit to dance to his tune. As long as she abandons, he keeps providing for her comforts, Simrit belongs to an altogether different background. Simply because she has married Som by choice, she is forced to make her marriage successful. But at every step she is humiliated.

Having chosen her husband, Simrit finds she does not have the freedom to choose anything else not event such trivial domestic matters as chair covers and curtains’ (5) Her tastes, her ideas, her values are quite different from her husband’s but it is Som’s wishes and his desires which prevail, smothering her initiative and her interest in living, till in the end she feels she is just ‘a cog in the machine (*The Day in Shadow* 38).

The world of Som is a husband-centered world where there is no refuge for a sensitive woman like Simrit. Sex discrimination comes so easily to him, that even his pride of producing child is
concentrated on his son only and not on all his children. It’s against her nature, that she keeps compromising and accepting the less importance that Som has made of her. Though her pointless efforts to reconcile with Som’s world, they had dawned upon her long ago. When Som has given her, all that money can buy, and wants to give something special to mark the occasion of his success, she does not know what to ask for. But there is an unspoken desire for “a world whose texture is kindly” (4). Som’s unwillingness to understand her pains her heart. Divorce seems to be the only way out. It seems synonymous with freedom. But Som suffers her beyond marriage. Even in divorce, his oppression does not come to an end. In fact, once Simrit walks out of the marriage, he takes it as a personal challenge. Som had not forgiven Vetter and he would not forgive Simrit.

Though she discovers strength in herself she was never aware of men’s world. It’s only after the divorce that she realizes that a divorced woman is not treated as a normal woman, people cannot be normal with her. Either they pity her or they desire her, or they envy her. As far as men are concerned, it hardly makes some difference; but women are treated as if they have become very poor human being or untouchables. They are treated as the persons rejected by the
society. They start looking at her, “as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks” (39).

Though a woman lives under such situations as Simrit divorce should have come as a relief. But for Som on the other hand divorce cannot bring freedom. She is free from the physical presence of Som, she was still not out of his grasps. The divorce settlement has such tax implications, that she is injured in life. This trap was like “a hangmen’s noose around her neck” (53). Simrit rightly likens Som to Shylock and says: “This agreement I’ve signed is his pound of flesh”(53).

In fact the divorce terms are Som’s last but the most powerful and most deadly weapon against Simrit. She does not understand the responsibilities given by the tax till Raj makes it clear for her. But when she understands the document, she is filled with disgust for Som. She had known Som was an insensitive, apathetic man with no sympathy for anyone. Still she finds it difficult to reconcile with the fact that she has also become the target of Som’s cruelty. “There must be a mistake, she told herself. No one treats another person like that, even when forgiveness is impossible”(53). The seriousness of the document- when she does understand its effects- makes her feel, as she herself wants to say to Moolchand: “I’ve been in an earthquake,
Mr. Moolchand every single thing I knew is a rubble around me or the problem, Mr. Moolchand, is that I have been pushed off a fifty story building and every bone in my body is broken” (140).

Sahgal does not show dislike against Som. Som is only a part of the system which makes woman inferior. It’s this world which is to blame; it’s the very culture which treats women as useless thing, as soulless objects. It’s their lot to get kicked and still to wag their tails. Raj correctly analyses this situation:

The corpus, he thought, as they walked back to the entrance, might be Simrit’s tax monster. To him it looked more and more the mirror of a whole culture, people-especially women-forever taking things lying down (122).

It is this system which makes one more victim in Pixie. Pixie is a widow with a child. She does not have a Raj to give her support. In fact, like Simrit, Pixie also needs a shoulder to lean on, but as ill-luck would have it she gets Sumer Singh, who is much like Som in many ways: Pixie looks upon Sumer Singh as a ‘leader’, and “to her that meant a man of dedication” (193). If Raj had collected Simrit, Pixie also had great respect on Sumer. She gave Sumer the much needed respect from the agitated world, full of rivalry, complications and
envies. But in return Sumer was incapable of giving emotional security. He has arranged a job and a flat for Pixie and he feels that that is more than generosity on his part. Sumer suppresses Pixie, as Som had exploited Simrit and he turns her out and drops her like a hot brick, as Som did Simrit, the moment the felt Simrit has changed herself unfriendly towards him.

Som keeps announcing publicly to Simrit that he has given her everything and that she cannot expect anything more than that from him. Sumer’s threatening is simply an echo of Som’s, “Do you realize…. I gave you a place to live in and a job? Do you think either of those is easy to get in this city?”(107).

Sumer is then, the promise of an emotional security to Pixie as Som is to Simrit. Both of them impose their powers on the woman concerned; without ever bothering to ask the woman what they want. The bedroom scene of Som and Simrit is re-enacted in the hotel – room with Sumer and Pixie. When Pixie moves back with fear to Sumer’s touch, he orders her to leave, “Get out before I throw you out” (A Situation in New Delhi 23).

The difference in the stories of Simrit and Pixie is part accidental, part character-related. Simrit is much stronger than Pixie,
Simrit is a wife whereas Pixie is just a concubine. Raj is like a gentle
wind, he is a class apart, a rare breed. Raj is a complete man an ideal
personality for a woman in search of herself. Raj is a dream come true
for Simrit and Sahgal perhaps wants the people to believe that the day
when this world will be able to change its Som and Sumer and the
day when the world will be full of Raj will be the day when there
shall be absolute equality between men and women when “the moral
lapse of a daughter would be no worse than a son” (61). It will
hopefully be the day in shadow.

Our Society is tradition bound and conventional which makes
women as victims and helpless. Women especially young, immature
and inexperienced women become easy prey to these conventions, as
they are powerless, likely to suffer, defaulters and more exposed than
their older and mature counterparts. Once victimized, some of them
quietly accept the role traditionally offered to them, while some
others embrace death as the only refuge from the problems created by
society.

Sahgal’s next novel Rich Like Us persents more than one
victim - Rose, Mona, Sonali and Sonali’s great grandmother. Though
a foreigner, Rose is as much a victim of system, as her Indian
counterpart-Mona. The crumbling burden of society and custom
suffers the personality of all women-Indian or Western. Rose is forced to compromise with the marital status of Ram. Like a devoted, submissive wife not wrong. But Ram, instead of understanding her and feeling guilty about victimizing her, goes on exploiting the weakness of his wife. Ram suppresses both his wives for his pleasure. He takes pride in extra-marital affairs. Husband of Mona and Rose does not feel a little ashamed about courting both the worlds. On one hand, Mona prays for his welfare, and on the other Rose keeps dancing to his tune. For Ram it is a convenient arrangement as Zafar remarks: “You have the path to heaven all paved for you...with a cocktail party upstairs and a prayer meeting down –stairs” (Rich Like Us 25).

He gives both his wives many heartaches and headaches, but he is himself not a little bit moved or shaken. His attitude is cruel, not trying to calm or comfort any of his wives. Mona is the typical Indian woman-a silent sufferer. Rose dares to face him at times, but he illustrates the example of Lord Krishna who had thirty wives, to prove that he is simply being true to his tradition. Rose, though she is a foreigner, identifies with Sita, who strikes her as the archetype of the wronged woman.
After a gap of seven years Sahgal has written her last three novels, but her views on marriage have not changed. In *Rich Like Us* this faith is still not destroyed. It’s not only the submissive wife Mona who keeps fasts for the welfare of her estranged husband Ram but also Rose the foreigner keeps reminding her wounded soul that marriage is for keeps and though Ram has not proved a worthy husband she must be true to the Christian teaching, ‘for better or for worse’. *Plans for Departure*, shows Anna Hansen a truly emancipated, strong, Danish woman coming back to the folds of marriage after staying temporarily in foreign lands for a period of time. Again, the fact that she marries Nicholas after rising high in the sky of freedom for quite a few months goes to show Sahgal’s belief that marriage is an ineradicable institution. *Mistaken Identity* has only one married woman, the Ranee of Vijaygarh. This strong woman walks out of her marriage when she feels it has become useless system for her. But she does not remain single instead she marries Comrade Yusuf once again reaffirming Sahgal’s strong faith.

Divorce has also been taken up by Sahgal, in several novels. While her second novel *This Time of Morning* still has a character who though reduced to ‘a moth trapped in cement’ does not reach the decision of divorce before spending many a hesitant months thinking
deeply over the issue. Rashmi when she finally realizes that she cannot feel we-ness with Dalip and that their marriage is finished, faces opposition from her own mother. But when in *Storm in Chandigarh* Saroj decides to leave the home that has failed to give her shelter and security, she is helped by her relatives. It shows that the awareness against wrong marriage has started spreading and society at large has begun sensing the need to break off the relation which becomes suppressing.

Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* is again not at all scared of deserving Som, though she is burdened with many children. It is in *The Day in Shadow* that Sahgal thinks on the issue of divorce at great length. Simrit finds pity, suspicion, hatred and even jealousy in the eyes of people when they come to know she is a divorce. People look at her, “as if divorce were a disease that left pock marks”. Simrit is professedly Sahgal’s own image. Sahgal herself had to experience what Simrit goes through. In a letter to E.N.Mangat Rai, she writes, “…and then divorce is stupid and senseless, the solution of fools….” *(Relationship 197)*. Her disbelief in divorce as a solution to wrong marriage is a natural system to her belief in the institution of marriage.
There is another relevant issue that Sahgal raises from time to time, through her several characters. This issue is that of virtue, chastity and honour of women. In this respect Saghal’s letter to E.N.Mangat Rai is worth mention. She writes: “I do not see things clearly in terms of moral or immoral right or wrong and this may be why I choose compassion and consideration as guides” (Relationship 1).

In *This Time of Morning* this question is presented through the portrayal of Uma for whom marriage is but sensuousness. She is not virtuous and chaste yet Sahgal’s sympathy lies with her. When asked as to what her idea behind the creation of Uma was, she replies.

A woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thinking. She has to be good and good means virtuous in the sense of chaste. Uma was a woman with appetites that her husband couldn’t satisfy, so she indulged them elsewhere. Men of it and there’s no comment. This happened to be a mismatched marriage (and there are many of those) in which the woman was the stronger, more independent character (Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing 114).

For Sahgal this question of chastity in itself is belonging to ancient times: “What is virtue in a woman? Is it compliance with society’s laws or should it be judged by a larger vision and standards?” (Relationship 8). Uma may be unchaste from point of view of society, but she is certain immoral for Sahgal.
In *Storm in Chandigarh* again the woman character Saroj is tortured by Inder. Simply because of her pre-marital sexual experience. Saroj again strongly establishes Sahgal’s belief that involving in pre-marital or even extra marital sex does not necessarily mean lapsing in having many sexual relationships. Saroj feels sorry for the maddening impact that her past has on Inder. But she is not at all ashamed of her so called sin as she believes, “I don’t want forgiveness. I’ve committed no crime” (*Storm in Chandigarh* 197).

She feels she is ‘clean and whole’. Saroj might have her own views and strength but the final word on this issue comes from Vishal Dubey. He tells Saroj, “If chastity is so important and so well worth preserving, it would be easier to safeguard it by keeping men in seclusion, not women” (193).

This portrays some truths when examined in the light of Madhu’s story. If only men are kept in check, women shall not have any threats to their chastity, as Vishal further argues:

The biological urge is supposed to be much stronger in men, so it is they who should be kept under restraint and not allowed to roam free to indulge their appetites. The entire east might flourish under this sort of reversal of purdah (193).
Sahgal’s women move in and out of sexual experiences many a time, yet they are certainly not unchaste. Sahgal makes clear the difference between physical and spiritual. According to her even extra-marital relations do not mean lapse of loyalty. For as long as there is commitment and will to understand all is not lost. Mara returns to Jit without ever feeling guilty about her involvement with Inder. Usman shares Devi’s bed a couple of times and Devi gathers physical experiences with more than one man and yet these characters bag all the sympathy from the readers. Sahgal does not judge her characters on the basis of their sexuality; her characters have more to them than sex. Even Sylla who does not think twice before jumping in bed with Bhushan, becomes a loveable character in the hands of Sahgal.

Chastity according to Sahgal has been used as a weapon by men, to bow down their women. Mr. Narang cannot resist from ogling at lovely women, but when his daughter Nita lights a cigarette his honour is exposed to danger. If chastity is a must it should be so for both the sexes, otherwise it is simply another instrument of oppression in the hands of men. Sahgal has very strong opinion about this:
All but a few societies make a ruthless cult of male honor and female virtue. Down the ages the halo of virtue has extracted and awesome range of self-denial in return. From the sacrifice of life, as in sati to the sacrifice of personality, expression and ambition depending on the times and more crucially the culture of home, especially of its males (Relationship 7).

Strong individuality and emancipation from the family bondage are the goals of women. But it requires a lot of sacrifice and great courage to reach them. In Sahgal’s novels we find two types of women characters. In the first group are women, like Lakshmi and Devika of A Time to be Happy, Mira of This Time of Morning, Gauri of Storm in Chandigarh and Mona of Rich Like Us who present a picture of subdued womanhood. Some of these women remain happy and content in the confines of the conservative values, while some others though not happy, are too timid to walk out of a wrong marriage despite consequent humiliation. The second group consists of women with whom Sahgal identifies to some extent.

Rashmi of This Time of Morning, Saroj of Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit of The Day in Shadow, Sonali of Rich Like Us, Anna of Plans for Departure and Bhusan Singh’s mother of Mistaken Identity fall in this category. Once they discover that their marriage is
wrong, nothing can stop them from breaking its bond. There may be horrified mothers like Mira for Rashmi, there may be dominating and overpowering husbands like Inder for Saroj, and there may be financial considerations like the tax burden for Simrit. There may again be devoted love like Nicholas for Anna and lastly there may be societal constraints like those for Bhusan Singh’s mother; but these cannot prevent them from responding to the call of their traditional background does not leave them. These women keep on shuttling between traditional and modern values. Traditionally her women are taught to stay subdued and silent in suffering but gradually the signs of awakening, come to the fore; and they reject the stereotype and speak out the truth.

Sahgal establishes in the minds of the Indian women a sense of justice and shakes them off their long sleep. It is in this respect that Sahgal has contributed to the cause of feminism. In an article ‘The Virtuous Woman’, she seems to bring light to her aim as a writer. She writes:

Through the re-writing women do, new Sita and Savitris will arise stripped of false sanctity and crowed with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did and how their lone, remote struggles can help our search for identity and emancipation (The Tribune 3).