Chapter III
Nayantara Sahgal - Political and Cultural Allegory

An Analysis of her novels: This Time Of Morning, Storm In Chandigarh, A Situation In New Delhi and Rich Like Us.

I try to create the virtuous woman, the modern Sita, if you like. My women are strivers and aspirers toward freedom, toward goodness, towards a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of the heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity.........I think there is this quality in the Indian woman. (Sahgal Letters.1976, 116)

This statement of Nayantara Sahgal in talking about the multifaceted Indian woman, she has created in her fiction is expressive of the multiple views on women in Indian myth, religion and history. Taking her cue from myth and legend Sahgal redefines the archetypal image of the Indian woman from chaste, submissive, subjugated, to strong, free and human, this is her view of Indian women, the modern Sitas and Draupadis who reflect the spirit and essence of India, its ancient past, the changing present and the future of total transformation. Indian life shaped by the plurality of tradition with its myriad philosophies, totality of concern, and discourses is the basis of the multiplicity of views already mentioned. All of which is responsible for the complex conglomeration that is life today. Nayantara Sahgal, a daughter of this tradition, who has herself been a witness to vast and climatic changes, in this land and of its people, chronicles such aspects in her multifaceted characters.
When talking about Nayantara Sahgal’s fiction one would have to emphasize on her combination of artistic projection, with historical veracity. The phrase; In history nothing is true but names and dates, in literature everything is true but names and dates, is applicable to Sahgal’s fiction. Though in giving expression to political happenings and historical reality, she indulges in artistic licence but never compromises on the truth. Over and above Sahgal tries to give expression to the issues she feels strongly about, through her fiction, as she has done through her journalistic writings. Humanitarian values, freedom and social responsibility are the issues she is concerned about and feels that such positive qualities should be highlighted in social and political life. Her novels by presenting the reality of the contemporary scenes not only analyses the present trends in all their “human details” (Bhatnagar 55) but also foresees the direction of the “political wind” (Bhatnagar 55). Her representation of social political and cultural reality is more political than historical because her fiction is basically interpretative and predicative rather than retrospective in the historical context. As a person and writer in whom politics is embedded deep in her “bones and marrow”, and in her emotional and intellectual make up”, she can never remain a mere spectator (Sahgal From Fear, 41) to the fall out affecting human interests. We see therefore that she combines the account of real political happenings with certain basic values to which she as a writer and human being has always been committed. She enshrines these fundamental issues or bemoans the absence of these by placing her stories in a historically recognizable locale. Her major contribution to the art of fiction in Indian English writing is giving shape and essence to the political novel in its present form. She perceives that politics is not the concern merely of politicians, but it is a pervasive influence
affecting life at all levels. In her own view "Each of these novels, more or less reflects the political era we were passing through" (Sahgal, From Fear 115).

The use of the political genre is one of the main aspects of her novels, the others being the exploration of the religious theme and the problems of women in contemporary society. An important feature in Sahgal’s novels is that the political scene in her novels has been presented in human terms. Her fictional political universe throbs with flesh and blood human figures rather than mere abstractions. She uses psychology to engraft her humanitarian concerns and the public and private selves of her characters are blended and explored. One gets from political writers like, Nayantara Sahgal, not the cold truth of the political scientist, but the hot truth of an artist. Sahgal sensitive to human reality, present the political happenings in a wider human framework.

The happenings in each novel assume a kind of allegorical dimension. The political and cultural events become an allegory for life. The public political events narrated so scrupulously by the writer becomes a reflection for the private-personal happenings. Nayantara Sahgal points out to the glaring defects and imperfections in the Indian political and social world and holds it up against the ideal traditions of the Gandhian era, in novels like Rich like us and Situation In New Delhi. Where the seemingly secure world of order and discipline propagated by the Emergency is actually an allegory of the muck and dirt of actual Indian politics. Parallels are drawn between the domestic situations projected and the actual political situations. The disturbed relationships, unhappiness and frustration are paralleled to the tensions and quarrels of the state division in the novel- in A Storm In Chandigarh. The four novels selected for study- This Time of morning, A Situation In New Delhi, Storm In Chandigarh, and Rich Like Us project the complexity of
human relations against the backdrop of actual political happenings. *This Time of Morning* (1965) is set against the backdrop of a just liberated nation undergoing the birth pangs of a new era. *Storm In Chandigarh* (1969) depicts certain sets of complex human relations against the background of the second partition of Punjab. The end and aftermath of the Nehruvian era culminating in *A Situation In New Delhi* and dynastic rule of Indira Gandhi, culminating in the declaration of Emergency in the seventies in *Rich Like Us*, which also explores the complexity of the Indo-British relations.

Sahgal’s second novel, *This Time of Morning* (1965) is set against the backdrop of a just liberated nation and seeks to catch the dilemma of a country just passing through the birth pangs of a new era. This novel talks about the attitudes of Indians for whom power has suddenly become a potential reality. Here we observe all canons of decency and decorum overthrown, in the hunt for power. Power here becomes a political reality, to be used or misused. Nayantara Sahgal uses satire effectively and forcefully in this novel to explore the manipulation and treachery that goes on behind the scenes in the Indian political arena. The private and the public are intermingled to focus on reality- the incongruities and the imitation world of the Narang family serve as an analogy to the muddle in the ministry of External Affairs. This novel emerges definitely as a political one, concerning itself with both the corruption and idealism of the political world. The humanitarian and liberal spirit is the essence of Sahgal’s philosophy and thinking and this idea encompasses her concerns, political, social and ideological. In *This Time Of Morning*, the post independence issue of freedom and progress is given individual colour. For men like Hari Mohan and Somnath it is power, for others it is the opportunity to create a new society through service. On one hand this novel provides an insight into the working
of politics, on the other hand it seeks to explore the effects and outcome of these as they work out in the life of individuals. Rakesh notices the disorder in his county and notes also the signs of progress. He realises that the time has come to find an identity of their own as Indians of the new era—an identity based on a judicious mixture of modern ideas and ancient values. The seeking of identity that Indians craved for in these early years of independence an identity based on an admixture of the best aspects of the west without severance of their own heritage is paralleled by Rashmi, Nita and Rakesh themselves seeking to express their own individuality and establishing their own identity.

Aspects of a society in transition are expressed in the life and attitudes of women like Nita and Rashmi. Rashmi’s broken marriage is the result of disastrous relationships and changed perceptions from earlier conventional ones of woman’s chastity, submission and self-sacrifice. Rashmi wants depth in relationships, to her a marriage should be based on love and belonging and humanistic values. Rather than suffer in silence; aghast at growing indifference to relationships, she walks out of her marriage, which has turned into a farce. Nita is a new woman who wishes to live her own life, with a job, earning her livelihood and leading a useful life. She resents an arranged marriage, which is overshadowed by material concerns where even sexual and emotional acts are merely conventional facades. Mira—Rashmi’s mother on the other hand is a traditional woman for whom marriage and traditional relationships and images are irrevocable for they keep life and society together. Her daughter’s decision of divorce, shocks her, but she realises change is inevitable and life has become complex: “New vistas presented a range of new conflicts and tensions that society had never known in their youth.” (Morning 161)
**Storm In Chandigarh** (1969) is a political novel where Sahgal presents a chronological account of Indian politics from the last phase of the freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in the mid seventies. As a political novelist, Sahgal depicts important phases in the Indian political scene all the while delineating personal events in allegorical significance. It is to be noted that *Storm in Chandigarh* is a more mature novel from the point of view of presenting the complex human relationship against the backdrop of actual political happenings—the second partition of Punjab. In this very political novel, the umbilical link between the political and the personal is highlighted. This novel is noted for its delicate juxtaposition of the ordinary pain of individual existence with the greater anguish and trauma of political turmoil in the region at that time. On one hand the feud between Gyan Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab and Harpal Singh, Chief Minister of Haryana assumes gigantic proportions, threaten the peace in the region, while on the other hand we are given an insight into the personal pain and tension in the lives of the young couples, Jit and Mara, Inder and Saroj and Vishal Dubey, the central Emissary. In this novel, the issues of freedom, humanitarian concepts, tyranny and exploitation are explored both at the political level in the tussle for power between the warring politicians, with the city of Chandigarh as the bone of contention. As also at the personal level in the trials of Saroj at the hands of her autocratic and unfeeling husband Inder. Most of Sahgal’s novels as this one depicts a picture of political erosion, degradation and breakdown all of which form a backdrop to the personal crises in the stories. Through a projection of this decay the writer shows her dissatisfaction with the new trends of corrupt politics. The writer believes in the old which she finds to be humanistic and compassionate which the modern has unfortunately displaced.
In Sahgal, tradition refers to certain areas like religion and social mores and the set of beliefs and practices, which formulate the mental make up of most Indians. In the life of most Indians religion plays a very important part, in most cases Hinduism the dominant religion, about which Sahgal has a lot to say, for she feels that religion forms a core issue of tradition. She feels that the attitude and outlook of a people is traced back to their culture and tradition and makes them behave as they do. The Hindus’ otherworldly or excessive concern, with the hereafter, to the total neglect of all that lies here and now is expressed in either evasiveness or extreme aggressiveness as is said in Storm in Chandigarh: “Either we sat paralysed waiting for heaven to send us a sign, or we charge like bulls into the ring.” (Storm 78) Vishal Dubey, the central male protagonist in the novel, feel that Hindus are obsessed with a backward looking tendency, which makes them excessively dominated by the past: “I think our great-grandmother does have a formidable influence on what we do......... Sometimes, I think it will need a tearing up by the roots, to get her out of the way...........” (Storm 66) Vishal Dubey also realises that ‘Brahmin’ is not a name given to a particular caste but to a person who has the ability to understand the great tradition of peace, tolerance, culture, and which can successfully and courageously resist evil.

In Sahgal politics is the core issue, but it is politics as related to the issue of humanity, and society, a society where culture is an important aspect, culture as shaping both individuals and the community. As a writer whose central concern is woman Nayantara Sahgal feels that culture and tradition is ultimately bound up with gender issues. Sahgal like other Indian English writers i.e., Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai questions the conventional image of Indian women and seeks alternative
images for them. “The roles are questioned and altered and adjusted and transformed or broken and discarded.” (Jain 158).

Sahgal’s novels take up the feminine cause from the autobiographical point of view. Her view is formed from the gap between theory and practice. Between the freedoms that she has experienced and savoured in her childhood and the oppression of the male world she experienced in her own married life. Sahgal’s new woman emerges, out of this personal conflict. The essence of this new woman is the awareness of the woman as a ‘person’. She believes in real women, not in created images or prototypes. Her women are the modern Sita—the best admixture of tradition and modernity. Sahgal questions the validity of certain traditional institutions like marriage, particularly arranged marriages in India because sometimes marriages and families become exploitative forces, Sahgal’s thinking women seek something deeper and beyond the materialistic trappings of marriage, like silk sarees, expensive jewellery or parties. What they seek is a response, a meeting of souls, recognition of their existence; it is then they find their path thorny.

Saroj, in this novel *Storm In Chandigarh*, is a victim of her husband Inder’s anger, at her single premarital lapse; put behind her long ago. Saroj, a warm loving person is determined to make her marriage a success, but Inder who wants to punish her mercilessly hounds her. Ironically, the same Inder does not hesitate to have an extramarital affair thus applying different standards for himself and Saroj with patriarchal arrogance. Saroj is left isolated and desperate - “like a bird against a window pane, trapped in a futile frenzy”. (*Storm*, 97). Her final departure from home is accompanied by a sense of failure, but it is a move towards personal freedom and rejection of the role Inder wanted to impose on her. For Sahgal the cause of the individual is very important, she seeks their freedom and expression not
only as a group, but also as individuals. Even for women she always sought full participation in social and political life, on the basis of their own individuality and not as labelled possessions.” (Sahgal, Women’s Liberation 98) In Vishal Dubey’s musings in Storm In Chandigarh we hear the voice of Sahgal, when he says about women: “They were wives, daughters, mothers. They belonged to their men by contact or by blood. They were dependent, not individuals.” (Storm 185-186). But we see this aspect changing and in novels like Storm we see the persistent seeking of women for their space in life as Mara and Saroj in this search for “the perpetual seeking beyond... (their) own safe domestic frontiers.” (Storm 61).

Mara another important character in Storm In Chandigarh is an open and frank person who is extremely honest in her relationships. She seeks fulfillment and response in a relationship outside marriage, which she does not find with her husband Jit and turns to Inder. In the novel she is in quest for that special relationship which gives her freedom. Saroj wants her marriage to be based on equality and mutual respect. For her husband Inder she has never been an individual, a person but at the end comes “the assertion of individuality by Saroj,” as she renounces her “begging bowl, with its capacity to be broken” (Storm 208) In this novel we find Mara and Saroj in this search the “perpetual seeking beyond.......... (their) own safe domestic frontiers” (Storm 61).

Nita and Rashmi (This Time of Morning) are early creations of Sahgal and they take the plunge Saroj (Storm In Chandigarh) take bolder decisions to change their lives and overthrow the claustrophobic images imposed on women by tradition than their earlier contemporaries. This development marks Sahgal’s awareness of gradual changes marking the attitudes to women by women themselves as also by society. Changes becoming faster and more drastic with the passage of time. Her
later heroines Devi, Skinny, \textit{(Situation In New Delhi)} and Sonali and Rose \textit{(Rich Like Us)} are stronger and more effective. Their actions, decisions, attitudes to change and correction are more powerful and wide-ranging. They remain not mere individuals involved with themselves but emerge as beacon lights bringing transformation to society while transforming themselves.

The political and social concerns of Nayantara Sahgal, which the writer intersperses so beautifully in her fictional narrative, make her a very meaningful and serious writer to most of her readers and critics. As the critic Makarand Paranjpe comments, "To me Nayantara Sahgal's novels are meaningful chronicles of a larger narrative, indeed as most Indian English fiction is." (159) The story of the growth of India has certain key themes, which can be defined as colonialism, nationalism, partition, independence, regionalism, communalism, urbanization, feminism, capitalism, socialism etc. which form the essence and background of our lives as well as fiction. In Sahgal's writing these issues are suitably interspersed in her themes.

\textit{A Situation In New Delhi\textit{(1977)}} is a novel, which marks out another important political phase in Indian history, this time the crisis in the political scene which occurs after the death of Nehru-the charismatic first prime minister of India. This is the novel which explores the duality of existence of a politician's life by focusing on the character of Devi, who faces a dilemma in her stubborn insistence on living at the personal and political realms of experience simultaneously. Sahgal's most powerful exploration of a central woman character in Devi-modeled on those strong sensitive women associated with the freedom movement whom Sahgal encountered countless times during her youth is perceptively delineated here, Women like the strong and vibrant Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (the writer's mother), the
powerful Indira Gandhi, the sensitive poet, activist Sarojini Naidu etc. As the woman in power Devi could not yield to her personal yearnings for she “was public property, sharing Shivraj’s house and perpetually in the limelight”. (Situation 52) Sahgal in the character of Devi explores very effectively, the conflict between duty and personal desire, between public tension and private trauma in the life of public figures. Devi, the sister of Shivraj, the late prime minister of the country is aghast at the anarchic conditions and the corrupt politics at the highest level, destroying the Gandhian ideology of the Indian political tradition and is one of Sahgal’s most convincing portrayal of a woman politician. The character of Devi explores the conflict between duty and the duality of existence and the multidimensional face of modern Indian womanhood in the role of a politician and public leader and breaks new ground in the portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction.

In the portrayal of the trauma, travails and triumph of the Indian woman Nayantara Sahgal differs from the other two women writers selected for this study. In that she has created the image of woman as leader. This she has done, from the vantage point of her background, as the scion of India’s foremost political family boasting of powerful political leaders both men and women. The three women, Sahgal has explored in the novels selected for this study are Devi and Madam as politicians and Sonali-bureaucrat. In these women the writer has delineated vividly the opposing pulls between personal desires and public obligation between one’s principles and murky realities of public political life, thus creating vivid, living personalities and outlining known and unknown truths and highlighting the desires, frustrations and triumphs of this breed of Indian women. In Devi (A Situation In New Delhi), Sahgal has tried to bring out the conflict between the woman and the cabinet minister. She searches for fulfillment at both levels, in the public / political
front she tries to live up to the ideals of her charismatic brother, Shivraj, by projecting clean and value oriented policies in the ministry and also seek fulfillment in love with Michael and Usman. She goes through frustrations and tragedy at her son’s wayward violent ways and rejection of her proposals at the cabinet meeting, but achieves fulfillment in the mass movement she later takes up with Usman. But as a woman she is doomed, in an elusive search for personal fulfillment. In the character of Devi, Sahgal creates a rare combination of feminine intuition and a political leader of principle and foresight—a positive image of the Indian woman with her strengths and failures.

As has already been stated, Sahgal has redefined the concept of the virtuous woman of Indian myth and legend. Her women in their quest for freedom and individuality; often overcome the barriers of convention and morality. In her novels, Sahgal treats man-woman relations, even adulterous relations in an unconventional manner—honestly and frankly. “Chastity for her is not a concept of the flesh, it is one of the spirit” (Jain 158) In this novel, Devi symbolizes the continuation of the search for freedom, both at the personal and public levels. Devi as a woman of life does not allow marriage to be a means of bondage for the self—she does not want to end her life at her husband’s pyre. The search for fulfillment takes her to Usman and Michael, but Sahgal is realistic enough to leave Devi’s search unfulfilled, for at that particular juncture, Indian women, even those at high places, were not ready for such unconventionality.

As a writer for whom politics and public life is the mantle for the creative and the personal this novel is almost autobiographical for it discloses her strong attachment to and the abiding influence of her uncle Pandit Nehru and mother Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit on her life. This novel reflects changes in both political and
personal life, the death of Shivraj (Nehru), which marks the end of the old order and
the arrival of the new. Shivraj’s death marks the beginning of a downhill trend in
Indian politics. From idealism, commitment, honesty, the scene has now become
replete with corruption, power play, and lack of commitment. In this new
atmosphere, Devi and Usman; representatives of the older breed find themselves
helpless, as they feel they are living in an era they cannot understand and where their
policies and ideals have become obsolete “fog, breathing charisma until it chokes
us.” (Situation 117). The novel vividly documents the cult of violence signified by
the Naxalite movement and student agitations of the late sixties and early seventies.
Rishad, Devi’s son falls a victim to this violence as Madhu to student violence and
patriarchal oppression. Madhu commits suicide after her gang rape and Usman is
victimized for seeking justice for her cause. Through the political trauma, chaos,
lawlessness, violence and personal tragedy, Sahgal poses certain questions about the
state of politics and public life, the victimisation of the common person and the
restlessness of the youth vis-à-vis the issue of taking law into one’s hands.

Sahgal depicts a nation in transition, between traditional values in
politics and culture and changing trends of the modern era, these aspects are
paralleled in the life of the chief protagonists who also are caught between the old
and new, past, present and future. Nayantara Sahgal posits the crucial idea that one
must prepare for changes and equip oneself to face the new, for one cannot hold on
to something obsolete. Shivraj’s legacy failed because he did not groom suitable
followers or failed to initiate his followers with his vision. Changes are inevitable,
irrevocable and Sahgal feels that the best way out would be a judicious mixture of
the old and the new.
From the idealism of the Nehruvian era when the euphoria of independence was still a tangible reality, one reaches the transitional stage of chaos and political erosion depicted in *A Situation In New Delhi*. From here the stage shifts to the era of Madam, the female imperialist when the nexus between business, politics and crime became the strongest and Indian politics reached its darkest stage. This is depicted in Nayantara Sahgal’s most powerful novel *Rich like Us* (1985) for which she won the Sahitya Academy Award. Here Sahgal takes up an important political event in the history of modern India—the declaration of the State of Emergency from 1976 to 1977. The writer narrates the nightmare of this suffocating political environment bearing down on the life of a few people sensitively and vividly in the novel.

*Rich Like Us* explores on variety of themes ranging from the political one of power craving, corruption and atrocities all depicted against the backdrop of the Emergency the perpetrator of which is the ‘Madam’- nameless, faceless but all powerful. Madam, the female exploitative force is portrayed as an abstraction, an allegory of the negative forces of power represented in the female. Paradoxically, in the same novel, we see the evil reality of atrocities on women from the earliest times. The fictionalized account of an actual sati incident from the writer’s own family, in the incident where Sonali’s grandfather watches helpless as his own mother is being burnt in the pyre as a sati. From this to the modern incidents of bride burning for dowry and the torture and rape on the village women by the police, it is a continuous story of atrocities on women. All of which cannot be righted with any amount of social reform, or legislation as the writer believes: “Generations of lawyers will uphold generations of laws, but the old evil will go on into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, because no torch has been lit”. (*Rich* 234).
Injustice, evil, exploitation goes on and on because people look the other way, because there is silence and no protest as during the Emergency. The Emergency is an allegory of a society, of a people who never speak up against injustice, of the silence of a set of people, perpetually in chains, the state of society where power rules and corrupts. This novel shows us two kinds of women—the victims and the exploiters. Madam in Rich Like Us is the exploitative agency. The Sati incident portrayed in the novel is a situation where women offer silent, but tacit support on atrocities on a fellow woman. This kind of aggressive power play in related to ‘mother right’—a case of feminine principle having gone wrong. The victimised women are a representation also of the enslavement of the human being, whose inherent freedom is threatened. Freedom is threatened by the political system, ritualistic tradition, conventional roles etc. Sonali in Rich Like Us is victimised by the political system. Rose is exploited by her stepson and earlier by her husband Ram. Other women characters similarly victimised are Sonali’s great grandmother, and Mona (Ram Swarup’s first wife). In contrast we have the other kind of women, like Ravi Kachru’s domineering mother-Bhabijan and Sonali’s over bearing mother. The third kind are the conventional women for whom freedom, principles and justice are immaterial in the face of materialistic and personal gain, they are women like Nishi and Kiran.

Certain crucial aspects of Indian tradition as related to women are explored, as the concept of motherhood, of supreme importance in Indian relationships and society. Traditionally it is only with motherhood that a woman comes into her own, is emancipated and society gives her due recognition. The concept of the ‘Mother’, ‘Mata’, ‘Matri’ deified and venerated is the single role where women assume a position of power In Rich Like Us, Rose is a lonely, isolated
woman not only because she is a foreigner, but also because she is childless. In the loneliness of middle age, she is easily victimised by her stepson Dev, who does not hesitate to kill her. Looking at motherhood from an unconventional angle, Sahgal de-romanticises the experience for childbirth and labour pain to destroy the myth of contented motherhood. Nishi’s silent revolt and helplessness at the experience of childbirth is described in the following account:

Her selves lay torn in jagged halves on the delivery table,
under the masked, indifferent scrutiny of strangers and their implements.

Through slitted battlements............she could smile and nod at telegrams, gifts and flowers...grappling with her selves was simple if she kept her inner and outer selves apart.(Rich 136)

These lines describe the contradiction in Nishi between degradation and pain, the reality of the experience and the illusory greatness at the universal glorification of motherhood and the role of the woman as the perpetuator of the human race. The account also foregrounds the intimate secret, mutinous feeling of a woman undergoing the most traumatic experience of her life. Like many feminist writers, Sahgal uses the experience of childbirth to depict the innermost cores of a woman’s being as also “the marginalised state of mind during childbirth” (Kirpal 172). Here woman’s language is used to depict the raw truth of her experience.

The emphasis on the depiction of the collective, social and the universal through the analysis of individual feelings and experiences is a notable feature in Nayantara Sahgal. The individual is the criteria, through which she judges all issues
In each of her novels, Sahgal shows an individual as a crusader for the cause of values cherished by Gandhism (in which the writer believes strongly) openness, truth, non-violence, egalitarianism etc. Strong, idealistic individuals like Vishal Dubey, Devi, Usman and Sonali are individuals chosen by the writer to bring positive changes to society. In Sonali, the IAS officer in Rich Like Us, Sahgal portrays the crusader for a cause. Sonali portrays the continuity of Indian tradition in her innate values she cherishes and the transition and changes by seeking to fight and change the system. The strength and resilience of this lady can be gauged by the fact that the oppressive environment cannot change her. The situation of the Indian woman, from the past to the present is presented vividly in the life of Sonali the IAS officer-joint secretary, Ministry of Industry whose great-grandmother was forced to commit sati: Both Sonali and her great-grandmother are victimised women, but both resist and protest in their own way. The great grandmother commits sati, stoically to fulfil a purpose like the legendary Sita undergoing Agni-Pariksha (trial by fire) and Sonali resigns when she is victimised, to fight her personal and public battles alone and later with like minded people. She exposes the evil, exploitation and corruption associated with the regime of Emergency even to the extent of breaking off her friendship to Ravi Kachru to be true to her own principles and those of her father Keshav Ranade. She is a representation of the troubled and traumatised bureaucrat harassed by corrupt politicians, also the young woman troubled by the patriarchal notions of her own mother and sister. A life-like portrayal of the contemporary Indian woman at the cross roads of modernity and tradition. Like Devi she is also a woman in conflict between the public and the personal between desire and duty—a representation of the multifaceted Indian woman. Sonali is an individual in her own right who cannot he
reduced to a system. Sonali, like other prominent individualistic characters emphasise the Gandhian perception of the individual as the carrier of the divine spark within her. As she realises after her battle which she fights single handedly tying to overcome the forces of dictatorship and terror of the Emergency that “My own country stretched before me waiting to be lived” (Rich 234).

Sahgal is a witness to the vast climatic changes that India had undergone from the colonial to the post-colonial days as a member of India’s first political family. She is also an avid observer of the transformation of Indian life and tradition from the then to the now. In her novel Rich Like Us, Rose, a central character- a British woman married to an Indian businessman is an eyewitness to such changes. She had arrived in India before the II world war and lived on till long after the independence- a witness to the changes in the country from colonial to post-colonial days, Rose’s observation, her interaction with her Indian family, her observation of the political and social changes as a member of a family to which she belongs, yet do not belong gives us several perspectives of India and its tradition. Rose’s position as the chosen wife of Ram is at first an exalted one and then a marginalized one as the unwanted, cast away childless woman, the middle aged hag who is an irritant in the household of her villainous step-son Dev. Rose serves as an allegory of the British position in India, from the exalted domination of the Raj days to the marginalized situation of the post-colonial era. The socio-political changes are noted from the view point of Rose. Sahgal through the character of Rose provides a bird’s eye view of changes in India with the objective, balanced outlook of the western mind which through removed is critically sympathetic to the eastern ideals.

The life and destinies of the central female characters Rose and Sonali set against the backdrop of Indian’s traditional past and horrific present form the core of
the novel. Two women from different cultural background relate to the structure of the past believing in its integrity in relation to the contemporary problems. Sonali is the modern Indian woman imbibing the best of western liberalism and progressive thought. Rose with her innate goodness and humanity keeps the family together and builds up the family business and though a foreigner, she detects the illness in society and tries her best to avert it. The depiction of the rich personalities of the two women in contrast to the sordid, degenerate world portrayed in the novel, add significance to the title *Rich Like Us*.

In the context of Indian English fiction the book brings about a refreshing change, for with it Sahgal enters the realm of modernist fiction after the straight narrations of the past. The book alternates between a limited third person narrative and Sonali’s first person narrative. The sordid drama enacted on the stage of Indian politics is viewed with a double vision, the objective narration of the author and the filter of Sonali’s consciousness. There is the juxtaposition of the past and present in the narrative to explore a crisis in Indian life and tracing of history from the turn of the nineteenth century to the seventies of the twentieth century—in recent history. Symbols of illness like hepatitis, cancer and paralysis allegorise aspects of a society gone terribly wrong. The crippled beggar, the forced sterilization and the rape and murder of the village women indicate the suffering of common people at the hands of power misused both at the social and personal level.

A study of the novels of Nayantara Sahgal leads one naturally to the writer’s concern for the future of Indian society. She has always used the genre of the political novel to comment on the state of society by basing her novels on actual historical incidents. In doing so, she talks about the politics of power, of treachery, intrigue, sycophancy both in public and personal life, which affect human
relationships too. She uses the political discourse as a reflection to the politics of both private and public life as also myth and legend. Sita's trial by fire is used to allegorise the Sati incident of the past and Rose's murder and dowry deaths of the present. For Nayantara Sahgal, freedom and individuality is of great importance. She, who was totally nurtured on the Gandhian values of truth and non-violence, imbibed the high principles of her father-Ranjit Pandit and uncle Jawaharlal Nehru, on ideals based on positive aspects of traditional values. She felt that such values should be emphasized for these were the ground realities foreseen by Gandhi to build a healthy and progressive society. In the novel Rich Like Us, she expresses much of her feelings about the abuse of power, cruelties of the system, the exploitation, lawlessness and corruption which sadly has become a reality in modern society.

She thoroughly decries the tendency to reduce people (humanness) to "a thing, like a mass of clay, for someone else's use." (Situation 51). She emphasizes the fact that individuals make society and therefore creates her important protagonists who are nurtured on strong abiding values that can change society for the better. These characters like Sonali (modeled on herself), Devi (on her mother Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit), Saroj, Vishal Dubey, Keshav Ranade, Rose etc are seekers of freedom and nourished by the best aspects of Indian tradition both in public and personal life. However they are hampered at every step by inimical forces, which have become predominant in modern Indian society. Her emphasis on the rot that has crept into the system, rather than the individual and the individual, as crusader is relevant to Indian society today. As for the relationship of individuals to tradition they welcome aspects of tradition, which help sustain relationships and positive human values, however Sahgal's protagonists are appalled and reject the cruelty and
exploitative aspects of tradition. They seek changes, to right the wrongs and bring about positive transformation to the societies they live in.

Emphasizing the fact that politics has always been an inevitable fact of human life, Sahgal talks about a very important issue of life that is the politics of family and personal life. In an interview with Jasbir Jain in 1990, Nayantara Sahgal has talked about the play of power in interpersonal relationship, between husband and wife, parent and child, between lovers, friends, in-laws and so on. As she says, "I think of politics not as leading the country but politics as the use of power, and also the abuse of power, It happens at so many levels. (Sahgal, Interview 186)

The issues that make or mar relationships are also the issues of politics. The politics of family life, interpersonal relations, quarrels, interference, loves, hatreds, jealousies, helpfulness, treacheries are the seeds of greater issues affecting even nations and history. So Sahgal's small stories culminate to make up the big stories that go on to make political or social history of a land.

Like her contemporaries Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, Sahgal too emphasises on the issue of woman apart from her other concerns. In her writings she contradicts the notion of the third-world woman as represented by western feminism, as an embodiment of ignorance, poverty tradition bound and most of all victimised. Instead, she brings to the fore, women's, particularly Indian women's role in bringing constancy to relationships and making for positive values in life and society.

Looking at the essence of her thought process and her views on woman and society from a critical angle, one may point out that Sahgal talks from the vantage point of the elite, advantaged women. This may provide an incomplete picture of the
ground realities of common Indian women and their lives who may not be similarly advantaged. However, Sahgal’s view of high places, the political world and its men and women is a very faithful one. It is a very useful picture too for it talks of protagonists who are in a position to change conditions, change attitudes and ultimately societies and even lives for the better. Whether they are successful or helpless, whether their intentions are sincere and honest or mischievous and selfish are analysed by a writer who has had much experience and research in these areas. As Sahgal portrays a student in trouble, a political leader or a bureaucrat in dilemma, a housewife in peril, a minister charged by a mob, she provides the changing perspectives to the kaleidoscopic realities of Indian society.
Works Cited


