CHAPTER V

Nayantara Sahgal’s Art of Characterization

Before we consider Ms. Sahgal’s art of characterization, it will not be out of place to say a few words on the importance of characterization in a novel. Characterization is considered a very vital part of a novel. Characters in a novel are creations of its author and though they are life-like, they are not the same as the people we encounter in our daily life. The people who inhabit the world of a novel reveal far more about their inner life to the reader than do our neighbours, friends and relatives to us. It is through his characters that the novelist conveys his vision of life and the world. The reader lives with these characters. He shares their experiences and learns from their behaviour the secrets of conduct successful or otherwise. Walter Allen’s following observation on the importance of characters in a novel is very apt: “A novel is a totality, made up of all the words in it, and it must be judged as a totality. Of this totality characterization is only a part; yet it is plainly an essential one and first in order of importance since, so far as the reader is concerned, without it the most important apprehensions of man’s fate count for nothing. Only through character can the novelist’s apprehensions of man’s fate can be uttered at all.”

Nayantara Sahgal’s characters are beings of flesh and blood. They are far from being mere abstracted idealogues. Though she is a Gandhian in her belief in non-violence and concern for the individual, she gives her characters freedom to think for themselves. This enables
her to look at things from different angles and lets the readers or their own views. This tendency makes her characters psychologically true also. Their thoughts, words and actions are the products of the environment in which they have been brought up and move about. None of her characters are absolutely virtuous or vicious. They are like most of us, blends of virtues and vices. Below are analyzed the characters of her novels and through this art of characterization.

Sanad is the protagonist in Sahgal’s first novel, *A Time To Be Happy*. Like his brother Girish, he is brought up to be a successful man. He works in the British firm Selkirk and Lowe. But he feels alienated in the company and a sense of rootlessness troubles him. He does not like the Indian employees of the British firm being treated as inferior to their English counterparts. His self-analysis leads him to resolve not to remain a stranger among his own countrymen. He marries Kusum who helps her overcome his feeling of alienation by making him imbibe the spirit of India. He succeeds in working on his own terms in the firm. This is his great achievement. His refusal to go to England for orientation telling Mr. Trent that he is not interested in it speaks volumes for his self-respect and self-reliance. His reply to Mr. Trent is significant:

> I told him about my desire to discover my country a little before I went to England. I told him Kusum was teaching me Hindi and I was learning how to spin. ²

It is through the contrast between Sanad and his elder brother Girish that she highlights the character of the former. Both are
brought up by their father to be successful in life. But they are temperamentally different from each other. Whereas Girish conforms to the British pattern of life because it indicates to him a superior class and does not mind the British treating Indians as their inferiors, establishes the right contact with a view to rising to the top and enjoys working in a commercial firm, Sanad puts individuality over conformity, wants the British firm, in which he works, to treat Indian employees on equal terms with the English, and seeks identification with his countrymen without which he feels lost amid crowd of brown faces. Unlike his elder brother, who is an unthinking Anglophile, Sanad chooses and accepts things from foreign sources only when, after examining and analyzing them, he finds them useful. His attitude in this respect finds a clear expression in these words which constitute Sanad’s comment on the incongruity of Indians’ habit of imitating the English way of life blindly:

Take our clothes, our mannerisms, our speech. Take us. What are we? I am not saying it is not a good thing to borrow from another culture, but to take it over lock, stock and barrel, and become an imitation of it – it’s pathetic. 3

He tells Girish further:

Do not you see, it is not uniformity I am objecting to, but a mimic uniformity that has nothing whatever to do with our roots. 4
A. C. Pandey has rightly commented that “the marriage of Sanad and Kusum has been symbolically presented to imply the marriage of India with freedom. They are happy with the bond of marriage, though exposed to adverse situations.” With his will-power this Anglicized man regains his Indian roots over which his English education had drawn a curtain. He learns Hindi from his wife and acquires skill in spinning.

The character of the narrator in the novel is also important. He is the only son of a rich mill-owner of Sharanpur. He has received education at home and abroad and as a result of this his sensibility becomes deeper and wider. He is pained to see the gap that exists between the workers who live in poverty inspite of working very hard and the mill-owners who wallow in luxury. This makes him give up his inheritance and become a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. This is how he speaks of himself:

It may have been the contrast between poverty and plenty – the poverty I saw all about me, and the plenty I enjoyed in my father’s house where food was prepared in pure, nourishing ghee, and milk and meat and home-made butter were plentiful – which sculptured itself in bold relief on my childhood memory and later, during my student days, toward the national movement... When I adopted Khadi, I made, I felt, the first major decision of my life, for mill-made cloth was my family’s source of
income and my own future inheritance. In choosing to wear Khadi I surrendered for ever my rightful claim to inheritance and, in doing so, severed all contact with my father’s business.  

The narrator is omniscient as he is well known to all the characters and is a witness to most of the incidents in the novel. Besides telling the story of Sanad, he dwells also upon his upbringing and tells us what made him adopt the Gandhian path of life. Although his main job is to observe and record what happens to Sanad, he fails to stand aloof from the action and gets emotionally involved in it. Aware of the gap between Maya and her husband Harish, he feels irresistibly drawn to Maya who regards a response as the most important thing in life and which she does not get from her husband. With a view to helping her in her need of love, he holds her in her arms, forgetting all self-control. Though she has a feeling of self-realization, she makes a move to free herself and mutely appeals to him not to touch her. After freeing her he meditates on this event and says, “Now the knowledge of my empty future overwhelmed me.”

In this novel we find in Maya the beginning of a New Woman. When, after marriage, she finds herself in a world quite different from that of her parents’ house and feels in it like a fish out of water, she thinks of carving a path for herself. This is how the narrator dwells on this aspect of her life:

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

Unlike other women, she does not take to the traditional life of a housewife. Her marriage being unfulfilled, she seeks fulfilment in social service. But, instead of getting any support from women like Lakshmi, who cannot even think of getting away from playing the traditional role of a housewife, she is opposed by them. Maya’s aspirations appear sheer madness to Lakshmi:

“It’s not a laughing matter,” she scolded.
“Don’t you see it’s tactless of her? It’s embarrassing for Harish with her getting mixed up in the Congress programme. Why can’t join a music circle or a literary society or something he’ll approve of?”

Prabha, like Lakshmi, is an obedient wife. She sees nothing wrong in her husband’s wish to marry again with the object of getting a male heir. She believes that only by surrendering herself totally to her husband a woman can crown her marriage with success and happiness. She says.

As any young and inexperienced girl should who is given in marriage to a man of my husband’s good and considerable ways. It was the only thing in life. And do you know why? Because all life was ahead to be discovered.
In this way she may be said to typify the lethargy and unthinking nature of women, which, to a great extent, accounts for their suffering.

Kailas Vrind is the central character in *This Time of Morning*. His character is cast in the mould of Gandhian ideals. He is an ardent Gandhian. But he is not in sympathy with all the ideas of Gandhi. He holds that Gandhi’s ideas on prohibition, cow slaughter and sexual abstinence were quite out of tune with the modern age. It is Gandhi’s concern for the individual that he has imbibed. For him individual freedom is something most important in the life of a country and so he considers individual progress a measurement for society. He says: “We have made the human being the unit and measure of the progress so we can never at the stage abandon our concern with him.”

For Kailas Vrind, politics is a means of service, not a stepping stone to material prosperity and fame. He gave up his lucrative law practice to join the freedom struggle being then fought under the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He put the nation and the cause of her freedom above his family. He became a close associate of the Prime Minister after Independence. His high ideals come in his way of dealing successfully with the new breed of politicians who are only self-seekers and do not hesitate to play a dirty game. Kalyan Sinha is one such politician. With his manoeuvrings he succeeds in winning the favour of the Prime Minister and in bringing Kailas Vrind into the latter’s disfavour. But this success is not lasting. When the Prime Minister understands Kalyan Sinha’s true nature, he takes Kailas Vrind into his confidence again and sends him to U.P. as Chief
Minister. His career illustrates the truth of the Upanishadic saying that “Truth always prevails.”

He has in Mira a wife, who is devoted to him heart and soul. His marriage with Mira was a result of her adamant will to marry him because knowing that his dedication to his country would not let him provide the ‘marriage any woman wanted’, he was against entering into wedlock. Though Mira, after marriage, realized that it was impossible to know the whole of the man, she, feeling quite secure in her married life, tries successfully to make her marriage a success through merging her will into her husband’s. The author, thus, comments on their marital relationship: “He had unavoidably stretched the fabric of their relationship till it wore thin and tore in places. She had patched and mended and restored it, and if it was whole today it was because of her.”

Kalyan Sinha is the opposite of Kailas Vrind. For Kailas Vrind, Mahatma Gandhi is a perennial source of inspiration, but for Kalyan Sinha he is an emasculator. Whereas Kailas Vrind regards individual progress as a unit of the measurement of the progress of society, Kalyan Sinha thinks of the progress of society in terms of group progress. It is dynamism that is the hall-mark of his character. It is with this quality that he impresses the Prime Minister, wins his confidence and succeeds in ousting Kailas Vrind from the delegation to the United Nations. So absolute does become the Prime Minister’s confidence in him that he does not like to entertain any complaint against him. He is all praise for him:
Men of Kalyan type do not always function in the routine, ponderous bureaucratic manner. That is their value. They have the ability to shed non-essential and go directly to the heart of matter and get things done. It is an irritating quality at times, but a useful one.\textsuperscript{12}

The character of Kalyan Sinha has been very brilliantly portrayed by the novelist. Orphaned during the famine in 1914, he was found on a street in Patna by a childless couple who adopted him. They perhaps named him Kalyan, and sent him to school. It was on a scholarship from a philanthropic American lady that he went to America for higher studies. Deep down in his unconscious mind, he desperately desires for love as is clear from his narration of his past to Celia Rand:

“I have survived all sorts of famine a famine of food and one of feeling. Do you think human beings need these things to live? Half of humanity lives without them, without food, without shelter.” He stopped a minute before pronouncing it as though it were a word of abuse, “without love.”\textsuperscript{13}

Rashmi, Neeta and Leela are portrayed in \textit{This Time of Morning} as victims of conventions. Rashmi’s marriage with Dalip is not successful. His influence on her personality has been a negative one. Rakesh, with whom she chooses to stay after severing the marriage bond, takes note of this fact:
Though all the years he had known her she had possessed a brightness that had distinguished her in a crowd. She had never been exuberant but the peal of laughter when it came had been of pure joy and the quality she emanated above all was of being at home in the world. Now she looked displaced.\textsuperscript{14}

It is strange that she is not supported by her mother, Mira, in her attempt to get rid of the wrong marriage. To her mother she appears to be a fool when she decides to leave Dalip. She goes farther than Maya in \textit{A Time To Be Happy}, who, on account of social constraints, is content only to find her soul-mate in the narrator without trying to stay with him. Rashmi is one of Sahgal’s rebellious women and, therefore, a new woman.

Neeta fights for her emancipation on her own strength. She revolts against her father who adopts dual moral stands – one for himself and another for others. He wants her to marry a man of his choice. But, in order to assert and protect her individuality, she refuses to yield to his wish. She, however, gets into the trap of Kalyan Sinha, who is incapable of feeling emotionally attached to any woman who comes into his contact and whose relationship with women is confined to the gratification of carnal desires. Though her future with Kalyan Sinha is not sure, she feels free to be herself.

Uma is wedded to Arjun, who is too devoted to his work to care for the fulfilment of her desires. She wants him to be mad in love – a thing which is beyond his power. This makes her a sex freak and
forces her to seek physical fulfilment in other places. Through Uma, Sahgal wants to show that ‘a woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thinking.”

Leela, a girl brought up in the orthodox atmosphere of Varanasi, goes to Radcliff in the U.S.A. There she becomes pregnant and commits suicide out of shame. Through her the novelist seems to express her view that Leela’s tragedy is caused by the rigid social set-up which does not recognize pre-marital sex and pregnancy and thus denies individual freedom to women. Thus Leela becomes a victim of society.

Kalyan does not believe at all in the Gandhian principle of using good means to achieve good ends. He is an expert in manipulating things to his own benefit. It is through manipulation that he wins the confidence of the Prime Minister and brings Kailas Vrind into his disfavour. So effective is his manipulatory skill that even Nita, Uma and Rashmi come under the spell of its magic. But when this magic breaks, the Prime Minister prefers Kailas to him and sends Kailas to U.P. as the Chief Minister. There is no doubt that Kalyan’s dynamism lends an irresistible charm to his personality, but the sincerity and patriotism make Kailas Vrind a very likeable character.

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, we have an interaction between character and politics which is in keeping with this political novel. What Robert Alter says about the political novel fully applies to the characters of this novel. According to him, “…the political novel at its best can show concretely and subtly what politics does to character, what character makes of politics.” In this novel Vishal Dubey, Mara,
Jit and Saroj illustrate how politics influences people whereas the two Chief Ministers – Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh – and their political activities show what character makes of politics. It is through contrast between Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh that the author highlights the salient features of their characters. Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of the new-created state of Haryana is in tune with the old breed of politicians who preferred making all possible efforts to take the nation forward rather than concentrating all their energies on their efforts to fulfil their self-interests. For him politics is service, not his career. His heart is fired by Gandhian ideals of truth and non-violence, but he feels that he does not have sufficient strength to thwart the strike, which Gyan Singh adopts violent means to launch to show his strength to the Home Minister who is against the disintegration of and further break up of the nation which Gyan Singh aims at. Vishal Dubey, the emissary of the Home Minister reawakens Harpal Singh’s self-confidence and he begins to gather support for himself. It is, however, the Home Minister’s death that makes Gyan Singh call off the proposed strike. The novelist describes the Home Minister’s character in terms of what his death would mean:

It would mark the end of an era known as Gandhian. In politics that had meant freedom from fear, the head held high, the indomitable will in the emaciated body of India. Gandhian politics had also meant the open discussion, the open action, no stealth, no furtiveness, and therefore no shame. ¹⁷
Gyan Singh is just opposite of Harpal Singh. He has no faith in the Gandhian ideals of truth and non-violence. He belongs to the new breed of politicians who are devoid of any firm ideal and have a permanent tendency to exploit popular sentiments to achieve their ends. Vishal Dubey succeeds in his mission and the strike does not take place, but he owes his success not only to the efforts made by Harpal Singh under his inspiration to dissuade people from joining the strike, but to the sudden death of the Home Minister also. The novelist wants every thinking citizen to act like Vishal Dubey for the preservation of the democratic values in the society. According to Jasbir Jain, “The message which the novelist wishes to impress upon is the courage involved in taking a stand against injustice and tyranny. This is the meaning of non-violence and the lesson which the post-Independence generation is compelled to learn all over again.”

_The Day In Shadow_ records a further stage in the development of Sahgal’s art of characterization. Whereas in her first novel _A Time To Be Happy_ the characters represent different kinds of values and so tend to be types rather than individuals, the characters in her later novels develop through interaction with each other and in this process exhibit certain individual traits of their personalities. This does not mean that characters like Kailas Vrind and Kalyan Sinha in _This Time Of Morning_ and Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh in _Storm in Chandigarh_ cannot be classified as types. It means that they represent two different sets of values, which direct their behaviour. But it is their interacting with each other through dialogue in realistic settings that distinguishes them from the characters of her first novel. It is in this
way that they contribute to the development of the plot of the novel. Their actions add to the depth of the novel. The point will become clear if we compare the heroine of first novel, Kusum with the heroine of *The Day in Shadow*, Simrit. Kusum plays the role of a lonely wife though she teaches her husband Hindi. As such she looks insignificant in comparison with Simrit whose character is complex as she encompasses the roles of wife, mother, writer and divorcee. Kusum is a flat character while Simrit is a round one.

*The Day In Shadow* enjoys the distinction of being Ms. Sahgal’s first novel that has a woman for its central character. The novel is the story of Simrit though her actions are the outcome of what her ex-husband Som has done. Som appears in person in only six of the twenty-two chapters of the novel, but his shadow looms large in the rest of it. He is present in them in the form of consent terms. It is through Simrit’s flashbacks that we get a glimpse of other aspects of his personality. The consent terms bring out the ruthlessness of his personality. Though he is dynamic, he is devoid of human values. His dynamism seems to abet his instinct of sadism. Raj judges him rightly when he says,

He’s magnificent, an uncommonly whole person, all of him there or none of him. There’s a kind of elemental grandeur about him. I’ve never come across anything like it. One meets much tamer types in everyday living. He’s superb and real. Men like him bring progress and we haven’t enough of them. If only they
had feelings, too, progress wouldn’t become a danger.¹⁹

This whole-hearted admiration of Som from Raj comes at the fag end of the novel. But even he recognizes the lack of feeling in him – a fact which is evidenced by the cruelty of consent terms.

Simrit is the heroine of this novel. She is married to Som, a Punjabi industrialist, who, as has been seen, is heartless enough to divorce her with the heavy consent terms which make her feel like an overburdened donkey. The author comments, “I suppose, she thought, this is what an over-loaded donkey feels like standing there as large as life with the back breaking, and no one doing anything about it, not because they can’t see it, but because it’s a donkey and loads are for donkeys.”²⁰ The divorce did not set her free for she had to pay heavy taxes on the amount of Rupees Six Lac in stock and shares which was to go to Brij when he reached of age. Commenting on her plight, Jasbir Jain Says:

The divorce settlement is a sort of continuation of their marriage; it pins her down to the role of a victim and attempts to crush her desire to be free in a positive way. The first step she has to take is to face the situation squarely and it is the courage of this stand, which frees her from the bonds of marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Out of this struggle to be free is born a new Simrit – a person who makes choices, takes decisions and becomes
aware of herself as a person. First the mind, then the body open upto new responses and life affirms itself in a new sense of fulfilment in her relationship with Raj which is an involving and an equal one. 21

Sumer Singh is a representative of those politicians who are given to manipulating people and events to achieve their own selfish ends. He has nothing to do with those human values and ideals which are regarded as necessary for bringing progress and prosperity to the nation. As the Minister for Petroleum he endangers India’s independence as Som did Simrit’s when he allows leftist powers to acquire control through the exploitation of oil reserves. Instead of discharging his duties sincerely, he always thinks of grabbing the Foreign Ministry. This is how the novelist brings out her declining mental status:

It was time it happened here - time to throw away sentiment, the weak, worn out liberalism of the past, time to bury Gandhi and write a new page of Indian history. The winds of Asia had changed. The old connections belonged in the garbage can. The entire sentimental framework of Parliament and Constitution would have to be scrapped. For him, he was convinced, it meant big things ahead - the prize - the Foreign Ministership which in the
coming reshuffle would almost certainly be his.

Sumer Singh, the self-seeker, is contrasted with Sardar Sahib who as the Petroleum Minister served the nation with a sense of dedication and loyalty. Whereas Sardar Sahib belonged to the past in his dedication to the high ideals, Sumer Singh represents the present when self becomes far more important than the nation itself. The contrast throws into higher relief the noble qualities of Sardar Sahib’s head and heart.

Other important characters in the novel are Raj and Ram Krishan. They play a very significant role in the novel in helping Simrit to face the adverse situation created by the cruel ‘Consent Terms’ courageously. In their religious views they represent the author’s point of view on Hinduism. Ram Krishan is an insider whereas Raj, a Christian is an outsider. But both take a critical view of Hindu religion. Raj doubts the capability of Hindus to oppose evil in the political as well as personal sphere. They are in the habit of accepting their lot without murmur and are passive in the face of evil. He says, “What did people like Shah or Simrit believe in? What, if anything, would they fight to defend?” He tells Simrit in the same vein of thought: “The type (the religion of ours produces) doesn’t face up. It puts problems into cold storage.” Ram Krishan is critical of making renunciation a prized virtue as this turns an individual into “a sadhu with his arms held above his head until they could never be lowered again. It was eyes blindfolded until they lost their sight.”
Ram Krishan is able to see the link between the individual lives of people around him and their political culture. In this way, the rot in the personal lives of people is to him only a reflection of the disorder at large. He “thought of his country beginning to look distorted like this room. Great ideals were in decay, with nothing yet, or for a long time to come to replace them.” Thus, his vision seems to acquire the colour of his creator’s.

In A Situation In New Delhi, the characters fall into two groups. According to Jasbir Jain, “so far the division of characters has roughly been into two kinds – those who are ruthlessly driven by the progressive urge and those who are possessed by humanistic considerations.” To the first group belong Rishad, Devi’s son and a brilliant student of Delhi University, Naren, a Ph.D. from Oxford University, and Skinny Jaipal, a first year B.A. student. The second group of characters consists of Devi, the Education Minister, Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, and Shivraj, the late Prime Minister. Besides these two groups of characters, there are Michael, a biographer and old friend of Devi, who has returned to Delhi to write the life-story of Shivraj; Madhu, the girl, raped by three students on the university campus, who later commits suicide; Priya, who helps Rishad; and Pinky, a drop-out from the university, who marries a dull but rich young man.

Usman, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, like the late Prime Minister and his sister Devi, tries to usher in a new social order through non-violent and democratic means and humanistic considerations. He is a visionary. He prepares a blue-print for reforms
in the educational system of the country. He has his proposal for reforms presented to the cabinet through Devi, the Education Minister. But his proposal is not accepted by the cabinet and he resigns the Vice-Chancellorship of the University and decides to create a new social order through his own efforts. When Madhu was gang-raped on the University campus, he realized that such private disasters could be checked only through political means, by awakening in the youth a sense of individual responsibility. This shows that Usman is a man of positive thinking.

Devi, the Education Minister and her son, Rishad are like each other in living on a dual level of existence. Their private and public worlds are quite different from each other. Manmohan Bhatnagar’s comment on these aspects of these characters is very illuminating: “Devi finds her public self impinging on her private aspirations. Her son Rishad finds his parasitic personal existence meaningless. However, both are depicted as growing from a “clandestine” life, private and public respectively, to a stage of anagnorisis where the duality is harmonized. It is through his personal relationship with Suvarnpriya Jaipal that Rishad achieves political maturity, and it is Devi’s personal commitment to her brother, the deceased P.M., Shivraj, that decides for her political course she has to take. Joining forces with Usman, who is leading a mass-movement for the restoration of values Shivraj cherished, Devi finds she is coming home.”

Rishad, Naren and Skinny Jaipal are young revolutionaries who, being dissatisfied with the contemporary politicians, feel that “it would
take the young to build and to do that they had to pledge themselves
to sober, calculated destruction.”

Rishad unselfishly aims at improving the lot of the poor and imagines a society in which all people have their basic needs fulfilled. Finding that such a social order cannot be achieved through the contemporary politicians, he, along with his companions, decides to take recourse to terrorist tactics:

To build a new world the old one had to be razed to the ground. The way to do it was through a systematic creation of panic. Panic to chaos to ruin. And out of ruin open revolt and power. Only then the new social order could arise. Not Utopia just food in the stomach and a decent wage. Utopia for the poor and the downtrodden. An Indian Utopia.

Rishad and his companions are quite different from Devi, who is steeped in the light of the Gandhian ideal that to achieve good ends one must adopt good means. In this respect, Rishad and his companions fail to achieve the end of establishing Utopia in the country. They die suddenly. Their failure embodies a significant message that no good end can be achieved by ignoring humanistic considerations. Michael’s thinking that if Shivraj’s values are not dead, he isn’t either sounds a hopeful note.

Madhu is a tragic character in the novel. She is raped on the campus of Delhi University where she studies. After this she does not get any sympathy from anybody. Even her parents see marriage as the only way out of this stigma instead of reporting the matter to the
authorities. They try to hide it lest its revelation should ruin the prospect of obtaining a good husband for her. She knows that after her marriage she cannot expect to get sympathy from her in-laws when it is denied to her by her own parents, “She screamed in the night and at home they said she was going mad the way she carried on.”

In Rich Like Us, again, we have two sets of characters: those who support and benefit from the Emergency imposed by the Madam on the country, and those who think that the Emergency was declared by the Madam to save herself from being dethroned after the Allahabad High Court judgement against her for resorting to corruption in her election campaign and oppose it as encroachment on individual freedom and are victimized for this by the Madam’s government. There are other characters who are not directly involved in politics and are content to lead family life. Dev, the son of Ram and Mona and the step son of Rose enters into collaboration with a foreign concern to make easy money. He is an opportunist and so sees a chance in Emergency to make over to a new business. He feels no qualms of conscience in withdrawing his father’s money with forged cheques. Ravi Kachru, a classmate of Sonali at Oxford University, was once a visionary who thought of changing the world through Marxism. But as soon as he became an I.A.S. officer, he began to dance to the tune of the Minister under whom he worked. When Sonali as the Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Industries, does not confirm the Happyola deal, it is Ravi Kachru who is appointed the Deputy Secretary after Sonali is transferred to her home state on demotion. Towards the end of the
novel we are told that, “now it seemed that Kachru, no longer chief
explainer of the Emergency, was just a joint secretary who would soon
be shunted out of Delhi.”31 He praises Sonali in these words, “You
were too brave for me. You set impossible standards.” Sonali is glad to
note that Kachru has become Ravi again.

Madam and her son are referred to by Sonali as “one and a half
people” who control everything. The imposition of the Emergency by
her on the country brings to the surface the nobility and courage as
well sycophancy and cowardice or indifference of Indians.

Rose, Mona and Sonali occupy an important place among the
women characters of the novel. Sonali is the most important of these
figures. She is the heroine of the novel. Rose and Mona are the wives
of Ram. Mona is portrayed by the novelist as a legendary woman who
suffers silently. Rose is a foreigner. She identifies herself with Sita of
whom she thinks as a type of the wronged woman. In this way both
these women belong to the category of traditional Indian woman. They
are given to make compromises. To Mona the presence of Rose in her
house is intolerable, but she with her. Similarly, Rose compromises
with Mona, acknowledging her as the lady of the house and with Ram
also when she comes to know of his affair with Marcella. We find Rose
considerate toward Dev, Ram’s son from Mona and looks after his
education. It is praiseworthy on the part of Rose that she saves a boy
being taken to vasectomy camp by Nishi. She convinces Nishi: “It’s no
use taking him, he’s not even a whole man. He won’t count.”32

Sonali Ranade is different from Mona and Rose. She faces the
adverse circumstances bravely and refuses to compromise with the
high ideals in the light of which she has decided to lead her life. As a senior I.A.S. officer she sticks to the values of integrity and honesty. For this she has to suffer demotion. In the Happyola case she studies the file very carefully and decided to reject the proposal:

It was a preposterous proposal, requiring the import of more or less an entire factory. Policy did not allow foreign collaboration in industry except under a complicated set of regulations, although essential items the economy needed that we couldn’t produce for ourselves were exempt from the list. There was a number of those, but a fizzy drink called Happyola wasn’t one of them. When the visiting representative of the company came into my office, I told him so.”

This was certainly a bold act on her part and she deserves all the praise that can be bestowed on her. The nobility of her character is thrown into higher relief by the conduct of men like Ravi Kachru who do not hesitate to lick the feet of those in authority to serve their selfish ends. As a result of not complying with the wishes of the Minister of Industry in the Happyola case in which he had accepted the tip much in advance, she is transferred to her home state and demoted. She does not yield to cruelty and depravity. She resigns because she does not want to remain an obstacle in the path of self-seekers in the corrupt set-up. She is reminded of her grandmother who was burnt to death next to her husband’s pyre a couple of days
after his death because, being courageous, she had posed a threat to her greedy relatives. It was, however, given out to hoodwink the people that she had committed sati. Thus she rightly sees a resemblance between herself and her grandmother, for both have been victims of injustice.

Kishori Lal is another character who inspires the reader with his courage and forbearance. He is a dealer in bathroom items. During the Emergency he is sent to jail not because the items in his shop do not carry price tags, but because of political rivalry since he is a member of the Jan Sangh Party. He does not accept the advice of his daughter to go to the Prime Minister to congratulate her for her services to the nation as that would lead him to a better business career than the present one. He retorts to her:

For clapping a whole lot of people into jail?
They nearly clapped me into jail for not having prices marked on the items. They don’t need a reason. Just quick march off to jail. If that’s a matter for congratulation, you need your head examined. 34

J.P. (Jayaprakash Narayan) is drawn direct from life. He saw the Emergency as an attempt to stifle the freedom of the people and thereby murder democracy. He led the people against the Madam and, as history records, won independence for the people second time. A. P. Pandey says: “J. P. Symbolizes that set of politicians who could have organized people against the Emergency. Therefore, such people were imprisoned and reported to have been given all the facilities in the
prison. As a matter of fact, they were harassed in the jail, and in twenty months of Emergency they had developed a lot of health complications. Since J.P. had a high political stature, he was thrown into prison to sink his voice for ever.”

Ram, father of Dev, is a pleasure-seeker. He has two wives – Mona and Rose and he exploits both of them for his pleasure. Besides, he has extra-marital relationship with Marcella. When Rose confronts him at times on this relationship, he justifies himself by giving the example of Lord Krishna who had many wives. This is like the Devil quoting the Bible. Ram has no capacity to peep into the spiritual meaning of the thing Lord Krishna did here on this earth. Lord Krishna came down to this earth to free men from sufferings caused by the unrighteous persons like Kansa. He is touched by the troubles of his devotees and rushes to their help on hearing only half of his name pronounced by them. To the contrary, Ram remains indifferent to the sufferings of his wives and enters into extra-marital relationship with Marcella, a foreigner without caring for the feelings of Rose as he had married Rose without showing any consideration for the feeling of his first wife, Mona. It is like a man in the habit of delaying things claiming to be Hamlet only on that basis.

Nishi and Leela are enthusiastic supporters of the Emergency. They seem to be bent upon making the Madam’s son’s sterilization programme a complete success. Leela says, “I have 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 business like programme we’ve got to start for domestic servants and no nonsense about it.”

In *Plans For Departure*, there are seven characters: Henry Brewster and his wife Stella Brewster, Marlowe Croft and his wife Lucilla or Lulu Croft, Anna Hansen, Sir Nitin Basu and Madhav Rao. All these people live in Himapur, an imaginary place in the Himalayas, which is approachable only by rickshaws and dandies. Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate, is described as “practically the sum total of officialdom here.” He is one of those British officials who are not prejudiced against Indians and judge things on the basis of sound conscience. This can be seen in the contrast between the attitude of Henry Brewster and that of his wife towards the hanging of Khudiram Bose who was convicted of sedition. Khudiram Bose had killed two innocents – an English Lady and her daughter instead of Mr. Kingsford. The mistake was caused by the identical green carriages drawn by white horses, which took them to the club. The brutality of Khudiram Bose’s trial made Brewster sympathetic towards him and changed his attitude towards British imperialism. Though he cannot avoid being present as a matter of duty at the public hanging of Khudiram Bose, he tries to dissuade his wife from attending it. But Stella says to him:

I’d go to this hanging if I were on my death-bed. This is the least I can do. This is the animal who killed Mrs. Kennedy and her daughter. It might have been me or any one of us. 

38
Henry Brewster shows consideration for the feelings of Indians by abstaining from doing anything that may hurt them. For example, when Marlowe Croft requests him to uproot Indian customs, he replies wearily:

I am not here to set examples and definitely not to uproot customs. I am here to keep the peace and collect revenue.\(^{39}\)

Brewster even refuses to allot the land for a church as it may give rise to fanaticism. His wife, Stella Brewster, is a lady of silent but implacable and dangerous nature as is seen in her insistence on going to the public hanging of Khudiram Bose. She does not like her husband and enters into an illicit relationship with Robert Pryor, the Home Secretary in England. She leaves Himapur for England to marry Robert Pryor there.

Marlowe Croft is a Christian missionary who dreams of establishing the kingdom of God on earth, “starting with Himapur, its concrete symbol being the little church”. He is morbidly pre-occupied with his project. This is pointed out to him by his wife, Lulu, when she says:

The way you go on, one would think you are planning to build the Canterbury Cathedral instead of a little old wooden shack where you’ll have no one but coolies and servants for a congregation.\(^{40}\)

To this Marlowe Croft replies in the following words which are characterized by the certainty of a fanatic he is:
The church will be built and no mistake. I’ve staked my life, my very soul on it. In time, this will be a Christian land.  

In spite of all his enthusiasm for establishing the kingdom of God on earth, Marlowe Croft can be said to be paying only lip-service to Christianity. He is a fanatic who has no respect for the customs and feelings of Indians and shows no consideration even for the feelings of his wife whom he gets out of his life remorselessly.

Lucille Croft and her husband, Marlowe Croft, are unlike each other. Lucille married Marlowe Croft against the wishes of her parents. It was Marlowe’s missionary zeal that had attracted her towards him. Though religion is the common bond between them, she does not get love from him, for which she longs from the inmost depth of her heart. Asha Choubey has observed that “Lulu is a woman of flesh and blood, but Marlowe does not respond to the call of her body. All other couples in Sahgal’s novels share intimacy at least in bed, no matter whatsoever their differences. But here is a woman who knows no proximity with her husband.” With her parents not sympathizing with her and yet determined to prove a loyal wife, she continues to behave in a responsible manner. But she continues to be oppressed by her husband. She wants to leave the place, but she is silenced by Marlowe’s three words – “Be careful, Lulu”. Her forbearance gives way when Marlowe decides to adopt a sweeper boy without consulting her. Their marriage-bond breaks. Looking back she thinks, “Marlowe had married her, but not for love. There in the church, it was she who had dedicated her whole soul to him and his work, though not, she could
now see, for love…. Lulu had only been a good wife. With her good wifeliness gone, and her loyalties at breaking point, what was left for Marlowe to like about her? The life she had made with him was over.\textsuperscript{43} Her plan to leave is foiled by Marlowe, who, in his zest to possess her, kills her. In this way her plan for departure is nipped in the bud.

Miss Anna Hansen is a Danish Secretary who has set out on a travel for one year to Copenhagen, London, Madras, Calcutta and Himapur. She comes finally to Himapur where she has to stay for three months. She is the central character in the novel. As Jasbir Jain says, “She is the first foreigner in Sahgal’s novels to be placed centre stage.”\textsuperscript{44} She says further:

Surrounded by this multitude of voices, Anna Hansen still plays the central role. This she achieves by relating her external experiences to her internal growth. Her questioning of the Indian political situation is part of her own need to define freedom, her probing into Brewster’s and Croft’s relationships is part of an effort to understand the nature of love. Her journey to India is an assertion of her need to grow, not to be content with mere wifehood: she had decided not to be born a man but to create more space around her self.\textsuperscript{45}
Anna Hansen is an objective observer, so her views about Indians and the British rulers are unprejudiced and balanced. A. P. Pandey’s following comment on her role in the novel is quite meaningful:

Miss Anna Hansen, a Dane, has equal distance from power structures i.e. ruled (India) and ruler (British), and presents an unbiased, unprejudiced and balanced views about them. Although in *Rich Like Us* Mrs. Rose understanding plays an important role in understand the socio-cultural milieu, Sonali holds the central place. Selecting a foreigner to hold the central place in this novel is an attempt to depart from the oft-used devices of making Indians to play decisive roles in her novels.46

One aspect of Anna Hansen’s personality forces attention on the reader’s mind and that is her humanity. We see this in her attitude toward rickshaw-pullers and dandy-bearers. Whereas other characters take pride in hiring rickshaws or dandies to go to the hill-top, Anna Hansen prefers to go there on foot, walking along the pebbled and rocky roads. Her following words bring out the tenderness of her heart:

I cannot see me carried by dandy upon the shoulders of those poor, thin coolies with their caving-in chests. So also I cannot set in a
rickshaw bursting their lungs out getting up the hill.\footnote{47}

Anklesaria gives an insight into her character with the following words with which it will be quite appropriate to close this brief analysis of her character:

Robustly optimistic and an incurable romantic at the same time, she appears to be a surrogate for the author whose imagination is fully engaged with her. She is therefore the only believable, fully-rounded figure in the novel.\ldots Age neither sours her nor stales her idealism. The novel closes with a moving picture of her in extreme old age with Gayatri by her side. Looking back over her many-splendoured life, Himapur represents the irresistible lure of what might have been.\footnote{48}

There are two Indians in Himapur-Madhav Rao, a photographer-cum-chemist and Sir Nitin Basu, an eminent botanist from the University of Allahabad. Both of them are patriots and both have their view of reality circumscribed – the view of Madhav Rao when he sees through the lense of his camera after having disappeared under the black shroud of the camera and that of Sir Nitin Basu when he trains his microscope on some part of a plant. Sir Nitin Basu, like Sir J.C. Basu, discovers similarity between plants and animals. Anna Hansen writes to her fiancé, Nicholas, about the experiment of Sir Nitin Basu thus:
Plants get drunk like humans.... One drink of whisky made a mimosa straighten up and look brighter and eager. Another drink made it drowse and droop. The third drink made it drunk and folded its little leaves. But after four hours’ sleep it shook off its hangover and was fresh and perky again. I am enchanted with this particular experiment I am writing up. It plainly shows, as Sir Basu says, that plants have animal (or human) traits, but so far hardly any one in the scientific community accepts his finding. He says botanists in the west may accept that a tree feels the woodsman’s axe, but he wonders if he can persuade them about the tortures peas go through when boiled. 49

Bhushan Singh, the scion of the Vijaygarh royal family, is the protagonist in Mistaken Identity. He is the narrator of the story of the novel. It is through him that the novelist speaks. The title of the novel refers mainly to his mistaken identity under which he is illegally arrested from the train bound for his native place, Vijaygarh. He is sent to jail on the charge of hatching a “conspiracy to deprive King Emperor of his sovereignty over India” and of keeping books like The Scarlet Letter and The Revolt of The Angels which were considered seditions. Months pass before the trial takes place and he is ultimately exonerated from the charge of treason. While in prison, he tells the
stories of his boyhood love-affair with a beautiful Muslim Girl, Razia, which sparked off communal riots and resulted in his banishment, of his days in America and of his love-affair with Sylla, a vibrant and modern girl. As Jasbir Jain says, “As he narrates the past to his fellow-prisoners he begins to unfold his own hidden selves.” And this leads ultimately to his self-discovery.

Bhushan’s fellow-prisoners, who are eight in number, belong to two different ideologies – Gandhian and Marxian. Bhaiji, with two other activists, is a staunch follower of Gandhiji and his ideology of truth and non-violence. He is committed to “clothe the nation in Khaddar. Comrade Yusuf, Comrade Dey, Comrade Iyer and Sen, a young boy of 19 are communists, with Comrade Pillai as their spokesman. Comrade Pillai does not approve of Gandhi’s trade Union to unite workers. He says : “Workers need no advice from Gandhi and his mill-owning friends.”

Though Bhushan thinks that by aligning with either group he will only damage his case, he feels some affinity with the communist ideology. This is seen in his following statement : “Actually, I have less in common with Bhaiji’s party than with the comrades who at least aren’t humbugs. Gandhi makes no sense to me at all. Goes on bleating about Hindu-Muslim love but a Hindu-Muslim marriage would send him on a fifty-day fast.”

Bhushan is a visionary. Vacha, Bhushan’s advocate, tells the court, “...he has a poet’s vision of a realm where all Gods are one... he dreams of a dawn when there will be no dividing characteristics of race, colour, feature, worship left on earth.” He is a campaigner against social ills. He practises himself first what he wants others to
do to establish true unity in the society. Having failed to marry his boyhood girl-friend, Razia, on account of religious difference, he marries Comrade Yusuf’s daughter at the end of the novel. This act of his exemplifies best his revolutionary and progressive thinking.

The ranee, Bhushan’s mother, is the most important woman character in *Mistaken Identity*. According to Jasbir Jain, she “represents a strong force of change.” When her husband, the raja of Vijaygarh, marries for the third time, he ceases to exist for her. She is oppressed by her husband in many ways. She gives birth to baby girls, but all of them are put to death and it is rumoured that they were born still. Asha Choubey rightly remarks, “Lucille Croft was murdered by her husband, but only once did she die. But here, the ranee goes through the ordeal of getting killed every time her baby girls are murdered.” Only Bhushan was allowed to live and grow. This wronged woman wins the novelist’s sympathy:

I didn’t know I felt agony for this woman brought as a bride with her twin sister at the age of thirteen in horrendous circumstances. Heaven knows she may have lost children which may have been buried, girl-children. She had been through agony and had no life. She was gasping for oxygen, as it were, in purdah. But her mind was free and she
consulted these yogis and she, you know, lived her life.\textsuperscript{55}

Instead of suffering to her last breath, she sees a way out of her sufferings. She accepts Comrade Yusuf as her life-partner and her son, Bhushan, who has inherited her temperament, marries Comrade Yusuf’s daughter. Again, the novelist’s words on this ‘beautiful character’ are worth quoting.

Getting her boy to read out to her adventure books and she asked him, “I want to see a snow-storm”. I didn’t know, I longed for her to be free but I didn’t know she would free herself. When she freed herself, it had to be. It could not be that she stayed behind in the dark and remain buried there.\textsuperscript{56}

The character of the ranee offers a parallel to that of the Maharani in Manohar Malgonkar’s novel entitled The Princes. In The Princes, Hiroji, after obtaining the heir for the throne of Begwad from the Maharani, feels absolved from his responsibility towards his ancestors and passes his days happily in the company of one or the other concubine, subjecting the Maharani to utter neglect. It is this neglect coupled with her son’s advice to seek freedom from it that makes her run away with her Muslim lover. Thus both these women seek freedom from their oppressive husbands and obtain it. Jasbir Jain’s comment on the compromising note sounded by the marriage of the Ranee with Yusuf and that of her son with Yusuf’s daughter is quite appropriate: “The final union is the union of opposing forces: 
the royal princeling and the daughter of a communist, the Hindu with Muslim, the conservative confined Ranee to the freedom-loving Comrade.”

The Raja of Vijaygarh, in his maltreatment of the Ranee, represents the forces of social brutality. He supports the British Government with the hope of winning a clear title of Rajahood which is never awarded to him. Thus, he betrays not only his family but his country also. But his attitude changes towards the end of the novel. This change is seen not in social sphere but in the political one. He sheds off his unpatriotic instincts and begins to support the revolutionaries in his state, As A.P. Pandey says, “The Raja of Vijaygarh... gets infused with patriotic feelings and indirectly supports the revolutionary activities in his kingdom.”

Nurullah is the protagonist in *Lesser Breeds*. He was born of a thirteen-year-old girl who was rescued by a Raja from the torments to which she was subjected by a peasant. It was the Raja, the rescuer of his mother, who gave him the name of Nurullah. Though Nurullah was given the life-long refuge of Islam, he respected the Hindu customs no less than the Muslim ones. He, indeed, became a symbol of communal harmony. We are told by the narrator that:

> The boy knelt on a prayer mat facing Mecca to do namaz five times a day and studied the Koran. But racing with other children and barking pi-dogs behind the peasant columns passing through to join a fifty-mile march to Akbarabad he shouted *Sitaram* with all the
rest. He squirted colours at Holi, whirled fire-crackers at Diwali, and fasted during Ramzan.

59

Ammaji, we are told,

Would make a Kabir of him, a messenger of love and integration, the only Mussalman she knew who had put on a dhoti and waded into the Ganga with her on Makar Sankranti.60

And

Pyare Chacha would add his name to the chronicles of dead and living ones.61

In spite of being a Muslim, Nurullah is not a misfit in a Hindu family. He impresses the reader rather as a member of it. All this throws into higher relief the broad-mindedness of Nurullah.

When Nurullah appears in the novel, he is a twenty-three-year old young man appointed in the Akbarabad University to teach English Literature to the first-year students. After working as a sort of Personal Assistant to Nikhil, the master of the ‘national monument’ and a political leader of Gandhian hue, he moves into Nikhil’s residence. He is introduced to Nikhil by his mentor Robin-da. When he first meets Nikhil known as Bhai, he is greatly impressed by his politeness. In the words of narrator, “He (Nurullah) had never known such civility, or met such a man – one who, in Saadi’s words, would by his honey-tongued gentleness ‘manage to guide an elephant with a hair’.62
Nurullah is not a supporter of the idea of trying to achieve freedom from the British rule through non-violence. When he asks his mentor, Robin-da whether he should accept Bhai’s suggestion to move into his palatial building, Robin da tells him emphatically to move in as that would give him an opportunity to study the movement first hand. What goes on in Nurullah’s mind at this moment clearly brings out his attitude toward the ideology of non-violence:

How could he mortally offend his mentor by saying there was nothing to study in a Movement that had never so much as sent a shiver through the Raj– except once when a furious mob burned a police thana with constables inside it. But even that had come to nothing when the Mahatma had called the Movement off and said the violence had run a rapier through his body so let us pray. 63

When Bhai is in jail, Nurullah takes Ammaji and Shan to the jail once a month for a 20-minute interview with Bhai. It becomes difficult to control Shan when she lets her fury loose against the bars. Therefore, Nurullah has to be kept on hand. He alone can manage her in such a situation. This shows how close Nurullah has become to the family of Bhai, not only close to, but a member of his family.

A successful teacher as he is, Nurullah understands the psychology of his students. He knows what will appeal to them most and how it can be made to appeal to them. While thinking on which poem in the text-book will make an instant appeal to his students, it
is Shelley’s *Mask of Anarchy* that appears before him when he opens the text-book. In this poem the poet advocates non-violence in face of violence. He drops the poem, thinking that its idealism will not find a way to the hearts of the fifteen-and-sixteen-year-old students. He wanted a poem on the subject of a real war in which soldiers on both sides fought with arms. The narrator says:

He read his choices through in a quick mutter, then got up and recited each one out loud using his hands for flourish. But other teachers he had known had done this with little result. He tried repeating each line twice, three times, like an Urdu sher, pausing between lines for their meaning to sink in, and felt an interior prickle of excitement. If it worked it would revive the most moribund or nitwit student in his class. Wonderful how it did next morning! His elation knew no bounds. The pure delight on faces told him teaching had to be this kind of give and take and a teacher without a trick or two might as well not teach.⁶⁴

Nurullah believes in the principle of give and take in the sphere of education. Education is, indeed, a two-way traffic. This is why the narrator speaks of Nurullah the teacher in these words: “Correcting Shan’s education was systematically broadening his own.”⁶⁵ He not only corrects much of what she has been taught but also gives her a
new way of seeing things. When Robin da told him that Bhai wanted him to tutor Shan until his release and he had told Ammaji that he (Nurullah) would, he said, “Counter-teaching is required, Nurullah. Cast your mind about for ways to correct what she is taught. Cultivate in her another way of seeing.” This is how the narrator speaks of what Nurullah as tutor had done to Shan, “He had only freed her from her convent textbooks and pointed her to a new way of seeing. But yes, he had watched her performance in New York with a teacher’s love and pride.” When Nurullah, who has gone to the U.S.A. to teach English at Princeton, describes her as a hero in her own right, Eknath says, “Who would have thought the brat had it in her” and congratulates him “on his handiwork.”

Nurullah is so simple and noble that he holds himself responsible for the arrest of Bhai which ultimately led to his being hanged. Disguised as a bearded fakir carrying a stick and a lota, Bhai betrayed himself as soon as he saw Nurullah at the railway station and took a step toward him in sheer delight. Nurullah turned to stone as the fakir was brusquely waylaid, handcuffed and marched away. The remembrance of this event always makes him sad and thinks that but for his presence at the railway station, Bhai would not have been arrested and hanged. The narrator says,

“Left to grieve alone he had locked his door and thrown himself into the aggressive rituals of prescribed mourning, wailed long and eerily, banged and bruised his head on the ground and still kneeling, beaten his breast with his
fists. He had driven his nails into the skin of his arms to draw blood – all to no avail since it was he who had delivered the friend of his heart to the hangman by merely being there at the railway station.”

Nikhil called Bhai is a non-violent freedom-fighter. His grandfather had had a miraculous escape during the First War of Indian Independence. His Father had died a martyr’s death for pleading on behalf of the lone survivor of the conspirators against the British. As the narrator puts it: “The survivor had had to die too, on the gallows, but his lawyer’s chilling argument – a far cry from the emotional oratory of his contemporaries – had whipped the mask off a ruling power whose law-courts condemned men to death for following its own example. ‘For the crime’, he had famously declared, ‘of putting their words to your music’. Nurullah could not believe he of all Indians had submitted to a martyr’s death, standing his ground and being trampled under horse’s hooves outside the gate.”

Bhai is a follower of Gandhiji. He is proud of carrying out his campaign against the British openly. When Nurullah told Bhai that the notices of the Kisan Conference, which he himself had cyclostyled, would be distributed after dark by him with the help of his three trusted students. Bhai felt amused and said to him quite plainly, “We don’t work in the dark, Nurullah, because we’ve nothing to hide. I’ve already informed the District Magistrate about our plans.” The narrator, however, makes fun of this boastfulness of Bhai in two places in the novel; in the first place, when Nurullah, plunged into
darkness, sees on a moonlit night the naked bodies of Bhai and Jeroo intertwined, the narrator quotes the words of Bhai, “We don’t work in the dark, Nurullah, We have nothing to hide;” in the second place, these words constitute an ironic comment on Bhai’s being in his disguise near Burma border when a market crowd mistaken for a rebel mob was gunned down: “But how long, thought Nurullah, was a stranger to subterfuge safe in any disguise? Even children knew more about conspiracy. “We don’t work in the dark, Nurullah. We have nothing to hide.”

In spite of the above mentioned comments on him, Bhai cannot but be praised for his whole-hearted dedication to the cause of his country’s freedom. He is to be praised for taking care of his daughter’s education also while actively participating in the Freedom Movement. He first appoints Nurullah Shan’s tutor who corrects much of what she has learnt earlier from her textbooks and later, entrusts her to Edgar Knox under whose care she acquires higher education in the U.S.A. But for Bhai’s active interest in Shan’s education, she might not have been a successful figure in public life.

Shan is the loving and loved daughter of Bhai. She is fortunate enough in having an affectionate and caring parent in Bhai. When Shan, in the company of Ammaji and Nurullah, visit her father in jail, her profound love for her father manifests itself in her letting her fury against the bars.

As a student Shan is very inquisitive. But this inquisitiveness is born in her as a result of her contact with Nurullah. Before this she had assimilated without any question whatever was taught to her by
the nuns. She does not hesitate to exclaim ‘what rot’ when Nurullah tells her that once upon a time this plain (The Ganga’s banks) they are sitting on was a sea. But her exclamation, instead of angering her teacher makes him “explain that geological upheavals had driven back the sea and left a miraculous fertility where grain and wisdom had blossomed and those who had barged in as uncouth conquerors had learned better and made Hindustan their home.” In this way she learns history and geography simultaneously from Nurullah. But since for Nurullah teaching is give and take, he takes from her a lot of knowledge about things he doesn’t know and which he needs to know. The following words of the narrator are a tribute to Shan’s knowledge: “He got Shan to teach him flower names she knew and stowed carnations, petunias, azaleas, plox and crepe myrtle away in memory along with which cutlery to use when and other superfluous knowledge that the life he had embarked on seemed to need.”

While in America, Shan, besides academic pursuing keeps a notebook of her impressions and takes interest in the customs and rituals of that country. She is introduced there to opera by Otto Shelling, a German with whom she develops intimate relationship. He imparts musical education to her and praises her saying, “A girl of Shan’s refined sensibilities belonged in the west.” Janey Ann instructs her in the order of the events of the goodnight ceremonies. Shan says:

I know there is an order of events in the goodnight ceremonies. Janey Ann explained it to me step by step before her abortion, very mathematically with a diagram and a long lead
A statuette called the Bagpiper donated to the dorm by a 1910 alumna of Scottish ancestry. (The goodnight struggle results from keeping the Bagpiper from shooting out of your date’s pants. This must not happen before wedlock. The militant behaviour of the Bagpiper is something I would never have guessed at, there being not a nudging suspicion of it inside trousers.)

When the Second World War ended, Shan returned to India. She was elected to Parliament and became Commerce Minister. In that capacity she visited the U.S.A. and explained there the Asia Doctrine. It was described by an unfriendly analyst as “a hemispheric policy that looked hostile to the west and would disrupt time-honoured patterns of commerce worldwide.” Her reply to this comment made a member of the audience made him chuckle and remark that she would have outwitted Matternich any day. This is what she had said on that occasion:

…it’s your wisdom we’ve turned to for an autonomous hemisphere. We’re putting our words to your music. We’re so disappointed... that you are reacting like the mighty Matternich did to your Monroe Doctrine.

In these words of Shan we hear an echo of her grandfather’s famous declaration during his defence of the sole survivor of the bloodbath at the statue of Queen Victoria that the ruling power’s law-
courts condemned men to death “for the crime of putting their words to your music.” Shan, thus, in her bold attitude continues a noble tradition. It was sad that such a brilliant public figure’s race was run so soon with her being killed in an aircrash.

Ammaji’s character in the novel attracts the reader’s attention for three reasons: first, her comment on Churchill, second, her penetrating insight into Nurullah’s character; and third, her affection for her son as deep as the attachment of a fish to water. She is Nikhil’s mother. We are told that she “spent a ritual hour spinning thread on her charkha every day, fulfilling her party pledge to spin two thousand yards of khadi thread a month.”

78 Here is a non-communal character. She is never ill at ease with Nurullah who takes her to the Ganga for a pre-dawn purifying dip on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti. The following words of the narrator finally express Ammaji’s attitude towards Nurullah: “Ammaji would make a Kabir of him, a messenger of love and integration, the only Mussalman she knew who had put on a dhoti and waded into the Ganga with her on Makar Sankranti.”

79 Ammaji’s comment on Winston Churchill’s description of Mahatma Gandhi as a “seditious faker, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy’s palace for a meeting with him is very interesting:

Bichara Churchill,… What does the poor man know about langots and how we revere fakirs that he calls them nauseating. No one is insulting his King-Emperor. He just upsets himself needlessly. 80
Ammaji impresses the readers as a true follower of the Mahatma. She is so deeply attached to her son, Nikhil, that the news of his hanging serves as a bolt from the blue to her. Her life-style evokes powerfully the atmosphere of the days when the struggle for freedom was being waged under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Robinda, Nurullah’s, mentor, Pyare Chacha, a relative of Nikhil, Hashi, Robinda’s niece and her husband, Matul, Eknath, Mrs. Framjee, Jeroo, Lilibet, etc. are interesting minor characters of the novel. Among the foreigners Edgar Knox, his sister Leda, Desmond, Florence Burns, Otto Shelling, his mother Mrs. Shelling, and Janey Ann are important. Edgar Knox is an American Journalist of repute who has impressed President Roosevelt with his ability. He is known in India for his support to the cause of India’s freedom. He had to appear before the Senate Sub-Committee for his views on the atom bomb. He had called the atom bomb a new undeclared war and said it would look like the latest capitalist trick to Russians. He was dubbed by the Sub-committee a communist. The narrator tells Peter Ryder that the Senate sub-committee on internal security branded him dangerous and virtually disappeared him. The narrator, however, comes to her own conclusion about Edgar Knox’s character in these words: “A lover of mankind and of jazz.”

Leda is Edgar Knox’s sister. She is similar to and different from her brother in some respects. The narrator says, “Leda, a spinster past thirty, looked like translating manuscripts and collecting fairy tales for the rest of her life. Edger’s smitten brand of politics got translated into Leda’s fairy tales and vice versa. But Edgar was a man and would look
after himself. It was Leda he worried about, fearing she would go manless to her grave.”  

But a guest from Hiroshima, a Japanese city on which an atom bomb was dropped by the U.S.A., made Leda collect “contemporary tales told her by sufferers of the orgiastic punishments designed for the lesser breeds outside Europe.” 

As a result of the feeling caused by these tales, “whenever she read profoundly moving Churchillian prose about ‘all mankind’ and ‘one world’ she threw up quite violently in her bathroom basin.”

When Nurullah goes to New York to teach English there, Leda meets him. She does not think of him as a total stranger on account of his having been Shan’s tutor. She feels attracted towards her and falls in love with him. After sometime, as the narrator says, she could “envisage him and herself joined in worthwhile endeavour through the years to come, living here in the idyllic beauty of Brookham, Massachusetts.” Finding Nurullah emotionally attached to Akbarabad and to his teaching, she thinks that he can continue teaching in the U.S.A. and to the hurdle of Nurullah’s attachment to Akbarabad that threatens to come in the way of their union, Leda finds a solution which speaks of her profound love for Nurullah. The narrator says:

After dinner, groping her way to solution, it occurred to her that his attachment to Akbarabad need not ring alarm bells for their living here together or to making future plans. Lovers could live-continents apart and meet on each other’s terrain. That night–another night
of amazing joy that had not yet happened this
solution gave her hope.  

Otto Shelling is infatuated with Shan. He imparts her musical
education and takes her to opera. In his own view, music is his
passion but opera is his religion. He observes her closely and comes to
the conclusion that “a girl of Shan’s sensibilities belonged in the
West”. He wants her to stay in the U.S.A. and dreams of passing the
rest of his life with her. But to him she looks like a mirage. We are
told, “But here, across the table from him eating shashilk was a
tropical wild flower…. Black silk hair flowed down an astonishing
slenderness, two breasts that were honeysuckle on a vine, the sway
and slightness of a reed. She was a mixture of childlike frivolity and
adult gravity which made her not one but many women, succeeding
each other capriciously. He feared she was a mirage to which he was
steadily advancing and she receding until there was only light and air
where she had been.”  

We hear from the narrator further: “It was his
dearest wish, Otto would hint, to see the Bordeaux red of his mother’s
rubies against the sheen of Shan’s throat the like of which Otto had
not seen in New York or any European city of his amorous
acquaintance.”  

But this was not to be. At the end of the Second
World War, Shan returned to India and after Independence she
became Commerce Minister. When in that capacity she visited U.S.A..
She, then called on Otto Shelling to condole his mother’s death. Later
she was killed in an aircrash.

Since Nayantara Sahgal draws her characters – political leaders,
civil servants, writers and journalists – from the upper stratum of
society, they are credible people. It is her concern with the internal psychology of her characters that makes them acquire credibility. Her characters belong to different religions and they are portrayed by her with the impartiality of an artist. These characters have freedom to follow different ideologies and to work for translating them into reality. There are political leaders of various hues from the followers of Gandhian ideal of politics as selfless service to the nation like Kailas Vrind to those who, like Kalyan Sinha, madly concentrate on and work for progress without caring for the individual; from those who, like Harpal Singh, believe in the principle of non-violence to the leftists like Yusuf and Naxalites like Rishad who firmly believe that India can achieve freedom only through violent means; and from civil servants like Ravi Kachru who take pride in cringing before the authorities to Sonali who has enough courage not to deviate from the path of truth as an administrator. There are women like Rashmi, Simrit, and Saroj and the ‘Ranee’ of Vijaygarh who in their longing for and achievement of sexual freedom and self-realization embody the author’s attitude towards life.

Many of the characters of Nayantara Sahgal are modelled on the well-known political leaders and bureaucrats. Kalyan Sinha, the minister without portfolio in *This Time of Morning*, is easily recognized as Krishna Menon. As M.K. Naik says, “*This Time Of Morning* contains one of Sahgal’s best realized portraits – Kalyan Sinha, a man with acid on his tongue, a gimlet in his eye and a chip on his shoulder – a figure whose resemblance to Krishna Menon is plain.” Similarly, Shivraj, with the news of whose sudden death the novel opens and who,
according to Michael Calvert’, was ‘a unique human being, a kind we rarely, if ever, see in politics,” and Devi in A Situation In New Delhi, the Home Minister and Gyan Singh in “Storm in Chandigarh, and the Madam and her son in Rich Like Us, remind the readers of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India and his sister Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the former Union Minister and successor of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Pratap Singh Kairon, the former Chief Minister of Punjab, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India and her son, Sanjay Gandhi respectively. Vishal Dubey, a civil servant, who, in Storm In Chandigarh, was sent to deal with the explosive political situation there is modelled on E.N. Mangat Rai, a brilliant bureaucrat, whom the author married in 1979 after sharing with him live-in-relationship for many years. J.P. (Jayaprakash Narayan) appears undisguised direct from life in Rich Like Us. The above mentioned characters, with the exception of J.P., are thinly disguised portraits of real political and bureaucratic figures, but it would be a mistake to think that through these characters the novelist has presented the whole life stories of these public figures. A writer’s experience and knowledge of real people serves only as a starting point for the creation of his fictional characters and after they have come into being they live their own life in the novels, exhibiting here and there some of the prominent traits of the real personalities on whom they are modelled. Therefore it will not be proper to relate all incidents in the lives of fictional characters to those in the lives of their prototypes. When a reader thinks of the resemblance between Nayantara Sahgal’s characters and
the public figures on which they are modelled, he ought to keep in mind the following observation made by her in connection with the creation of the character of Kalyan Sinha in *This Time of Morning*:

...One takes out bits and pieces from life but otherwise, character... can be made up of many different people one knows, not a whole person. Like the character of Kalyan Sinha in *This Time of Morning*. It is more or less based on Krishna Menon. There was such a man and he was an oddity on the Indian scene a kind who wanted quick results and his other abrasive tendencies. But there were lots of differences. Kalyan Sinha was the narrator and it grew away from Krishna Menon as I wrote. That was the starting point even when you directly base it on someone, even then it doesn’t quite work that way. When you don’t base it on anyone, it may be a jumble of many people.\(^\text{90}\)

These words of Nayantara Sahgal are significant as they throw light on her process of creating her characters and help us in understanding them as well as her art of characterization.
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