CHAPTER III
NAYANTARA SAHGAL’S
RICH LIKE US:
EMERGENCY AND
HUMAN PSYCHE
NAYANTARA SAHGAL’S *RICH LIKE US*: EMERGENCY AND HUMAN PSYCHE

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most prominent and prolific writers of the Indian English fiction. Her major novels are political novels. She has the peculiarity of being the first Indian woman factionalist dealing with the political themes. Jasbir Jain opines: “She presents India with all its contradictions, depicts the political situation with all the ulterior undercurrents, and such in presenting the ideal and the real working against each other, the real undermining and the ideal resisting erosion” (Dhawan. *Indian Women Novelists*. 1993. 64).

She is the daughter of Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Ranjit Sita Ram Pandit. She has spent few years of her life amidst the inmates of Anand Bhawan in Allahabad. Being in such an environment she could not keep her aloof from the political influence. Since her childhood she had seen her family’s desire and their “hunger for freedom” (Sahgal. *Testament of an Indo-Anglian Writer*. 1992. 17 ). She has witnessed her father giving up his profession as a lawyer for participating in the freedom struggle. In her autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she writes that political chaos was in full swing at the time of her rearing. The backdrop of this political wantonness was Indian freedom movement. Since her childhood she had seen the active participation of her paternal as well as maternal families in
the struggle for freedom. Prominent among them was Pt. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru, her maternal uncle who later became the first Prime Minister of independent India. In her first autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she writes: “With us the growth of political awareness was a gradual and unconsciousness process and the most important influence on our lives” (31).

It is true that the writers are influenced and inspired by someone or the other during their early phase of advancement in writing career. They act as pioneer for them. Nayantara Sahgal is not an exception to this trend. Born and brought up in the Gandhian era, in a political family she was greatly influenced by that environment which had a deep impact on her writings and also upon her attitude towards life. As a fictionist Sahgal came to the grip of several influences such as of Mahatma Gandhi and her ‘mamu’ J.L.Nehru. It was her father who initiated political beliefs in her. Their ideas and perception creates a background for her novels and other creative works. Gandhian philosophy, Gandhian concept of humanism, non-violence, individual freedom, morality etc. find place in her works. Both of her autobiographies also reflect her intense faith in Gandhi. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she has revealed her emotions and sense of gratification for being associated to the Gandhian age. She writes:
Our parents were adults when Gandhiji appeared on the horizon. Our children will never see him. They will hear of him, but to them he will be only a name, one of the many illustrious names of Indian History. But we are truly the children of Gandhi’s India, born at a time when India was being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into of light. Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity – a different kind of political maturity from any that the world had seen before, based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice compassion and peace. The influence of these strange politics wove into one life a pattern of unique enchantment (Sinha 11).

Nayantara Sahgal imbibes the values of courage and discipline taught by her parents during her childhood, these values helped her while she was in America for completing her education. Apart from this she is also a supporter of the Gandhian concept of individual freedom which she believes is very essential for the growth of a human being as an individual. In the absence of it one feels dissipated. It was her father who decided to send Nayantara and her sisters to America for their proper development as an individual because individual freedom was a big question during that period in slave India. In her first autobiographical work *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she accepts:

Some things will always remain a mystery to me. One of these is the perpetually baffling question: how did Mummie and Papu have the courage to send us to America in 1943? Many people had journeyed abroad before the war, and many more were to go after, but few went as we did, at our age from a peaceful country on a
troop ship at the height of the war. I have grown up since then, married, and had children of my own, yet the older I grow, the less able I am to answer that question (xiv).

Nayantara Sahgal deals with the theme of freedom in almost all of her novels. Her characters Sonali and Rose in *Rich Like Us* stand for individual freedom, while other characters like Saroj, Neeta, Simrit and Mona are shown dissipated in the absence of freedom on the individual level.

Sahgal’s creative genius gain ground under the motivational force of Nehru too. Pt. Nehru was an epitome of love, compassion, devotion and sacrifice for the mother India. It was quite natural for anyone to get influenced under these impressions, so was Nayantara Sahgal. Nehru’s *Discovery of India* and *An Autobiography* are great inspirational source for the characters of Sahgal. Even the characters in her novel are sometimes the transcription of Nehru. Here, in this reference an instance can be traced from her novel *A Situation in New Delhi*. The character of the educationalist ‘Shivraj’ is the direct recreation of Pt. Nehru as can be identified by the hard labor and ideology of a country, free from doubts and fears where the residents are united.

In her autobiographies she has given place to many incidents where she got emotional and moral support from her ‘Mamu’ particularly after the death of her father, when Nehru became a father figure for her. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) she
states: “Mummy and Papa were wonderful parents, but Mamu was in a class apart, and our feelings for him came as close to adoration as it did for anybody” (14).

Similarly, her fearless and bold expression in the political matter is inherited by her mother. Her father who himself was a great scholar of Sanskrit taught her the techniques of writing and the method of expressing ideas into words through perfect use of language.

Nayantara Sahgal has published Nine Novels and eight works of non-fiction beginning with *Prison and Chocolate Cake* published in 1954- an autobiography entitled *Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing a Savage World* in 2010.

Belonging to a political family her writings interweave history and politics. She has admitted her consciousness towards the society and has brought into focus the socio-political issues. Her literary works, journalistic writings and articles presents immense variety of elements. It goes to her credit that she has been quite successful in combining such diverse themes into perfect framework of her creative output. She is basically a political novelist. In the words of M.L. Malhotra, “Politics and Mrs. Sahgal are cousins German or if a metaphor can convey it more forcefully, Siamese twins” (Bridges of Literature, 1991: 214). Most of her novels are based on the social, political affair, cultural conflict, drawbacks in the field of education, morality,
ethics etc. She has a proliferous knowledge of Indian socio-political scenario. Sahgal has kept a bird’s eye over the most disturbing events of her age i.e. partition, emergency, violence, corruption, social unrest and man-woman relationship. She has categorized her novels on the basis of above themes. Sahgal creates commotion among her contemporaries as well as readers by her prolific writing and themes. Her characters leave an indelible impression in the mind of the readers. Sahgal’s diverse themes include socio-political affair, drawback in the field of education, cultural conflict, morality and ethics etc. It is justifiable to use the words of Lakshmi Sinha: “Sahgal’s literary world,…in a broad sense can be termed ‘personalized fiction’. History, politics, autobiography and personalities intermingle in the novels of Sahgal” (Dhawan, Indian Women Novelists. Set II. Vol. IV. 1993. 42).

Sahgal’s social and political novels are an interpretation of problems like partition, internal emergency, conflict between Punjab and Haryana, complicated state of affairs, social evils etc. History and fiction seems to be superimposed in her novels. This Time of Morning published in 1965 is an artistic paradigm of the politics of power, evil attitudes of men in power and sophisticated high society. She projects the politicians, influential bureaucrats, artists, journalists, parliamentarians and high profile ladies as well as traditional housewives. The novel shows a good deal of disgusting details of socio-political
corruption in India especially in The Ministry of External Affairs. The senior and junior officers are always in a state of conflict. The novel presents the condition after India got independence from slavery and emerged as an independent country. But as soon as influential posts were allotted in the External Affair Ministry the idea of united India appeared as an illusion. Jealousy, selfishness, greed and the sense of superiority takes the place of unity. Iyenger states: “Nayantara Sahgal liberally draws upon her knowledge, part first-hand part hearsay, of what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of politically very important people, or in the lobbies in Parliament…” (Indian writings in English, 1985. 473).

The novel exposes perpetual conflict between senior officers. Kalyan Sinha, Arjun Mitra, Kailas and Dheeraj Singh belong to ICS while the younger officers like Rakesh, Saleem and Jeevan belong to IFS. This friction continues, it distracts the officers from their real motive which is to establish a corruption free country.

Nayantara Shagal is vigilant regarding the social aspect of the novel also. Apart from politics she is also concerned about the contemporary social issues like problems of women due to discontentment in married life, differences in the mental status of husband and wife and challenges faced by idealist and ambitious women. Through the character of Uma, Mira, Rashmi and Dalip she has depicted the above phases in the life of women. Sahgal
has put forward the character of Mira on the one hand, who is an ideal wife. She is ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband. She has given up her preferences for the pleasure of her husband and did whatever he likes. Nita on the other hand is entirely different from Mira. She is passionate about her ambitions. She desires for self identification and wanted to establish herself as an eminent woman. Sahgal has delineated the clash in married life resulting from differences in the mental status. This aspect has been presented through the character portrayal of Uma and Arjun Mitra. Uma is a sensuous lady who lives her life in her own conditions. She does not care about her husband’s status and position and freely indulges in sexual relationships with a lot of men. While Arjun Mitra, unable to understand the improper behavior of Uma, decides to neglect her because he could not give up their relation. Rashmi and Dalip also share the same destiny as Uma and Arjun. Lack of integration in ideas and opinion brought their relation to an end.

In the same series similar fate of women has been portrayed in Sahgal’s another novel *The Day In Shadow* published in 1971 dealing with social issues. The problem of divorce leading to agonizing condition of women is of major concern in the novel. The married life of Simrit and Som presents the disequilibrium resulting in divorce. While the character of Pixie symbolizes exploitation and suppression of women in the hands of men in power and position, like Sumer Singh, Minister of State for Petroleum.
It seems that partition became the fate of India after independence because in 1947 Indian sub-continent was divided into India and Pakistan then Maharashtra and Gujrat emerges in the map of India and the same happened with Punjab and Haryana. These two states were bifurcated on linguistic grounds on 1\textsuperscript{st} November into Punjabi speaking Punjab and Hindi speaking Haryana with Chandigarh as the common capital.

Sahgal’s novel \textit{Storm in Chandigarh} published in 1965 portrays this theme of the division between Punjab and Haryana. This piece of fiction is a perfect amalgamation of personal and political themes. The word ‘storm’ deals on one side with the storm within the characters due to personal or emotional crisis while on the other side it focuses on the political storm leading to chaos and violence on the partition of Punjab and Haryana. The very first sentence, “violence lies very close to the surface in the Punjab” (Sahgal. \textit{Storm in Chandigarh.} 1988. 7) depicts the political turmoil and stormy atmosphere between the two states. Storm in Chandigarh also represents the problem of violence; in fact it has spread like a contagious disease. Its influence can be felt equally in the life of a common man to the powerful politicians. The novelist also exposes the brutal aspect of violence and terror during the period of elections. The political parties are like dagger drawn at each other. Tension prevails at election campaigns. Violence continues even towards the end of the novel. Roads are blocked by two thousand people who are ready to attack on Haryana’s Chief Minister. Stones are
showered on his car and cow dung is thrown. The reason for this tough battle between the states is also the diverse personality and perspective of the two Chief Minister’s of Punjab and Haryana respectively. The clash between them is that of ideologies. Their fair and odd demands for their states resulted in the personal crisis in the lives of the residents of both the states.

The whole novel represents a picture gallery of problems like centre’s interference in the state issues. Quarrel over boundaries, water and electricity supply and over the capital Chandigarh, which each one of them claimed exclusively as its own. Apart from this the social aspects, emotional crisis, inner discontentment and imbalance in relationship has not been left untouched by the novelist. M.N.Sharma says that there is an undercurrent of humanitarian concern in Shagal’s work which is also her solution to “political confrontations, social evils and individual conflicts” (43).

Now I come to Sahgal’s most popular novel *Rich Like Us* which is the focus of my extensive study. Its artistic importance and prominence was recognized when it was honored with two most prestigious awards, the Sinclair Prize for fiction in 1985 and the Indian Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1986. Published in 1985, it deals specifically with the occasion that evoked protest all over India after independence that is the state of Internal Emergency declared by Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 26th June, 1975 which prevailed till 21st March 1977. It was one of the greatest political crises since independence. The
reasons for the promulgation of emergency were many. According to the verdict of 12th June, 1971 Indira’s party Congress was charged of election fraud. Court declared her election invalid and unseated her from Loksabha. This was followed by the verdict of Supreme Court that she could continue as prime minister without her right to vote in the Parliament. Several strikes and protests gained momentum, demanding for her resignation. She cannot resist these circumstances, hence declared state of internal emergency at 11:20 under article 352 of Indian constitution.

The state of emergency stormed the literary world too. It becomes the main theme for many political novelists including Nayantara Sahgal. T.N. Dhar is of the view that, “Sahgal throws up her cloak of disguise to make more than usual direct references to people and events, and expresses her disapproval of the Emergency let loose on the country by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in equivocal terms.” (History-Fiction Interface in English Novel. Mulk Raj Anand, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie and O.V. Vijayan. 150). Rich Like Us presents a live picture of the pungency of the emergency period. She has frequently expressed her views in the political concern over Indian socio-political milieu, traumatic events like partition emergency, violence, corruption, need of democracy and other important events.

*Rich Like Us* is exclusively written in the Sahgal tradition. Through various fictional characters and their lives she has
successfully presented the true picture of emergency prone India, when power became arbitrary and a favourable environment was created for the corrupt and the opportunists to flourish. On the contrary the public was exploited by depriving them from freedom and basic rights. In an interview Sahgal has revealed:

The Emergency was turning point for me personally and therefore fictionally Rich Like Us was set against a background of the Emergency, that event released me from the ‘chronology’. I was engaged in writing novels with the contemporary political scene as a setting-because dictatorship was the end of that particular road, a dead end, in a sense (Sodhganga).

Sonali Ranade is the mouth piece of the novelist. She is an idealist and a stern opponent of emergency. She defies Marxism and will never take recourse from it. She resolves not to submit to emergency, which is in reality absolute dictatorship. Ultimately she decides to resign as she cannot put her idealism at stake for retaining her position in the administration. She also believes in these words of Mahatma Gandhi as her father used to do: “…let the masses know that there are many other ways of earning a living than betraying the national interests…” (RLU. 146) while there are characters like Dev, Mr. Newman, Ravi Kachru who favour emergency because under its roof they could solve their purpose. Emergency proved to be a boon for people like Dev who want to make profit from their illegal acts. Dev and Newman came close because both of them targeted monetary matters. Newman, a foreign investor has come to India in search
of a market for setting his business while Dev, a young and flourishing businessman was waiting for a collaborator like Newman. They decided to set a factory for a fizzy drink named ‘Happyola’. Dev anticipated that during the emergency phase any kind of opposition, strikes or indiscipline was banned. While conversing with Newman Dev said: “This emergency is just what we needed. The troublemakers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed. The way the country’s being run now, with one person giving the orders, and no one being allowed to make a fuss about it in the cabinet or in Parliament, means things can go full steam ahead without delays and weighing pros and cons forever. Strikes are banned. It’s going to be very for business” (RLU. 2).

It took not more than ten minutes to confirm the collaboration deal in the Ministry of Industry. In accompaniment to this cash, was delivered to the minister for swift approval of the project proposal. Dev kept saying, “We need contact in political circles” (RLU. 13). Opportunists like Dev will not leave any stone unturned for making a beneficiary of the deal, so that he could establish himself among new entrepreneurs and can quit his ill father’s garment business. “The foundation stone would be laid in two months time and then at least Dev would come into his own” (RLU. 10).

The establishment of the factory had its effect on the lives of the common public. It was Ravi who helped Dev to requisite land
from the villagers in return of little compensation. They became destitute but Dev was least concerned about it. Rose, Dev’s mother felt sympathetic for the villagers when she came to know their plight. She investigated from Dev: “I suppose it would be all the same to you if a bulldozer came along and leveled this ‘ouse and you were given comp-eng-say-tion. Compenssaytion! ‘ow do we know if it was enough compensaytion?” (RLU. 9)

During the emergency era the bureaucrats presume to be supreme power, the officers in influential administrative positions and politicians were corrupted and they were working in collaboration, so as to make their ends meet. Another class which favours emergency and considers this dictatorship natural were lawyers, professors and editor. We came to know about them through a dinner party at Sonali’s house. “this dictatorship around us was one of nature’s marvels not man-made…It had the naturalness…What was wrong with a son succeeding his mother in this particular republic? And which mother anywhere in the world wouldn’t move heaven and earth for her son? “Especially when he’s shown such organizational talent” (RLU. 100) stated the chief editor of a newspaper favoring the implementers of emergency. As per the opinion of the lawyer, amendments should be made in the constitution, so that madam (P.M.) may get the necessary powers to fight against the deleterious forces of this country. Even, the civil services which were earlier a protective shield the “steel frame” (RLU. 22) now has become a
passage to support the emergency. “The distinction between politics and the service had become so badly blurred over the last few years it had all but disappeared. The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politicians meddling in administration” (RLU. 23). Civil services and politics were no longer two different sides of the coin.

Sonali’s narration, her wit and ironical expressions bring forth the real face of emergency and its supporters. She quotes the example of her old friend and batch mate Ravi Kachru, an ICS who can be seen hovering around the ‘political bosses’ (RLU. 23) he was “indispensable here, there and everywhere, the right hand and left leg of the Prime Minister and her household” (RLU. 23). He had become well versed in the game of politics. She was replaced by Ravi Kachru when she rejected the proposal of Happyola considering it unimportant for the country. She was quite ignorant of the fact that in disguise Happyola factory will be storage for car-parts required to manufacture cars by the Prime Minister’s younger son. Very soon she has to pay a heavy price for it, she was demoted and transferred to her home state “where, I already knew, and the Union government certainly knew, there was no vacancy at my level. I hadn’t merely been transferred without warning, I had been demoted, punished, and humiliated, and I had no inkling why” (RLU. 27).

Sonali very soon realized it to be the pros and cons of emergency. Sonali purports “The logic of June 26th had simply
caught up with me” (RLU. 28). She was a victim of it. The substructure of democracy had been badly shattered. It would not be an exaggeration to say democracy had come to an end. “The Emergency had given all kinds of new twists and turns to policy and the world’s largest democracy was like nothing…” (RLU. 26).

Emergency along with its sister censorship has shown its hideous face within one month. It was quiet easy to notice the “sullenness building up along New Delhi’s heavily policed roads…” (RLU. 21). Sahgal is a true presenter of the deplorable plight of the poor public. Subdued by the horror of emergency inhuman treatment were given to the public. A gathering of five and more was banned. Any sort of protest means brutal punishment. Vijayasree has successfully evocated the true picture of Emergency in these words: “Using the past as a point of reference, particularly the Gandhian age, when love of freedom truly flourished, she contrasts it with the troubled seventies in India and demonstrates convincingly that the Emergency has put Democracy in deep danger” (Dhawan. *Indian Women Novelists. Set II, Vol.5.* 1993. 22). The protagonist, Sonali was herself caught up in the trap of 26th June. “The same soundless nudge that landed me in the ditch had carted thousands off to jail, swept hundreds more out of sight to distant “colonies” to live, herded as many like animals to sterilization centres” (RLU. 28).
Emergency has provided an environment supportive to the Prime Minister for modifying the constitution so that she can rule recklessly. It is often said that birds of same feather flock together. The same happened during emergency; it brought people of same temperament close to each other. “…lawyers, teachers, entrepreneur’s forums to provide solid public support for constitutional change to strengthen the Prime Minister’s hands…” (RLU. 84). In support of emergency rallies were organized and the delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children and common mass etc went to the Prime Minister to sing the songs of praise and to congratulate her for declaring emergency. They wait patiently for their turn to meet the Prime Minister. This situation was ironically described by the novelist in these words: “And then the Emergency was so popular. You could tell by the delegations of teachers, lawyers, schoolchildren and so on and so forth who went every day to congratulate the Prime Minister for declaring it. They were stopped at the gate…She was sure they, like her, were not thinking about anything special while they waited…But they shared the mystical glow of people doing the right patriotic thing, or pilgrims who had journeyed far and hazardously to kiss the big toe already worn out with pilgrim kisses” (RLU. 87).

While at the other end helpless people were being tortured irrationally. Kishori Lal, Nishi’s father, a shopkeeper narrates his story of oppression. Policeman wrecked his shop completely
because he has not made arrangements in his shop according to the new rules. For example if he had attached a price tag in every item of his shop or not. Nishi insisted him to follow the rules laid during emergency, in compliance with it; she wanted him to go to the P.M’s house with his group of business man to congratulate her. Resented Kishori Lal said for what he should congratulate, “For clapping a whole lot of people into jail? They nearly clapped me into jail for not having prices marked on items. They don’t need a good reason. Just quick march off to jail. If that’s a matter for congratulation, you need your head examined” (RLU. 90). Nishi, enchanted due to emergency was ill treating her parents. On one occasion she rebuked them for not turning up to the foundation stone ceremony of the Happyola factory. Their son-in-law Dev wanted K.L. to open an agency of Madam’s (P.M’s) son’s car. “It’s more dignified” (RLU. 92) to be an agent for P.M’s son’s car than selling bathroom equipments.

Ravi’s recent focus was on popularizing the Twenty Point Programme set during emergency. For this purpose he has organized a meeting of women so that they can participate and utilize their potential in promulgating emergency through vasectomy campaign, beautification programme etc. Leila, another proponent of emergency suggested birth control should be their first and foremost priority. She provided reliable information and her business like ideas were applauded by
everyone in the meeting. “It’s perfectly obvious what our priority should be. I was saying so before you arrived. Birth control. We’ve got to take cue from the government. I have it on reliable authority school teachers are being dismissed if they can’t certify that they’ve had five people sterilized. Of course they’ve got to get themselves sterilized first. That’s the kind of business like programme we’ve got to start for domestic servants and no nonsense about it” (RLU. 94).

Vasectomy was among the worst faces of emergency. It is apparent from this conversation of Leila, how poor servants were ill-treated. “I’ve threatened my ayah with dismissal more than once if she produces another child but she goes on popping brats. This is her fourth. I tell you it’s a nightmare”. “Get her tubes tied” (RLU. 93).

When everything fitted in accurate framework it was decided to vasectomize Hindus first. Though it is a secular state but to escape any kind of opposition Muslim and Christians were kept aside from this programme. Leila said: “it’s a secular state. But let’s get started with the Hindus. Let’s just get on with the job to show we mean business, and arrange for one of those vans and have a vasectomy centre set up and get all our servants taken there on the same day. It’s a question of management and organization” (RLU. 95).
All those associated with this vasectomy campaign took it as their religious duty and without any delay send their servants to the centres. It was sheer transgression of limits when Nishi was dragging Kumar, an old servant to the vasectomy centre. Agitated Rose interfered in between, “This man,” said Rose, “is your father’s age. Would you drag your father off to a vasectomy camp?” (RLU. 97). Rose has sensed fear among her servants who were herded inside the van. Ross’s efforts made Kumar safe but Nishi was hunting for one more body to make up the loss due to Kumar. Suddenly her eyes fell on the beggar, handless and crippled as he was, unable to resist; fortunately he escaped from their grip.

The entire phase of emergency was surrounded by utter confusion. Neither the politicians, administrators, bureaucrats nor the common public were able to comprehend it. They were just flowing with the flow. Some considered that a millennium has arrived with emergency “headed by a mother Tsar whose ignorant little peasants were quite happy with Mother’s blessings” (RLU. 104).

The dinner party at Sonali’s house left her in a state of contemplation. She came to the conclusion that it was not only P.M. or the state of emergency that has brought things in a confused state but it was also the fault of mixed up people who blindly support emergency.
Sonali moved back to the days when emergency was launched. She was recollecting J.P.’s speech the night before emergency was promulgated. His arrest was similar to that of Socrates. She was perplexed with the state of lawlessness and disorder. She will not submit to such a dictatorship rather she will follow the path of truth (Satyagraha) to maintain her self-respect. She was really upset with the deteriorated state of affair.

Kisshori Lal was arrested without any charge. Three policemen arrived, turned his shop upside down and handcuffed him, giving the reason government orders cannot be denied. At the police station he was accused and compulsive efforts were made so that he may accept himself to be a member of the R.S.S. He was tortured, slapped and whipped. “You are a saboteur part of a conspiracy to overthrow the government” (RLU. 261). He was distained to say that he regrets for being a saboteur and after signing a paper supporting emergency he will be released. “Thank heavens whips were not what one calls torture” (RLU. 233). As he had plenty of them used on him by his schoolmasters.

K.L. learns in jail how, while those with influence were quickly and honorably released, other prisoners like an American educated boy, arrested on non-existent or filmsy grounds like a mere membership of the Marxist Party, remain there indefinitely. K.L.’s reflections in jail make him think. “The Bhagvad Gita said, the Lord speaking. ‘Whenever there is decay of
righteousness…I am born from age.’ From age to age. But righteousness had decayed and rotted. And there was no sign of renewal or rescue that K.L. could see” (Mathur: 42).

Nishi’s mother informed her about K.L.’s arrest and the consequences faced for opposing the emergency. Their telephone had been disconnected, electricity is cut off and the gas cylinder took many days to arrive. She has to stand in an unending queue to buy kerosene oil for cooking. Even the neighbors were callous towards them in such circumstances, not allowing them to use their telephone for the fear of approaching danger. Considerate about her father Nishi talked to Dev to take assistance from Ravi “Your father’s an old fool, joining the wrong party and mixing with the wrong people. He’s been asking for trouble and he’s got it” (RLU. 263).

Nishi swallowed these words of disgrace. Finally, Kishori Lal’s release orders arrive with Ravi’s approach, but he refused to go home as his fellow young prisoner, a student was still inside. Politely he refused saying to Nishi, “Come back, if you please, with another release order for the boy” (RLU. 272). The boy was not guilty of violating any law. Neither was he plotting against the government, he was imprisoned and his leg was broken by the police. Such was the nature of punishment given to those who were innocent and non-influential.
The novelist has very artistically interwoven political as well as social aspects in *Rich Like Us*. Rose and Sonali serve the purpose of being the mouth-piece of the novelist. Both have shared their life changing experiences during the emergency. Their comments are a hard blow on the faces of those who favours it. Vijayasree remarks “Nayantara Sahgal chooses a very effective narrative device for the authentic portrayal of the contemporary socio-political chaos- the double perspective- the omniscient author’s stance is altered by the participant- narrator view point” (Dhawan. *Indian Women Novelists. Set II, Vol. 5*, 1993: 26). Sahgal has depicted the travails and experiences of common people through her characters in the novel. The backdrop of emergency, its horrors and its aftermath has been perfectly blended by the novelist. emergency had created many tyrants whose clutches had engulfed many victims. Ram-Rose family was its perfect representation with tyrants and victims living under one roof. This household has been true projection of the different facets of emergency fitted best in the Indian and Western tradition. Through the depiction of the personal crises in the lives of the characters a successful attempt has been made to highlight the frustrations they faced during emergency.

A close examination of Ram’s family shows that Ram was a laborious businessman with his own traditional business ethics. He has acquired ample wealth for his wives- Mona and Rose. His only son Dev was always in terms of conflict with him. He never
wanted to join his father’s business. Emergency has provided him an opportunity to establish himself as an entrepreneur and at the same time has provided bullying power and protection to him. In his fuddle of success and greed he acted unwittingly and forged his father’s signature to draw huge sum of money from his account. Later on Rose came to know about all this from Sonali. Dev and his wife Nishi were so resentful of Rose that they refused to give her any sum of money she asked for to meet her daily needs, although everything belonged to her husband. Emergency has transformed the destinies of human beings.

“Dev from a petty criminal and dunce to VIP, Rose from one culture to another, me from being first in the competitive exam to swift oblivion…Rose and Dev and I had been brought where we were by other people, but Kachru’s journey has been his own…” (RLU. 253).

Sahgal closely examines the life of her women characters, who face several ups and downs in their lives as well as in the social circle. The problems of maladjustment in an entirely new culture, tradition and country has been depicted by Rose; injustice and maltreatment has been portrayed through the character of Mona; whereas the social evils such as early marriages and Sati tradition has also been given place in the novel to create emphasis. The journey of Rose has been shown tossing between two different cultures, East and West. She met Ram in London both were spell-bound by each other’s
personalities. Rose found in Ram, a rich Indian businessman and a secure future. She leaves her parents and marries Ram to become his second wife. On her arrival to India, she found herself surrounded by the realistic conditions, she has to actually face. There was a wide gap between both the cultures. The problem of adjustment was apparent. Apart from this, Ram’s traditional family was not ready to accept an English bride. Mona, Ram’s first wife could not tolerate her, she burns with anger inside whenever she faces Rose. Dev hates her as she has snatched his mother’s place. Later on she completely merges into the Indian ethos. The family members befriend her. Before death Mona, gave the responsibility of Dev’s marriage to Rose. Mona in her death bed pleaded, “Our daughter-in-law. You will look after her won’t you, Rose-ji” (RLU. 210) with these words she collapsed, leaving her place and responsibilities vacant for Rose. Rose never desired to play the role of Mona at the cost of Mona’s life. When Mona blazed fire on her it was Rose who saved her at that moment. Rose remembers “Ram’s English poet had called ‘A way we both shall understand’- but strange how within those walls they had adventured over hills and woods into another pasture, into friendship, and one fine morning, into love” (RLU. 211).

Rose was such a polite and friendly person. In the course of time when emergency messed up things, the country and social relationships were at stake. Dev’s monster like greed engulfs his
relations with Rose. He could not tolerate her outspokenness and bluntness in his matters. She has to beg in front of Dev and Nishi for little money. Often Sonali helped her in money matters. But Sonali was frightened to see Rose in such a miserable condition. “She seemed to have lost her natural verve and bounce. People like Rose have inextinguishable fountains of optimism. This wasn’t like her at all” (RLU. 252).

She was a person whom age can never surpass. She never felt lonely or aged earlier. Sonali was thirty eight, but she used to call Rose her best friend with whom she shared everything happening in her life. Concerned Sonali said that, there are “people one fastens one’s faith on because they are young and questing and keep the courage of laughter. Rose was one of them. I couldn’t bear to lose these qualities in her” (RLU. 252). They were all the victims of emergency and puppets in the hands of the tyrants whom emergency has created. As was Rose in the hands of Dev, whom he decides to kill by throwing in the nearby well with the help of a tough of the youth camp. The murder was given the form of a suicide case. Rose in drunken state, stumbled and fell into the well was the story narrated by Dev. The question that arises here is why will she go to the well when she was constantly warning the beggar about? Nishi tried to explain Sonali the probable reason of her death. “I suppose she couldn’t bear it any more. I used to see her sitting in Daddy-ji’s room, looking at him, waiting for him to recognize her, whispering
Ram Ram Ram to herself like a prayer. She was getting into a desperate state about his not improving. I suppose she couldn’t bear it anymore” (RLU. 284). Sonali was feeling “a freezing baffling anger” (RLU. 284) as she has smelled the rat in all these logics and facts given by shrewd Nishi and Dev.

Rose’s murder was witnessed by the handless beggar; this incident is represented as one of the darkest blot on emergency. Perhaps Rose must have become a threat to Dev and his ambitious pursuits. It was apparent in Dev’s lunch party with Ravi where they were discussing about Madam’s son’s car which will be soon launched once the constitution is amended. Here, Rose through her common sense has guessed it to be the same people’s car project Sonali was talking about. Out of suspicion she ironically remarks, “Sounds like the emperor’s new clothes to me,” said Rose… First of all there’s no car, and then you nationalize the one there isn’t. And in all these years wot you’re saying is there isn’t even a model” (RLU. 265). Rose talked to Ravi regarding the forgery of cheques by Dev. The response of Ravi gave her a jolt. “You could’ve helped by not starting this rigmarole” said Rose severely (RLU. 270).

Nishi ignorantly professed before Rose the strategy behind the car project. Dev has managed to store huge sum of black money collected from the “dummy companies and dealers who are going to exhibit the car when some models are ready” (p.266,
Rich Like Us) ‘Bomb shelters’ (*RLU*. 266) are meant for the storage purpose. Further, the “parts keep arriving and they’re stored down there too. They come straight from the airport without clearing customs” (*RLU*. 266). This was the well planned and plotted mechanism working under Happyola drinks factory. Since Rose was aware of this delinquency, and has become an obstacle in Dev’s path of progress. Hence she was eradicated from his way. This was the pathetic end of a loving large hearted and spirited Rose.

Sonali, the narrator in the novel has been a constant observer of all the happenings in the novel. She was herself demoted and dismissed from the Indian administrative services, and become one of the sufferers of emergency. But this Papa’s “star of my eyes” (*RLU*. 254) never slouches before emergency nor does she lose her values and ethics. Rather she was a staunch opponent of all those who favour it. She tries to disclose the complexities emergency has brought and the malpractices performed under its shelter have also been unfolded by her. Her constant move was to quest for the reality of her motherland whose facets has been changed during emergency. Mathur unites:

Her penetrating observation, sensitivity and low-keyed narration illuminated by a heroically moral stance seems to make her an alter ego of the narrator-novelist whose telescopic multi-voiced view of the scenario is supplemented by Sonali’s close scrutiny of persons
and events informed by her memory, reasoning, passion, conscience and idealistic perspective (46).

This historical fiction portrays two upper class women characters, highly refined in manners. Both, Sonali and Rose are kith and kin to each other. They have shown utter tolerance and forbearance to stay in patriarchal system of society. Through Rose and Sonali, Sahgal presents two unmatched characters simultaneously. “They present a large reality than a confined narrative can contain for the number of issues and she raises embrace a living society” (Pier Paolo Piciucco, 132). Sonali’s deep sense of respect, reverence and love for Rose urged her to find out all different possibilities of her going near the well late at night. She can never believe a lively person like Rose can commit suicide after drinking heavily. “It was very noticeable how steady Rose was on her feet when she had had a drink or two, talking care to put her feet heavily on the ground in a slow, measured way” (RLU. 285). Apart from this, she never goes for a walk after dinner, nor does she ever choose the stony path which goes from the youth camp. Sonali decides to speak to the beggar for more details. Rose in a drunken state meant Rose passing sarcastic remarks on the wrong doers like Dev and his moron company of business associates and friends. It was hard to presume the kind of desperation she must be undergoing that leads her to the well.

“If a searchlight were trained on that habit, it would light up the blazing truths she tactlessly tumbled out with, revelations far
from pleasant to behold as they lay asked on the drawing room carpet” (*RLU*. 285). Here, Sonali remembers the murder of her great-grandmother who was put on the altar of sati forcefully by her relatives, who later on gave it the name of ‘sacrifice.’ Sahgal interprets both the incidents to focus on the sheer brutality and animality practiced on women.

The grief-stricken Sonali collected the belongings of Rose and was going to meet the beggar to find out the mystery behind the sudden death of Rose. Although an inner voice was reminding her, “Rose’s killers would never be brought to justice. They would live out their comfortable lives and die patriotic citizens” (*RLU*. 286). Sonali met the beggar in an old tomb near the well, hiding behind the moss-covered wall, “curved foetus-like against it” (*RLU*. 290). He is among the most tragic and pitiful victims who symbolizes the pathetic face of emergency. When he saw Sonali, he came out. Expressions of fear and terror were visible on his face, as handless he was depended on the mercy of others. Rose was quite sensible when she said “A man should at least be able to wipe away his own tears” (*RLU*. 290). Rose has felt the pain of being handicapped. She was sympathetic towards the beggar. Her heart wept at the sight of the handless beggar. She along with Sonali has arranged artificial hands for him so that he can earn his livelihood. “She would want you to be safe” (*RLU*. 289). The same Rose was murdered in front of the beggar.
The head rending story of the most sacrilegious event was narrated by the beggar. The beggar sobbingly narrated to Sonali that Rose was suffocated to death by two tough of the youth camp. After murdering her she was thrown into the well. The melancholic tale of Rose and the beggar makes Sonali realize that “It was too late…to mitigate a fearsome tragedy, but not too late for me to wonder when the saga of peaceful change I had been serving from behind my desk had become a saga of another kind, with citizens broken on the wheel for remembering their rights” (RLU. 291).

Rose’s murder, beggar’s chopped hands and Sonali’s deplorable plight all were a result of wrong intentions and misdeeds of the people in power. After all “it is their raj around here” (RLU. 290). Like it was the landlord’s raj in the village of the beggar, his hands were cut off just because he claimed for his share in the land. This situation makes Sonali feel, “Power had changed hands but what else had changed where he lived? If ever there had been an emergency, it was this” (RLU. 292). All the three of them, who were considerate for each other were in some way or the other effected by the emergency. Sonali advised the beggar not to speak a word for what he saw near the well that night when Rose was strangled and thrown into the well, for she has discerned “as against justice for the dead which would never be done, there was no need to imperil the employment and security of the living” (RLU. 289).
Rose met the fatal end which was planned by the contractors of the society. She is doomed by her valour and honesty in the same way as by her pitiful status in the family after Ram’s illness. Though she has no brother, no sister or any kinsmen but still “it was no calamity” (*RLU*. 293) as Sonali puts it. She had “transcended those things blood, race, distance” (*RLU*. 293). She was the kind of a person for whom God has reserved special grace because such people does not live for themselves but for others as was done by Rose did for the beggar who was a stranger for her. On the other hand the beggar moved ahead in his life leaving the trauma of emergency behind. Sonali who herself has been a sufferer and witness to the sufferings of others was one of the most magnificent personalities who emerge in an entirely different way out of the emergency and decides to give a new direction to her life. She met Brian and Marcella, friend to Ram and Rose. They wanted to carry out a research work in the decorative arts of the mid seventeenth and eighteenth century. They need Sonali’s assistance. “I’m eager to close the gap, you will help us, won’t you?” said Brian (*RLU*. 297). Sonali after little hesitation accepts their offer and finally takes up the study of decorative arts. She has immersed herself studying history, for it was her best preparation for the future. Sonali believed, “It was really Rose’s legacy again, the paths that had crossed hers now crossing mine, reminding me I was young and alive, with my own century stretched out before me, waiting to be lived” (*RLU*. 301).
Rich Like Us is presented through the consciousness of Sonali. All her life she has fostered idealism but her castle of ideals quivers in the storm of emergency as if they were made of sand. The resilience and determination of a person like Sonali has always helped her to repel the negative forces and to never submit. She has nurtured the values and ideals from her father who has always taught her to come up as a fighter and be an opponent in the alien world of politics. The moment she was removed from her position and demoted made her realize that all these days she had been fed upon ‘the orgy of idealism’ (RLU. 31). We are not taught to eschew this sort of idealism but to tolerate it. This has made us to adopt cruelty and injustice. But very soon she wakes up from the dreams of her fantasy world as blindfolded she was till then and apprehends, she will never pursue her career “in the crumbling unprofessionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus emergency” (RLU. 32).

It is worth noticing that emergency was advantageous in bringing out the richness in the personalities and comprehensiveness in sensitive characters like Sonali, Rose and the beggar among the stark ugliness of the world. They faced severe affliction which the cruel whip of emergency showers upon them. Instead of all these tortures they bring forth a bright and glorious trait of their personality, a real asset which cannot be defeated by any event like emergency. As our Indian history
and tradition is rich with its vast mythology so are these characters. The poor beggar and Sonali forget and forgive everything and move ahead with a new enthusiasm and zeal. Besides their radiance and enriched individualism, even the darkest blot, emergency seems to be poor and beggarly.

Sahgal shows the depletion of values and ethics among the bureaucrats and politicians and other opportunists during the internal emergency. People like Dev crossed every limit of flattery henceforth reached up to the post of Cabinet Minister. While Ravi Kachru falls from the grace of Madam and was transferred. Finally, the novel demonstrates the drastic changes in the whole political system with the people changing as well and the values being deteriorated. Jasbir Jain writes, “Rich Like Us offers no solutions to mankind and problems on the contrary, it challenges all known solutions…finally Rich Like Us is about the complex nature of reality” (The Emperor’s New Clothes: The Emergency and Sahgal’s Rich Like Us. 34). The end of Emergency is not shown however the characters like Sonali brings the novel to a promising end. She decides to fight against the cruelty of the contemporary times as was done in the past by her father, when he rebelled against the sati tradition. Mini Nanda, believes that “the ending of the novel offers hope and a certain confidence and affirmation”. (Jain. Women’s Writing: Text and context. 1996. 187).
In the light of the dull and suffocating environment that prevailed throughout the novel, *Rich Like Us* also delves deep into the psyche of some sensitive characters who spreads the message of being ‘rich’ like them. Sahgal’s novels are endowed with humanistic approach; this seems to be true in *Rich Like Us* too. In *The New Indian Novel in English*, Jasbir Jain rightly points out:

Sahgal analyses and interprets variegated aspects of political life in depth and through her active involvement in politics. She emphasizes the humanistic values she upholds and the novel becomes a concern for the quality of life. Her concern with politics is just a part of her humanistic concern because each of her explorations into political life reveals her newer and deeper insight into the human psyche (Jain. 141).
Works Cited


----------. RICH LIKE US, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2010. Print. All references to this edition of the novel will be incorporated parenthetically into the text.


