Chapter IV

The Politics of Liberal Feminism

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.
Simon de Beauvoir

The concept of woman and her changing status in the postcolonial Indian society have been a source of creative inspiration for Nayantara Sahgal. Sahgal's women characters occupy a prominent position in her novels. In fact many of her novels use a female point of view. Identifying herself with the alienated, suppressed and the marginalized woman, Nayantara Sahgal does not hide her allegiance with the female subject and her efforts to trace a self of her own. In fact Sahgal is a well known feminist writer, apart from being a novelist. She presents the problems of women in the larger social context; being aware of the enigma of social construction of femininity within a traditional society like India. Yet her solutions are most often idealistic and individualistic. Therefore, even as she successfully poses complex issues regarding the female, she talks from a very ambivalent position. This gives us a clue to the unresolvable inner conflict in her approach. This inner struggle can be traced to Sahgal's quarrel with a social structure which is dominantly patriarchal and her inability to dissociate herself fully from the very same structure that constructs feminine identity.
In this context an analysis of Sahgal's women characters and their position can be best understood in the light of a comprehensive discussion of the formation of female gender identity in Indian society. According to Gerda Lerner, "Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance" (*The Creation* 236). Gerda Lerner explains the social origin of the individual behaviour which is often considered to be "natural". The individual attitudes and behaviour are constructed in the hegemonic ideology of the society. It is in turn influenced by the individuals and the movements that try to subvert the hegemonic ideological pattern.

Sahgal often portrays the problems of women trapped within the patriarchal ideology and oppressed within their own homes. Their suffering produces mixed reactions. Some of them accept their fates and express their dissatisfaction through self torture while others try to resist oppression and demand love, affection, consideration and a dignified life based on mutual respect.

Their world view is conditioned and controlled by traditional patriarchal belief systems, laws and regulations, global capitalist culture, religion and the colonial ideology. It does not mean that they are blind to the transformations that happen around them. They respond to these binding ideologies in their own way. Ammaji in *A Time to Be Happy* resists the dominance of the "indolent, pleasure loving man who had married her" and expresses "her stubborn refusal to submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her" (TH 25). Questioning the role of an
obedient and suffering wife assigned to her by her husband, Ammaji asserts her individuality. Her refusal to submit to the colonial control is evident in her response to the cultural amnesia that affects the English educated Indian youth: "Do they know what crops grow on their father's land, or even what this land was before the foreigner came to it? What kind of learning do they acquire in school?" (TH 24).

Ammaji's vehement reaction reveals her aversion for the westernised young generation who are aliens in their own country. She tries to confront the fact that the country is "progressing" through the wrong track. The growing alienation of the young generation in their own land is evident in her words. Her concern regarding the younger generation arises out of her awareness of the cultural confusion effected by the colonial regime. Thus Ammaji's personality is moulded by a two way struggle, one against the patriarchal control and the other against colonial domination.

Nadira in *A Situation in New Delhi* feels alienated in India for a totally different reason. According to the writer "she had erected an Islamic fortress around her, imprisoned herself, a princess in a tower" (137). The term "Islamic fortress" refers to the religious control to which Nadira is subject to. Nadira's religious prejudice might have originated out of this conditioning as well as from her experience as a Muslim living in the postcolonial India. Nadira tells her husband Usman: "What have they done to you? They're going to kill you. They're after you because you're a Muslim" (SND 31). Nadira's fears originate from the postcolonial
Indian situation beset by the Hindu-Muslim conflict, fuelled by the colonial rulers who believed in the policy of divide and rule. If Ammaji is worried about the alienated young generation, Nadira's fears stem from her own feeling of rootlessness in India in the post-partition period.

Having chosen to "dwell spiritually in blind alley . . . the dark breeding ground of superstition" she refuses to "focus on reality" (SND 32). Nadira's inability to understand the liberal minded Usman and his political philosophy springs out of her orthodox approach to problems. Her preoccupations, both physical and intellectual, were different from that of her husband. She tells Usman that she wants to be with him always, yet "she was not with him in his friendships and loyalties, in the passions of his mind and heart, in his concerns" (SND 33).

Nadira is a total alien both in the society and in the family. She fails to come to terms with reality, social as well as familial. Conditioned by the religious superstitions and orthodoxy, scared by the communal rivalry and violence Nadira could not "settle down" (SND 34) as the wife of Usman who advocates a secular approach. Usman's comment, "She was durable as mistress material, problematic as a wife" (SND 34), shows Nadira's inability to assert her individuality and establish an equal relationship with her husband.

Mona in *Rich Like Us* feels alienated in her own home. The neglect and total rejection that she suffers from her husband, Ram, who
returns from England with a new English wife, does not instil in her the
courage to challenge the injustice openly. Mona is a good example of a
suffering woman who fails to react positively. She tries to escape from
her frustration through prayers, fasts and acts of devotion. But her blind
devotion to her husband cannot conceal her suffering. Sahgal writes:
"And apart from Mona's fasts and prayers, there were Mona's loud
insistent tears" (RLU 41). Mona is a silent sufferer who finally dies of
cancer. Mona's sufferings begin with Ram's second marriage. He
justifies his action showing examples from the puranas. He says, "King
Dasrath, Rama's father had four wives" (RLU 54). Ram tries to justify
his action because both Mona and Rose feel it to be an injustice to keep
two wives at one and the same time. Mona expresses her grief through
fasts and prayers and Rose reveals her anger by holding Ram away from
her. Even though Ram cites examples from the puranas and epics, his
act cannot be justified. Sahgal writes: "the sanctity of hoary tradition
had not kept Ram attached to his first wife" (RLU 40). Here the
ambiguity associated with the concept of tradition becomes clear. Epics
and puranas are part of our tradition. But what is written in those texts
need not be confused with the real incidents and practices of the ancient
period. Moreover the word tradition does not denote or guarantee a just,
faultless system of practices relevant for all time. So Ram's effort
becomes meaningless and futile in the context of his cruel treatment of
his first wife which can never be justified by any precedence. It is clear
that his action is motivated by his sensuous desires rather than his trust
in tradition. He is more associated with the bourgeois values which
consider women as instruments of pleasure rather than dignified
individuals. The very use of traditional concepts to justify his cruelty to his first wife is clear indication of the influence of bourgeois values that sustain patriarchal control.

Even though Mona fails in evolving an open resistance, the illiterate ranee of *Mistaken Identity* bids farewell to the slavish existence of a first wife, after the arrival of the second and third wives. She decides to leave her husband and marries a communist leader Yusuf. Sahgal explains this sudden transformation in the ranee with the comment "this is the Ganges heartland where we breathe the air of miracles" (MI 206). Shrouded in the smoke screen of miracles, the illiterate ranee's silent suffering, the challenge she offers to tradition and public opinion and her final escapade with Yusuf just for the warm affection he offered, whose politics and religion is alien to her, is significant. Alladi Uma seems to suggest a rational explanation to this miracle when she comments "what is evident in both cases -- Mother and Razia -- is their suppressed vitalities and society's control over it" (188). So the sudden transformation in the ranee from a traditional woman to an iconoclast may be explained as the sudden eruption of the vitality dormant within her. Alladi Uma points to two important ideas here that woman is not weak by birth and that she has been conditioned by the society to believe that she is weak inorder to control her. Here ranee and Razia release their innate energy at certain points in the novel. If Razia succumbs to the pressures of the society ranee liberates herself from it. Yusuf's intervention provided the proper atmosphere for ranee's liberation.
Here, knowingly or unknowingly the ranee joins hands with a political activist and a freedom fighter, Yusuf, rejecting her husband who married thrice. Polygamy may be a traditional practice. But the practice of it in modern times is neither a sign nor an indication of the King's affinity for traditional values. He has his own reasons to suggest. Sahgal writes: "He said his elder brother had insisted on it, to extend his influence in the district and make him more eligible for rajahood, and he was bound to obey his elder brother" (MI 43-44). One reason behind the frequent marriages is his desire to become a proper King, another reason being his obedience to his elder brother. By and large his aim is for power, authority and identity. Here a traditional practice like polygamy is used for the extension of power which is a clear indication of the commercialisation of the traditional cultural practices within a bourgeois cultural space. It is the absence of love and the humiliating experiences in her married life that prompt the ranee to quit her husband. She runs away with Yusuf just because he is capable of loving her. Her quest is for love, dignity and freedom. Yusuf is engaged in a similar quest for his countrymen. What is common in them is the experience of oppression and an ability to offer resistance. Though she had left the alphabets and "skills behind with her toys when she came to Vijaygarh," she was "remarkably well informed" (MI 41). It might have been this informal education and the sheer energy resident in her personality that contributed to the sense of freedom and an ability for positive action in the "illiterate ranee".
The description of her laughter reflects her sense of freedom. Bhushan's mother laughs, "throwing caution and control to the winds, her head flung back, that mass of hair unwinding in coils over her shoulders as she reached under it to hold her skull like some precious breakable object whose fate she hadn't quite decided yet" (MI 38). Her uncontrolled laughter and the free flow of her hair suggests her freedom from inhibitions and controls instituted by the society. The rejection of a slavish adoration is suggested by the act of tearing the tapestry of a prancing Hanuman. Hanuman is a kind of loyal slave to Rama and the only ideology that controls him is a slavish adherence to his master's voice. The ranee rejects such an existence. It is her rebellious nature and the bitter experiences of life that enable her to overcome these ideological constraints. Unlike Mona who suppresses her feelings, the ranee tries to overcome gendering and patriarchal oppression through positive action.

Gender is produced and reproduced in the dominant ideology. A study of this process of gendering in the Indian context within the traditional pre-colonial and postcolonial phases will be meaningful here. The geographical space which constitutes the nation, India, has from time immemorial remained multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi cultural. This unending multiplicity provides endless impediments to the comprehensive understanding of the patterns of Indian cultural development. The diversity and variety inherent in the cultural make up of the nation is integral to the study of the position of women in India.
The status of women is not the same among Hindus, Muslims and Christians. It differs with community, caste, region, race and class. An awareness of this limitless variety enables us to realise the plurality of the subject that we are going to study. This range of difference is described by Andre Beteille in her essay, "The Position of Women in Indian Society". She writes:

In the same region and within the same religious group one might find a variety of social customs. Thus in Kerala, the Nairs and Nambudiris followed very different customs even when they lived as neighbours and were bound by the closest social ties. The Nairs were matrilineal and matrilocal whereas the Nambudiris were patrilineal and patrilocal. The rights enjoyed by Nair women were in many ways superior to those of their Nambudiri sisters. (64)

The above mentioned example certainly points towards the absence of a uniform status for the women in India. A similar sort of disharmony is evident in the presentation of women in the ancient religious texts and literary works which constitute the only relevant reference material available on ancient Indian life. The status of women in the Indus Valley civilisation was supposed to be very high before the Aryan invasion. Ancient beliefs about Goddesses also persisted among non-Aryan tribes during this time. According to the Vedic mythology, the male Aryan God Indra killed Danu, the great Mother Goddess of the conquered Harappan people. The Aryans were believed to be nomadic pastoral tribes flowing across the central Asian land mass. They were
supposed to be more advanced in warfare. The pre-Aryans were settled agricultural people (Ali Baig 4).

The Harappan pre-Aryans believed in mother goddesses. It has been taken as a sign of the dignity and social status that women enjoyed in that particular culture. In course of time the worship of the mother goddess was gradually incorporated into the Hindu canon and is still practiced in various parts of our country. The worship of "Ammas" in certain parts of Kerala and the worship of goddess "Devi" among Tantric groups in Bengal and Assam can be traced back to this Harappan convention (Morgan, 307). But such tales may not get the status of authentic historical records because of the element of speculation involved in it. At the same time the origin of such speculations and symbolic concepts from real material practice cannot be denied. Commenting on the shift in the social status of women, Romila Thapar in her article "Looking Back in History" writes:

Indications of a change in status can be noticed in early texts referring to the origin of the notion of the state. The context is that of peasant societies, who having lived through a halcyon period of co-existence and peace, began to erupt as centres of violence and lawlessness with the stealing of each other's wives and the crop from each other's fields. Property and women, it is implied are the source of trouble. To establish law and order not only are the institutions of private property and marriage recognised, but a person is selected, or alternatively, requested to become the arbiter of law and thus maintain harmony. It is from this point on that the status of women begins to
deteriorate as is evident from the narration in the texts (e.g. the *Digha Nikaya* of the Buddhist cannon and the *Mahabharata*). (7)

Romila Thapar associates the deterioration of the status of women with the establishment of a social system based on private property. It gives us some evidence of the association between the gender roles and the social structure.

Indian epics and puranas give us ample evidence of the poor estimate in which women were kept in ancient India. *Manusmriti* equates women with the *Sudras*. Bhagavat Gita places women along with Vaisyas and Sudras and describe them all as being of sinful birth. *Manusmriti* written early in the Christian era present the basic rules for women's behaviour:

By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent . . . .

Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife . . . .

By violating her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world; (after death) she enters the womb of a jackal, and is tormented by diseases (the punishment) of her sin. (qtd. in Wadley 30)
Manusmriti clearly outlines the role of women in Indian society. According to it they are not free and are supposed to be controlled and protected by men at different stages. Ideal women are those who obey these laws and their salvation and happiness rely on their virtue and chastity as daughters, wives and widows. The fact that the Dharmasamhitas focus exclusively on "women's behaviour in relationship to men: wife/husband; mother/son; daughter/father; sister/brother" (Wadley, 29-30) and its silence on male/female relationship is an indication of its male oriented nature.

The concept of ideal women is not confined to the Dharmasastras (The Rules of Right Conduct). It appears in the popular legends and epics as well. Rama's wife Sita, in Ramayana is considered to be the ideal Hindu wife. Her devotion to her husband, the unquestioned acceptance of his supremacy and the sufferings that she undergoes to be true to Rama make her the epitome of all womanly qualities. She is the ideal that ordinary women should follow.

If Sita is a popular role model of a devoted wife, Savitri is another ideal wife who is committed to her husband. Sita's passivity and silent suffering is contrasted with the vibrancy and positive action in Savitri. Through a determined effort Savitri releases her husband from the hands of Yama. In this legend also the devotion and adherence to the husband is stressed. The wife's devotion to her husband and its social acceptance becomes the cultural context in these instances. It is interesting to note that the widows who commit sati are often acclaimed
as goddesses. It is true that the devotion of the wife to the husband is the basis of man's reverence to the *sati-matha*. Thus the underlying principle that runs through these examples is the dominance of the male over the female.

In the contemporary discourse of women in India the construction of the new woman is actualised by the rejection of the subordinating tendencies of tradition. Such an inner dialogue of rejection occurs in Sahgal's women characters in general. Considering the nature of Indian tradition, C.T. Indira writes:

Indian ideological history concerning women is, thus, not monolithic. It straddles three levels: the spiritual or metaphysical, the legendary level as demonstrated in epics and tales of oral tradition (throwing light on changing social organisation), and the actual level as seen in the existing reality, especially in contemporary society. (*Gender* 74)

Indira feels that at the spiritual or metaphysical level human life is oriented towards reaching truth and in this sex difference is immaterial. In the legends and myths there are examples of women occupying important positions. In real practice women enjoyed relative freedom in certain parts of India and the tendency to confine women gained momentum with the intermixture of culture along with the invasions by Huns, Parthions, Turks and Mughals (*Gender* 79).
Whatever may be the credibility of this argument one can accept the fact that tradition is not fully "traditional". Tradition carries modernity just as modernity contains tradition. There are traditional women in myth and history who are "modern" as well as contemporary women who are traditional. Regarding the emergence of patriarchy in Indian society C.T. Indira claims: "Several sociological and political forces connived to give primacy to patriarchy in Indian society. I believe it was not indigenous to it" (Gender 79). With the assumption that patriarchy is not truly indigenous, Indira comes to the conclusion that "the fear of exposing their women folk to alien men must have resulted in mandatory codes of conduct" (Gender 79). Whatever may be the reasons behind the fear it is a fact that man had control over woman.

The very statement "the fear of exposing their women folk to alien men" alludes to the fact that these men consider their women as a possession, a thing or a sort of a private property. Their fear and initiative to "protect" their women may be an indication of their suspicion that these women, when exposed to other men may fall under evil influence and finally would be lost. Moreover if these men were able to formulate and execute a code of conduct strictly controlling women, without any opposition from them (of which no mention is made) the social set up of that period would certainly have been a male dominated one. It appears, therefore, that Indian society already had leanings towards a patriarchal tradition. It may be true to say that patriarchal control grew stronger and stronger along with the invasions by various groups and cultures.
Continuous invasions destabilised the social set up, economy and the cultural norms of India. The strongest impact was created by the British imperialists. The impact it created in the Indian psyche is reflected in the reform movements that sprang up during this period. The destruction of Indian economy especially the rural economy, and the cultural shock instituted by the British policies resulted in creating drastic changes in the traditional role models. The colonial rulers created major discontinuity in the economic field as they transplanted industrial capitalism to the Indian soil though with a difference. As the traditional occupations in which women were engaged declined drastically they were forced to till new grounds.

Along with this, the English education, reform movements and nationalist movement opened up fresh possibilities for women to reach new heights and to look into themselves. Drastic structural changes in the society provided new role models for women. The new generation of employees, professionals and those women who earned their livelihood emerged in this new social set up. It is this new brand of educated women who became leaders of various movements during that anti-colonial struggle. Theories and practices in favour of women emerged in modern India during this period. The anti-colonial struggle paved the way for a transformation in the social order. The struggle for freedom opened up various fronts of resistance; against caste system, feudal norms and the oppression of women. Commenting on the experience of Kerala, T.K. Ramachandran writes:
The national movement and the anti feudal struggles attracted women in large numbers and social life was agog with expectancy. It was in this racical climate that 'the women's question' came to be placed squarely on the political and social agenda, and man-woman relations discussed in a humane and enlightened manner. (119)

Since the national movement itself was shaped and influenced by bourgeois ideology as against the feudal decadence and imperialist hegemony it resulted in the dominance of the bourgeois familial ideology. Thus the cultural scene was dominated by the modern commodified capitalist culture. This new culture, which is a sign of the prevalence of colonial structure, produced an altered feminine identity. This is conditioned by the twin forces of Colonialism and Nationalism. During the renaissance period and during the nationalist struggle for freedom, the feminine identity secured a respectable position. But the post-independence period witnessed a set back to this ideal with the receding of liberal humanist forces. This has been brought about by various factors. The emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, the sustenance of colonial institutions, the absence of a significant opposition to it and the prevalence of the embourgeoised feudal practices in the cultural space contributed in the receding of the liberal humanist attitude and the hegemony of the exploitative global capitalism.

Nayantara Sahgal's characters denounce the feudalist notions and the traditional role of woman that enslave them. But while accepting the modern ideals like freedom and equality under the influence of the West
they were vehemently opposed to the political control instituted by the West and resist the commodification of woman and modern version of traditional sex roles under capitalism. Thus women characters are placed at a peculiar position as they could belong neither to traditional culture nor to the bourgeois modernity fully.

So the inner psychological struggle, resident in Sahgal's woman characters is in a way related to this cultural confusion that exists in postcolonial India. Traditional and modern values merge in the behavioural patterns of characters like Simrit and Saroj. The traditional "feminine virtues" like patience, obedience, an ability to suffer and control are evident in their character. But the unequal power sharing and the injustices in their married life trigger the modern urge to rebel in these educated wives. When their effort to establish a just order fails they decide to leave the husband centred life. Certainly divorce is a painful experience for these women. As Simrit feels:

We've ended it, but it's going on with an uncanny persistence of its own. The most tenacious things were the intangibles, above all plain ordinary life lived over the years. In some inescapable way a part of her would always be married to Som. (DS 220)

Even after divorce Simrit feels that the shadow of Som will continue to haunt her. The past influences the present. The so called freedom attained by her after divorce is not total freedom. The heavy burden of the past continues to confront the liberative spirit. So the new
phase she reaches after divorce is not the liberated phase but the phase of continuing confrontation.

Uma in *This Time of Morning* and Mara in *Storm in Chandigarh* react very differently from Saroj and Simrit. The sensuous and young Uma married to Arjun Mitra, the Secretary General of External Affairs is bored because of Arjun's inability to look after his internal affairs. Uma resists by spending more time with other men. Uma's sensuousness and Arjun's indifference to her, lead her to a peculiar psychological state. Sahgal comments on this transformation in her: "Anger distorted her face and when she was angry all decent canons of behaviour deserted her . . . she was wild and lawless and he began to dread her scenes" (TTM 26). Arjun who neglects Uma's needs as a woman is put to shame. She drinks heavily in the company of other men and moves around freely with them. Uma is indifferent to the rumours that begin to spread and she reacts to Arjun's enquiry regarding these rumours in a casual way: "Marriage? What marriage?" (TTM 27). Uma's reaction is expressive of her disillusionment in married life. Her dissatisfaction originates from the uneven distribution of power between husband and wife and her inability to compromise with such an unjust system.

Mara, the wife of Jit has a relationship with Inder. It is dissatisfaction in her married life that leads her to such an extramarital relationship. Sahgal writes, "she wanted all the worlds she could lay hands on and the best of each -- the softness of Jit and the hardness of Inder" (SC 57). But this sort of relationship leads her to more problems.
Mara's desire for ideal love leads her to Inder. But she finds Inder also incapable of giving real love. Moreover the duality of this relationship torments her. Sahgal comments "Inder and Jit, Jit and Inder. The duality of it tore her apart, . . ." (SC 172). Mara is critical of the institution of marriage. She doesn't support the labels "husband" and "wife" which fail in solving human problems. She asks, "... do our neat labels protect us from our private torments?" (SC 105). Mara's search for a meaningful relationship finally ends in her reunion with Jit. But Jit has become a changed man by this time. Jit's readiness to accept his faults and begin a new life based on mutual trust and communication inspires Mara. Jit confesses: "There's been a silence between us on so many matters. Not that we've planned it that way . . . No intimacies except in bed. Strange, isn't it, and yet most people accept marriage in those dried-out one-dimensional terms and expect to live almost like strangers" (SC 234). Jit's awareness of their fault become the starting point of fresh intimacy between them. Reacting to his goodwill Mara seeks help from him. Mara reunites with Jit before the marriage breaks up.

Nita in the novel *This Time of Morning* rejects the concept of an arranged marriage. She never comes across a person who is fit enough to marry her. She desires for "someone with something interesting to say for himself and at least a little taller than . . . ." (TTM 32) her. But the man whom she meets reaches only up to her nose. The dwarfness of the man may be suggestive of his inferiority. She doesn't consider marriage as a must. Nita earnestly wishes to lead a free life and hopes to find a
job. All institutions including marriage which would stand in her way are rejected by her. Nita remarks, "I don't want to marry a man I can intimidate," . . . "I don't want to marry at all just yet . . . , I should have a job . . ." (TTM 32). She believes that a job will guarantee more freedom. Nita's desire for unconditional freedom is evident in her attitude to Vijay to whom she is engaged. Even after engagement Nita could not love him. Nita's aversion to Vijay is born out of her hatred for all systems of control including marriage. Sahgal observes: "He was pleasant-mannered, not bad-looking, rich. She had nothing against him, only she did not want to marry him" (TTM 149). Nita's personality seems to develop in two divergent lines. One is her desire for total freedom and the second is her desire to be conquered by a taller, stronger, more powerful man. It is this desire that finally leads her to Kalyan. Nita admires Kalyan's fiery speeches and his dominant personality. One night she rushes to Kalyan's residence and pleads with him not to let her go back home.

A similar character that Sahgal has drawn is Sonali in *Rich Like Us*. She decides not to marry as she cannot suffer the rigid, bossy and selfish nature of her lover. She says: "Of course we aren't going to get married and I don't think he loves me any more, but I am, oh, I still am in love with him, oh Rose!" (RLU 180).

Sonali is still in love with her former lover even though she refuses to accept his hegemony. A highly sensitive creature, Sonali could understand the feelings of other women, belonging to both the past and present. She journeys back to the past to her great grandmother who
committed Sati. Her love for Ravi was both personal and ideological. Sonaţi remembers the strength of their bond: "We were born only four months apart in the same room of the same hospital and our mothers and their mothers had known each other before that" (RLU 96). They grew up together and participated in revolutionary activities during student days. But later when they became civil servants Ravi proved himself to be a fraud by becoming "the right hand and left leg of the Prime Minister and her household" (RLU 24). It is this sudden transformation that alienates Sonali from Ravi. But in the end of the novel we find a repentant Ravi who admires Sonali's brave resistance to the autocratic regime. Side by side with her political struggle Sonali fights against the patriarchal institutions. By refusing to lead a married life Sonali is rejecting an institution that enslave women. Jasbir Jain in her essay, "The Emperor's New Clothes: the Emergency and Sahgal's Rich Like Us" writes:

Sonali rejects marriage, with all its ritualistic ceremonies and long-term family ties, and with this the tidy, ordered world of conventional roles represented by Kiran's and Nishi's homes. The confines of order and doctrine alike are instrumental in enslaving human beings. (30-31)

In all these women characters there is a sense of dissatisfaction. It originates from the disparity between what is desired and what is imposed. Still Sahgal's characters desire for an attitudinal change in their oppressors. They do not consider the fact that a total transformation can be effected only by transforming the very system that
keep woman subordinate to man. This sort of an attitude leads them to a peculiar problem that all liberal feminists face. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha observes in the introduction to *Women Writing in India*:

... the major contradictions middle-class feminists in the West experienced in the initial stages of the movement were those between the promises of freedom and equality that liberalism held out to them and the social and psychic determinations that limited women's access to these rights. (35)

Similarly the limitations of a liberal idealistic approach is clearly seen in Sahgal's characters. Brought up under the idealism of the Gandhian movement, Sahgal's views have been influenced by the liberal humanist thoughts. While dealing with the problems of women Sahgal follows the Gandhian method and pleads for "enduring comradeship", frank and friendly communication and a compassionate approach. As Jasbir Jain comments: "What concerns Sahgal most is the need for a mature approach to marriage, the need to mature it with love and care and candour" (*Nayantara* 60-61). Believing that a mature approach and friendly relationship can move towards equality between man and woman, Sahgal advocates a liberal method of reformation. Such an approach can be highly limiting and dangerous as it turns its face away from the socio-political dimensions of this seemingly personal problem.

It will be wrong to assess that Sahgal is blind to such intricate associations. Moreover we have already discussed her own opinion
regarding the power relationship that exist in the personal and political realms. But Sahgal opposes the hegemony of the male considering it as an unwanted growth that exists within the social system. Sahgal's solutions like "enduring comradeship" and "friendly communication", reveal her agenda for generating the change from within the familial structure. On the other hand it signifies her belief in the redeemability of the system that produces these imbalances. Thus Sahgal opposes the male domination that exists within the patriarchal society, without negating the power structure that sustains this uneven distribution of power. The weakness of Sahgal's approach can be related to the weakness of liberal humanism that she believes in.

Produced and sustained within the society such imbalances are related to the economy, politics and culture of that particular social structure. So only a structural transformation can provide total emancipation. Thus Sahgal's opposition to the dominance and her inability to reject the bourgeois power structure that support and sustain the patriarchal system reveal the ambivalence in her feminist practice. The ambivalent nature of Sahgal's approach towards the patriarchal system that conditions and controls our prejudices and practices of women is evident here. While opposing the decadent norms and unjust hegemony Sahgal fails to develop it as a critique of the socio-political system that sustain patriarchy. Her concentration is more on the transformation of individual attitudes, which she believes, will result in social transformation. What leads her to this reductive stance is her liberal humanist approach that appears to be refreshingly innocent of
any ideological investment. But a closer analysis may unravel the ideological implications of this position. By limiting the solution to the individual level Sahgal evades the possibility of working for a total structural transformation that ensures equal status to women. In fact it is true that only such a social change can effectively displace the age old practice of patriarchy.

Patriarchal ideology filters into the social, political and cultural practices and traditional concepts in subtle ways. An analysis of its influence in the traditional Indian concept of woman may be feasible here. It is true that the role of wife is pre-eminent in Hinduism. Another important female role is woman as mother. Susan Wadley elaborates her ideas on motherhood in the Hindu tradition thus:

The norms for mothers are less explicit than those for wives. Whereas mythology and lawbooks provide endless examples of the good wife, there are no prime examples of the good mother. However it is the goddesses as mothers rather than as wives who are village guardians, who are worshipped regularly for their protection and aid, and who are feared. A common name for many goddesses is 'Mother' a goddess is never called 'Wife'. The wifely role is one of subordination, of devotion in any circumstances, of dutifulness. It is the mother who gives, who must be obeyed, who loves, and who sometimes rejects. Although there are no popular and well-known role models of the mother treating her children well, the mother as a giving, loving individual, although sometimes cruel and rejecting, is present at a sub-conscious but critical level in Hindu thought. (33)
The concept of mother as creator and provider is integral to Hindu thought. This concept of mother (woman) is connected with the agricultural society. An extension of this concept is the symbolic presentation of earth as mother. Mother Earth is symbolic of fertility, procreation, decay and renewal. Woman (mother) like earth gives life, sustenance and strength. The "earth mother" concept can be juxtaposed with the *Purusha Prakriti* concept. According to this principle the female is *Prakriti* (Nature) and the male is *Purusha* (the spirit) the cosmic person. The union of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is the basis of creation so *Purusha* representing the spirit naturally attains superiority over *Prakriti*, signifying woman. Thus even in this symbolic presentation of man and woman as *Purusha* and *Prakriti* the relative superiority of man is sustained. According to Hindu belief the spirit is superior to matter. The inferior status of woman is evident in all these concepts which are expressive of the power and creative energy resident in them. A culture which assigned different roles to different castes has assigned the role of managing the household and serving the husband to women and a change in their status was possible only with a shift in this gender role.

The presentation of women as goddesses is supposed by many as a sign of the superior status assigned to women in the Hindu tradition. What prompts them to think in this line is the fact that they were worshipped by all kinds of people and even men prostrate before these female Goddesses seeking, blessings, recognising her superiority over them. A deeper analysis may unravel the weakness of this supposition.
The questions of the relative status of these men and the female Goddesses arise here. It is difficult to suppose that the men who worship the Goddesses have the same social status for making such a comparison. So I think the relative status of these Goddesses has to be analysed in comparison with their respective male Gods rather than with ordinary men.

For instance, Kali, the most ferocious of all female Goddesses, adorned with garlands of severed heads and arms was send by God to oppose a demon and his army. After defeating the demon she performed a savage dance. It was so ferocious that the earth trembled beneath her weight. The frightened gods send Shiva to induce her to desist. Kali continued her dance and did not see Shiva standing in front of her. So Shiva prostrated at her feet. When Kali was about to step on him she realised the identity of the person prostrating before her. It was her husband. Realising this she stopped her rampage and the earth was saved. Kali's predicament shows the power of ideological conditioning. Even the ferocious Kali could not escape gendering.

The method of perceiving social reality from imaginary stories and symbolic representations may not be proper. But at the same time no one can deny the "allusions" that these imaginary concepts make to the real social practices. Romila Thapar in her essay, "Looking Back in History" makes the idea clear when she says that the socio-legal treatises like dharma-sastras "are indicators of a social ideal-guides and manuals to perfect action, although the underlying assumptions on which the laws
are based emanate from actual social conditions" (10). So these concepts which are "social ideal guides" to perfect action, need not be confused with reality. But, since these concepts are based on "actual social conditions" they can be considered as imaginary representations of real wishes and aspirations of a society.

Thapar expresses the view that the image of woman portrayed in the Puranas, epics and the dharma-sastras is more imaginary than real though it has been fleshed and shaped in the real social praxis. The role models and the "duties" assigned to women might have emerged, in its ideology out of the demands of the particular society (dominantly patriarchal) which in turn helped in re-establishing and reproducing the same models.

However the patriarchal hegemony did not remain unchallenged. Some of the literary movements, religious movements, social reform movements and the nationalist movement have succeeded in reforming and reinscribing the gender roles. The Bhakti movement which had a liberalising concept of religion contributed to emphasising the right of women to bhakti and thus promising a comparatively free life for them. The use of local language by Bhakti poets helped ordinary women to learn and understand the texts. The Bhakti movement produced women saints like Meerabai and Lalla in the north and Andal and Akka Mahadevi in the south. The basic fault of this movement was its concentration on individual salvation. As a result it failed to provide any physical challenge to the unequal social structure.
Religions like Buddhism and Jainism offered better status to women and thus helped in the empowerment of women cutting across caste barriers. Islam and Christianity which influenced the Indian society had different concepts regarding women. Koran regards men and women equal. But various interpretations and practices gave women an inferior status in real practice. In Islam women can never become priests. Unilateral right of divorce, polygamy and child marriage also shows the patriarchal patronage of Islam. Christianity believes in the biblical image of woman as temptress. Women have no property rights among Indian Christians. However women enjoyed better social mobility in Christianity. They could participate in the religious ceremonies. Even though women are engaged in ecclesiastical duties they are not given full ecclesiastical responsibility.

The social reform movement began as an impact of the English education in India. Its slogan was modernisation. Along with other social issues they touched upon important female gender issues like sati, the illtreatment of widows, the ban on widow remarriage, polygamy, child marriage, denial of property rights and education to women. They were successful in putting pressure on the government in passing legislations in favour of women. The most important gain they had was the Act which abolished sati in 1829. An impartial analysis of this action could unearth the motive forces behind this action. One of the many reasons behind the legislation might have been to save the poor Indian women from a cruel custom. At the same time the British colonialists
have had the benefit of getting the aura of the saviour. Moreover it will further deepen the liberal humanist image of the British among the English educated progressive men and women in India. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan expresses a similar view

That it (the abolition of sati in 1829) -- like the series of laws that were subsequently enacted on behalf of women -- served as the moral pretext for intervention and the major justification for colonial rule itself, does not have to be argued further. (*Real and Imagined* 42)

But it is true that even after abolition, *sati* is still practiced in India. In the post-independence India it has taken another shape. To quote Rajeswari Sunder Rajan again:

The vocal and organized proponents of *sati* today, other investigations reveal, are not the simple rural masses, but the landed gentry and the urban business classes; the 'State' is not a nameless adversary but is made up of politicians, policemen and other functionaries deeply entrenched in regional politics; the glorification of sati through temples and fairs is a commercial reality and an entirely 'modern' phenomenon; the enactment of modern sati derives its features from popular cinema and political meetings rather than hallowed ritual. (*Real and Imagined* 18)

What is emphasized here is the commodification of *sati* in the modern time. It also suggests the way in which the ritual is transformed and recreated in a capitalist society. The new status of *sati* is the
product of a particular kind of culture and a particular kind of economy (capitalism). While the colonialists abolished sati to construct a liberal humanist mask for them, the new rulers allowed the practice, through an act of compromise, for their electoral prospects and commercial advantage. Both of them tried to achieve their own selfish ends through these overtly conflicting positions. The gulf between the real practice of sati, as a business boosting festival and its representation as an act of sacrifice is clearly evident here. It enables us to understand the ways in which the patriarchal ideology adapts itself to changing socio-political structures in order to exploit the female, in the Indian context.

During the nationalist movement, Mahatma Gandi and the Indian National Congress consciously tried to bring women to the forefront of agitation. Women responded to the call of freedom and they considered it to be their duty to release mother India from the bonds of colonialism. Gandhi tried to unite the various traditions of Bhakti movement, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, Reform Movement and certain practices of Hinduism and used it in favour of the nationalist movement. The mother cult dormant in the Indian mind was aroused by the nationalists to inculcate national pride in the people. So the nationalist movement combined the tradition and methods of many other resistance movements of the past and was the only movement which influenced in a big way the Indian women belonging to different communities, castes, regions and classes. Even though it did not deconstruct the earlier role of mother and wife, the nationalist movement constructed a new role for woman, that of the social activist. Many women, mainly from the upper
middle class, responded to the call for freedom and later became important leaders.

In Sahgal's novel *A Time to Be Happy*, Maya is sympathetic to the nationalist movement and decides to work in villages, teaching people how to spin. Maya's alienation from her highly westernised husband, Harish, begins from this ideological difference. The nationalist quest is symbolically presented through the act of spinning. Maya's adherence to this nationalist quest for a new native culture is much against her husband's obsession with the Western culture. So the individual differences between Maya and Harish, to a great extent, is brought about by their cultural preoccupations. The conflict in their married life thus achieves greater magnitude as we trace these cultural differences back to its ideological roots.

After independence, numerous legislations have been passed to improve the status of women. But it has not been implemented with the same enthusiasm. Commenting on this reverse trend Smt.Lakshmi N. Menon in her essay "Women and The National Movement" writes:

With increasing dependence on government grants and external aid, the old *elan* is fast disappearing from voluntary organisations. There is a lack of identity with the cause and selfless desire to work for national advancement. India's value system is changed beyond recognition. (25)
Lakshmi N. Menon's concern over the disappearing commitment to values and the reverse trend that the women's movement has taken is far from untrue. Woman in the postcolonial Indian society obviously faces fresh challenges. As the female subject is conditioned by dominant ideology, assessment of the position of female in the postcolonial context demands an interpretation of the dominant ideological framework. Such an analysis involves a wholistic vision of the various institutions like the state, media, government machinery and the political cultural and social practices and the various ideological practices that come into conflict in the Indian contemporary society. A detailed discussion of this phenomenon is beyond the purview of this thesis. Still a brief analysis will certainly be necessary here. Kumkum Sangari's comment on some of the regressive aspects of state and culture in India in her introduction to the Journal of Art and Ideas will be of some use here:

First, there is the escalation of a communal politics and the growth of a chauvinist and fundamentalist social milieu where a major ideological prop is found in versions of an essentialist indigenism, in which descriptions of caste, gender, language et al are offered as eternal varieties even though they may not have taken shape earlier than the colonial period . . . . Second there is an assertive state-sponsored display of Indian tradition and culture, especially of the classical, the folk and the tribal intended as a saleable compensation for the lack of democratizing initiatives on its own part . . . . Third there are attempts, usually from anti-Marxist, neo-Gandhian positions, to re-establish the difference between us and them (the west) by taking a stand against the values of the Enlightenment
Kumkum Sangari refers to the construction of a society that fight on false issues. The growing influence of communal politics and the revivalist tendencies on the one side, the false propaganda of a glorious nation and the mechanical construction of a cultural homogeneity on the other, create false preoccupations in the postcolonial subjects. The expansion of the bourgeois cultural space, the encroachments of the multinational capitalism and the commodification of culture alienate people from the traditional belief systems and produce a false sense of modernity. Under the cover of liberal democracy a corrupt, decadent political system is practiced. All these refer to the construction and reproduction of a hegemonic system that distances the postcolonial subject from the actual realities of life and engulfs them in a world of illusions. The role of neocolonial powers that operate from outside and the colonial power structure that is resident in the postcolonial frame in the production of such a system is evident as it in turn protects the very same system. Writing on the present day Kerala society T.K. Ramachandran in his paper "Notes on the Making of Feminine Identity in Contemporary Kerala Society" observes:

With the shrinkage of the public sphere, the bourgeois conceptualisation of the "private" began to more and more seep into the consciousness of the people. The emergence of the culture industry and its twin products, popular journals and popular cinema, paved the way for the commodification and objectifications of women. (123)
"The shrinkage of the public and the bourgeois conceptualisation of the private" alludes to the receding of the spirit of the nationalist movement and the whole tradition of social service. Having lost faith in the public service because of the corruption and decay in the political and service sector people began to concentrate more on the private.

Sahgal covers this private world in detail. The inequality in the sharing of power in the domestic field prompts Rashmi (TTM), Simrit (DS) and Saroj (SC) to rebel. In all the three cases their husbands behave like autocrats and are reluctant to share love as well as power. Acknowledging male/female power as differential Foucault says: "Men think that women can only experience pleasure in recognising men as masters" (The History Vol.1, 300). A similar trust in the male superiority gives them confidence to play the role of masters while the role of wife as slave is taken for granted. It is this ideology of dominance that is rejected and challenged by characters like Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit.

Displeased with an unhappy married life with Dalip, which "made her a moth trapped in cement" (TTM 35), Rashmi withdraws from the activities of life in the novel This Time of Morning. Like "prolonged starvation" wrong marriage weakened her personality "robbing lustre, defeating courage and will" (TTM 13). She establishes friendly relationships with Rakesh and Neil Barensen who accept her as a dignified individual. It is not just sex, but a total involvement and friendship that she desires in married life. But her marriage turns out to be a "deadening trauma" (TTM 13) for her. Dalip cannot come up to her
expectations. Fulfilment of her desires never occur. She finds the society bereft of simple feelings like love, affection and consideration for others. Saroj (SC) and Simrit (DS) challenge the same institutionalised discipline. Saroj has been brought up in an atmosphere of freedom. But she doesn't find it in her own life. Saroj ponders: "Freedom. Funny, . . . we apply it everywhere except in daily living" (SC 193). Inder is shocked to hear from Saroj about her pre-marital affair. He begins to suspect her. His anger appears in various forms. Inder's affair with Mara and his cruel neglect of Saroj are some of them. Saroj's desire to build up a relationship based on love, freedom and equality never materialises. Women are supposed to inhabit a world different from men. Their "sphere was sexual and their job procreation". In the eyes of the society they "were dependents, not individuals". It would be a crime if they desired to inhabit the world as man's "equals, with the splendour and variety of human choice before them" (SC 192). All efforts made by her to establish a warm friendship fails. Stiff and adamant, Inder never pardons Saroj for the "sin" she had committed years before. Though they lead a normal sex life, emotional attachment is absent as there were "breaches and pauses in his love" and "love was granted as approval and reward" (SC 204). Sahgal writes:

That kind of companionship had always been difficult for him, just as to take a walk with her became a meaningless expenditure of time, when a restlessness took hold of him to get back to whatever work he had to do. (SC 55)
He turns to his business activities. It is another way of punishing Saroj. Though educated and modern, Inder cannot think of an equal relationship with Saroj. His affair with Mara and his neglect of Saroj are based on his strong trust in the omnipotence of man. Inder's attitude is evident in his words: "A thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own and command her -- and that's the man she'll respect" (SC 104). Inder's pride and his belief in the cult of male dominance is what makes him cruel and oppressive. So his hatred of Saroj is the product of his personal prejudice which is influenced by the notions of male superiority. But he is never able to convince Saroj of this superiority even though he succeeds in forcing her towards frustration and despair. Sahgal observes:

But she had forfeited the right to radiance the day she had told him of her first experience and been branded sinner. From that day only the part of her he could not see and would not touch walked upright. The rest stooped and shrunk in supplication to the man, her husband, who stood between her and the light. (SC 97)

However, her acquaintance with Visal provides fresh air and light. She acquires the confidence to face her dominant husband and finally leaves Inder. Saroj longs for a relationship based on love and friendship, but in turn she is insulted, humiliated and suppressed by her husband. By leaving her husband who wanted her to be "clinging, dependent" (SC 140) and be obedient, Saroj breaks the power relationship that binds her to Inder. Saroj tries hard to make Inder responsive to her love. But
he is adamant. The inner conflict within her between constancy and the desire for freedom finally end up in her decision to quit Inder. By this very act Saroj challenges the traditional role of suffering wife and assumes a new role of a rebelling woman.

Simrit's experience with Som in *The Day in Shadow* is similar. Like Saroj, Simrit also longs for mutual understanding and a friendly relationship with her husband but faces disappointment in the end. In Som's world of ambition and money her "pretty" feelings crumble. Simrit's desperate condition is portrayed in this passage:

A weekend with Som, somewhere remote, where she would methodically breakdown his dividing lines, melt one gesture into another, make them soft, searching children with each other. But Som didn't feel the need. (DS 27)

She never gets the desired warmth from Som. Estranged by Som's obsession with power and money Simrit feels that "the world is so full of violence" (DS 89). She is not ready to follow the goals set up by Som. This leads to a conflict between them. Som wants her to be as obedient as an animal, never asking questions, never showing any disservice by asserting her individuality and freedom. Sahgal writes: "May be she had always been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told" (DS 57). This comparison suggests the attitude of Som towards Simrit. He considers her as a show piece, "a poor little thing" (DS 78), an obedient, beautiful, domestic animal. Though she was a caged animal, Simrit never tries to escape from Som. She only
desires to have a friendly relationship with him. She asks:

Can't we just hold hands? Can't we lie side by side like brother and sister, like friends, and talk? Can't a husband and wife be friends? Is that forbidden? Can't you be a brother to me. Som, or just a loving stranger until we sort this out? (DS 96)

Even this demand is denied by Som. He was "baffled at first and then angered by her behaviour" (DS 90). Cut off from light and sound she feels "disorganised" (DS 14). She stays "separate excluded, rebellious" and becomes aware of her inability to "follow the goals Som had set for himself" (DS 90). Lack of understanding leads to the divorce. The divorce settlement puts her into a peculiar financial problem. The heavy taxes that Simrit is forced to pay is a continuation of the cruelties of her married life. With the help of Raj she faces these problems boldly and asserts her individuality and freedom.

The lives of Simrit and Saroj raise most of the important concerns related to the position of contemporary middle class women within the family that Sahgal wanted to project. The neglect, suffering and pain in their married life prompts them to desire for better understanding, love and friendship between husband and wife. They are torn between two worlds, the traditional and the modern. Constancy, chastity and other binding dogmas of tradition force them to suffer, perish and be quiet but their individualism triggers the desire for change. Though the spirit of uncompromising crusade for freedom and equal status is non-existent
they negate the whole scheme of a slavish existence under male masters. Through a slow, restrained mode of operation, after years of deliberations and dialogue to reform and protect their self respect and their family, they leave the husband centred life asserting their individuality and freedom. Their preoccupation with independence and individuality is shared by women all over the world. As Betty Friedan rightly points out:

... for woman, as for man, the need for self fulfilment -- autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualisation -- is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted. (The Feminine 282)

Inder and Som fail to acknowledge this reality despite the constant efforts of Saroj and Simrit, as they can consider them only as sex objects. Following the patriarchal tradition they behave like autocrats keeping their women under control. But it will not be right to consider these characters in isolation. Their personal experiences have to be kept within a proper social framework. Jasbir Jain writes:

... they are victims not of unhappy marriages but of a whole social environment. Their rebellion signifies a questioning of all social values of legal and moral systems and above all of religious orthodoxy. (Encyclopaedia 1394)

Stressing the social origin of these individual experiences Jasbir Jain points out the relevance of these individual actions. The oppression that these women experience is inflicted by the very patriarchal system and resistance to it naturally is directed against the social, legal and
moral values that hold the system. Kate Millett refers to the political nature of this control by suggesting that the relation between the sexes is basically political as it is an arrangement "whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (Sexual 23). Just as in the case of the divine right theory of Kings the "divine right" of the male to rule the female is supported by tradition. Under this tradition all kinds of injustices are practiced and it assigned women the role of a slave. Kate Millett feels that the difference between male and female, apart from the basic sexual difference is cultural in origin. So the subordinate role of women has been a cultural construct. Thus one of the aims of freeing women as Kate Millett observes is to liberate them from "immemorial subordination" (Sexual 363).

The popular media projects a false idea of the new woman through advertisement and television serials. The image of this new woman is derived from the urban, educated middle class. Such advertisements which present an educated, attractive, hard working woman providing rich nutritious food to her family provide a false idea of the emergence of a new woman thus disassociating it from the woman's real struggle for freedom. To quote Rajeswari Sunder Rajan:

The liberation of women is separated from the contemporary women's movement: by making liberation a matter of individual women's achievement and choice, the development of the new woman is made to appear as a 'natural' outcome of benevolent capitalist socio-economic forces. (Real and Imagined 131)
The capacity of capitalist propaganda to contain and neutralise even a liberating movement is evident here. So the cultural analysis unravels the techniques adopted by the ruling hegemonic ideology to contain and control the female subject even in the guise of promoting and supporting them.

The resistance of suppressed groups, like women, have been kept out of the mainstream. With the help of the magical system of advertisement and popular media the ruling power constructs the false notion of progress and higher status for women. This has been done for the sustenance and extension of a particular culture and a particular economy. The fact that culture is also invested with the duty of shaping the subjects, betrays the "ideolgical investment" in it. So, since femaleness is constructed in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy colonialism, capitalism), cultural analysis calls forth a critique of ideology. The nature of the ideology is such that, "the ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of state power alone" (Althusser,59). So mere change in the state power will not alter the ideological hegemony.

In most of the postcolonial nations, the transference of power to native rulers has created similar problems where there is a change in the state power. In the Indian context the presence of religious revivalism, colonial attitude towards progress (uneven development serve inequities in class, caste, community and gender relationships) concentration of the central power, corruption, use of communal divide for political ends and
many other tendencies suggest the coexistence of various traditions in the dominant ideology. While lenient towards revivalism, the ruling class follows the colonial policy as it shares a common capitalistic economic background. The policies of liberalisation and globalisation betray its populist masks and is the proper culmination of the policies adopted by the ruling class. Adopting a capitalist economic policy and preaching a liberal humanist ideology simultaneously in the political realm, showing a modern face and compromising with revivalism and religious dogmas (sati, polygamy, child marriage) in the cultural realm, the Indian ruling class has shown its ambivalent attitude. This ambivalence is a clear indication of its inability to materialise its proposed aims and its blind though concealed obedience to the colonialist heritage.

So in the contemporary Indian culture, the metaphysical beliefs and modern technology; the modern notions of secularism and liberalism and the crude practices of caste and communal rivalry; the human notions of nonviolence and the bloody practices of violence; the rhetoric of equality and the sharp economic inequality; the worship of women and the burning of widows coexist in a strangely "peaceful" manner. To put it in clearer terms the coexistence of divergent social structures like the capitalist mode of production and feudalist beliefs and its social structure; the colonial power structure and the democratic political system, are the signs of a society where cultural conflict and confusion prevails. This uniformly heterogeneous social system is at one and the same time self contradictory as well as self revelatory. The broad consensus evolved out of this multiplicity reveals the ability of the ruling
ideology to compromise with contending forces and thus establish its hegemony over others. So while receptive to this multiplicity one has to be aware of its subordination to the dominant modes of ideology ie, capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Thus the essential multiplicity of Indian culture, transmitted to the individual consciousness and its allegiance and quarrel with the dominant ideology, creates contradictory pulls and resultant confusion in the human psyche. A realistic portrayal of this experience is present in the characters (especially the female characters) in Sahgal's novels.

What is common in most of these characters is a sense of despair and alienation. This sense of gloom seems to originate out of their confrontation with the oppressive power structure, patriarchal and political. The operations of power in the private is similar to its role in the public. This power-play manifests itself in many forms, both in their personal and social lives. Its presence is felt in the oppressive settlement norms like the consent terms, the practice of polygamy which indicates the commodification of women, the religious practices like sati and in the communal riots. Resistance to this power is evident in lonely crusades against the oppressive power structure and obviously in the political struggle for freedom, dignity and integrity.

In Sahgal's own words "... a political novel would be an awareness of the use of power whether it is directly in politics or reflected in domestic life or other aspects of it. The husband-wife relationship, that too is a political relationship" (Jain, Nayantara 186). Nayantara Sahgal
had made conscious attempts to explain the political character of personal relationships. Power operates through laws and regulations inflicted by the state, traditional and religious belief systems and practices, the educational system, media, state sponsored propaganda and the like. Thus the operations of power by and large are manifested through the political and cultural institutions mentioned above. The resistance to this power naturally results in confrontation which can be traced back to the ideological confrontation that formulates contemporary social formation. Apart from suggesting the interrelationship between the personal and the political, Nayantara Sahgal focuses on the common social forces that operate behind these overtly divergent realms.

So it is true to say that Nayantara Sahgal presents the dominant power structure functioning in various forms and at different levels and portrays the patterns of resistance to it in her novels. We have already discussed the theme of resistance with reference to Sahgal's novels in the second chapter. She engulfs the reader in the totalitarian and patriarchal voice, critically reflecting on its uses of power to which anti-authoritarian humanists and feminists offer resistance. Though controlled and mild Sahgal as a feminist recognises the fact that resistance to male determination is both integral to and distinct from all other resistance to global injustice.

This same attitude is reflected in the character Devi in A Situation in New Delhi who is bewildered to see the changing situation in Delhi after Shivraj's death. The fall of idealism coincides with the
death of Shivraj who is a hero of the independence struggle. Devi feels
alienated within the transformed Party and Ministry and she resigns her
post as Education Minister. This isolation is not just because of the
death of her brother Shivraj. It originates from the loss of values,
simplicity and conviction among her colleagues within the Party as well
as in the Cabinet. The simple, old, experienced ministers are replaced by
well-dressed well-groomed and well-heeled young men. Devi joins hands
with some of her liberal friends who remain unaffected by the present
changes.

Usman, the Vice Chancellor of Delhi University and Michael a
writer who visits India to write a book on Shivraj become her natural
allies. Apart from the death of Iswar and Shivraj, it is the
transformation of the ruling party and the predominance of corruption,
viole nce and decay in the society that heighten the loneliness of the
idealistic leader, Devi. But her opposition to the present changes does
not evoke much response. Michael's memories of Shivraj flash through
Michael's mind. His optimism forces him to doubt: "perhaps we've been
in too much of a hurry to say he is dead" (SND 165). Sahgal is here
trying to suggest that idealism and goodwill are not yet dead and that it
still lurks in the minds of at least a few people.

If Devi is a romantic idealist, Sylla is a modern rationalist. A
Parsee girl with bobbed hair, Sylla wears frocks and behaves in an
informal manner. Her ability to command and manipulate the situation
in her favour is so great that she is described as 'a green eyed army
commander even though she resembles a Persian rose. Sylla is self-sufficient, smart, modern and realistic. Her pragmatic approach helps Bhushan to clear the confusion in his mind regarding Razia. Bhushan narrates:

She was a modern girl, full of enthusiasm. Vitality, because I have so little of it, has always been hard for me to resist. I am its natural follower. And Sylla was a natural leader. (MI 126)

Bhushan the romantic young man is carried away by Sylla's personality. But Sylla is pragmatic enough to keep away from any such attachment with Bhushan who was "more feminine, more gentle and compliant" than her. Sylla's decision to marry Nauzer Vacha, a professional lawyer and her rejection of Bhushan, a romantic prince -- "a poet and a dreamer", a remnant of the feudal tradition -- is self expressive of the character of Sylla. She lacks that romantic idealism that most other women characters of Sahgal possess.

If Sylla is free and modern, Razia breaks the barriers with her inner strength. Jasbir Jain in her essay "Goodbye to realism . . ." writes: "She is not a victim but a winner. She had vowed not to be imprisoned by restrictions, and has abundantly kept faith with herself" (267). She takes the lead in all activities with Bhushan even though she is always behind the purdah. Bhushan remembers: "Yet it was Razia who arranged our meetings and kept track of the time, with her inborn knowledge of when darning ended and cooking began" (MI 64). But while making love they
are caught by Razia's tongawallah and the college night watchman. The Hindu-Muslim riot which killed fifteen Hindus and ten Muslims culminates in Razia's disappearance with her parents. After that Bhushan's life becomes a search for her. He kills a bazar imbecile thinking that he is married to Razia. Finally he meets her as the wife of one of his Turkish friends. Razia's adventurous love affair with Bhushan really shocks the religious fanatics. The number of people killed in the riot that ensues is indicative of the magnitude of their communal animosity towards each other. Razia is defeated, but she becomes responsible for stirring the socio-political climate dominated by authoritarianism and religious fanaticism into an awareness of human values.

If Razia escapes from the fury of the fundamentalists, Rose (RLU), Lulu (PD) and Madhu (SND) become victims of the patriarchal society. Lulu and Rose are brutally murdered and Madhu, a college student is cruelly raped. Rose faces the stiffest challenge because of her peculiar status in India. A British lady, Rose comes to India as the second wife of Ram, against her parent's wishes. Being a second wife, she naturally invites hatred from the first wife Mona and other family members. She begins to feel a sense of guilt and sees Ram as her only support. When Ram lies paralysed because of a cerebral stroke, Rose begins to face stiff challenge from Dev who wants to possess the property fully. Being an influential man Dev can manipulate things in his favour. Sonali is the only friend who helps her at this time of need. The peculiar nature of Rose's predicament is explained by Sahgal thus: "She was at both ends
pulling when she won, she also lost" (RLU, 58). Thus Rose loses her parents when she wins Ram. She loses Ram when she wins Mona's love. Finally when she is choked to death, Rose is liberated.

Anna Hansen (PD) a Danish lady is committed to the ideals of freedom, love and compassion. She identifies herself with the natives. Though a Christian she shows no outward manifestation of religion. Though she had sympathies with the freedom movement headed by Tilak, "she wasn't anywhere near politics" (PD 143). The period was not ripe for an active participation. The narrator writes: "Tilak had just come out of jail, the rest of them had been slowly passing glorious resolutions while he was behind bars, and nothing like a real national movement had got started" (PD 144). She is drawn towards Nicholas and to India for the same reasons. Her attitude towards India is that of an idealistic, compassionate, self righteous western woman's sympathetic view towards a colonised and suppressed community. It is this sympathy that develops into a life long attachment with India. Her bond becomes stronger through Gayatri, her grand-daughter, whose mother is an Indian.

Thus broadly speaking, Sahgal's women characters in widely different ways register their protest, anguish and aspirations living in a patriarchal society. This broad categorisation does not hide the heterogeneity in their concerns. They are different in their religious belief, racial background, social status, educational background and their attitude to life. Hindus, Muslims, Parsees and Europeans come to life in
Sahgal's novels. Accepting this diversity with all its ramifications and with due respect one cannot be blind to the presence of a common experience of the suppression of the female by the patriarchal ideology and a resistance (however feeble it may be) to it in Sahgal's novels.

The presence of female resistance to the patriarchal ideology is evident in Sahgal's novels. Ideological resistance is present in the text in the form of protest against the present order. Sahgal's characters hope to build up a new order based on individual freedom, new moral codes and equal opportunity for the full development of their personality. Meera Bai writes:

Nayantara Sahgal's women seem to establish a new order with change of standards where women can be their true selves, where there is no need for hypocrisy and where character is judged by the purity of heart and not chastity of body. (167-168)

This new order is based on a liberal moral principle which insists on the purity of heart rather than that of the flesh. This search for a new order is identified to be rooted in the Indian soil. Shyam Asnani writes in his essay, "New Morality in the Modern Indo-English novel":

The need for individual freedom continues to be the central concern of Sahgal's novels. That is why her female characters, so deeply and loyally rooted in the Indian culture struggle to be free and full human beings in their own right. (144)
The new order shaped in the vision of Sahgal's female characters is based on three principles -- individual freedom, new morality based on purity of the spirit and mutual trust and communication. Projecting a new order, Sahgal's characters reject the present one. In other words it is a negation of the existing order and the values associated with it that characterise the female characters in Sahgal's fiction. Characters from Ammaji (TH) to Sylla (MI) do this. Ammaji and Nita (TTM) negate the alarmingly Westernised generation, while Devi (SND) and Sonali (RLU) negate the decadent political system and authoritarianism in the postcolonial period. Mona (RLU), Rose (RLU) and the ranee (MI) negate the practice of polygamy and the brutal control of the male over the female. Mona expresses her frustration through fasts and prayers. Rose often secretly desires for the death of Mona which could eventually make her the only wife of Ram. Uma (TTM), Gauri (SC) and Mara (SC) express their dissent through extramarital relationships. Rashmi (TTM), Simrit (DS) and Saroj (SC) negate the violence and the absence of communication in married life. Anna Hansen's negation is double edged. She comes to India after her engagement with Nicholas as she wants to gain more experience before starting a married life. She is not ready to follow Nicholas' political opinion. Moreover they are the only couple who place themselves on the opposite side in the parliament. In India her sympathy is with the suppressed natives and she speaks against the imperial politics and the hegemony and invincibility of the male.

Sahgal's novels provide ample evidences of the inter-relatedness of feminist resistance and other resistance movements against
authoritarian power structures. Exploring the boundaries of the personal and political realms, Sahgal uses her novels to experiment with these subtle interrelationships. In her novel, *The Day in Shadow* Simrit tells Raj:

"Stop tying me up with the Government's economic affairs"

.... "If I'm in a mess, it's my own stupid fault, signing Som's terms without understanding them".

"It's all part of the same thing," said Raj. "Signing on the dotted line is the hallmark of the defeated and the damned, or at least of those who don't have the whip hand, whether they're trusting souls like you or governments without know-how". (10)

Here Raj stresses the fundamental unity of all forms of oppression and the inevitable coming together of the suppressed classes against different forms of oppression. The suppressed naturally unite to defend and to offer resistance. But feminist resistance becomes problematic as the patriarchal ideology binds even the otherwise suppressed groups. So its resistance is to the patriarchal ideology and the power structure that protects it.

Resisting the existing power relationship feminism aims at the reconstruction of social values and institutions. It challenges prevailing discourses and tries to imbalance the presumptions of female inferiority. The construction of femaleness occurs in the dominant ideology, which in the contemporary Indian society is formed by patriarchy, colonialism and
capitalism. So the duty of the feminist is to present a critique of the dominant ideology.

The disillusioned, alienated and dissatisfied women characters in Sahgal's novels negate the present order and hope for a new order based on freedom and equality. Most of these characters concentrate on the specific individual problems and the effort to resolve it individually. It is true that the problems and experiences of females as individuals vary according to their class, caste, race, colour and economic status. However, control of the socio-cultural forces and the political power, their policies and programmes and the long tradition of male domination over the female as a subject is uniformly applicable to all. Still the intensity of its impact may vary in specific groups and more accurately in specific individuals. From this it can be deduced that even though women as a group is not homogeneous there are similar characteristics, problems and experiences that they share as a group. So naturally the resolution of these problems demand a united social action rather than the single handed effort of individuals.

Nayantara Sahgal's characters seem to unleash mainly an individualistic resistance against the oppressive systems. Even though it fails to develop into a larger social movement in Sahgal's novels, the lonely efforts of these female characters with the support of their intimate friends mark the beginning of feminist resistance. Karlene Faith comments on the relevance of individual action, in her essay, "Resistance: Lessons from Foucault and Feminism," thus:
Feminist resistance, in particular begins with the body's refusal to be subordinated, an instinctual withdrawal from the patriarchal forces to which it is often violently subjected. Resistance is formed on the most visceral, personal level, and the compelling 'No!' which it incites is a political act. (39)

The personal becomes political here. This prompts us to explore the politics of this personal resistance. These women characters in Sahgal's novels condemn the hegemonic practices of men but there is no clue to prove their determination to overthrow the system that constructs these practices. This attitude is ambivalent and it leads to the proposition that the writer, the creator of these characters indirectly or unknowingly supports the very system that she abhors.

Rejecting male dominance Sahgal's women characters propose to transform the system through an attitudinal change in the individuals. An idealistic notion of social transformation, this adherence to the attitudinal change in the individual, reveals the politics of the new liberal feminist approach itself. Though she adopts a wholistic view of the problem, Sahgal shies away from providing a resistance to the patriarchal power structure as she adopts an idealistic stance based on an attitudinal change in the individual. Apart from the idealistic liberal humanism, Sahgal's ambivalent philosophy can be traced back to the postcolonial Indian situation, where an all pervading feminist movement bold enough to destabilise the patriarchal social structure is non existent.