NAYANTARA SAHGAL AND REALISM:
LITERARY, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Nayantara Sahgal is a well-known for her outstanding ability to coalesce artistically social, political, and personal events and incidents. We find in her writing a fusion of emotional and fictional autobiography. An artist with a mission of creating a vision of her own, she has presented the contemporary India with her own life in the backdrop. Her first-hand knowledge and presentation of India with all the social and political contradictions and ramifications with ulterior undercurrents is superb. She has made in her fictional works realistic presentation of contemporary India in which the real work against the ideal and the ideal, in its own turn, resists erosion of human values. Aware of the national stream of consciousness, she has nurtured genuine concern for human and humanitarian values.

Realism was introduced in literature, especially in fiction, in the 18th century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett in England. This introduction of realism in fiction was similar to the introduction of electricity into engineering. Depiction of truthful details in fiction happened to change the very atmosphere of life in society then. From this perspective, writing of fiction had become almost a necessity because no one in the world knew what truth was till somebody had told a story in the garb of fiction. And for a serious and young writer like Nayantara Sahgal, to stick to realism after 1947 required contrariness. Like Henrik Ibsen, everything she has written is closely related to something that she had lived through.
Realism in literature, especially fiction, makes for accurate reproduction of details for purposes of incidental embellishment. Realism may also be defined as that element in art which, in the words of sola da Pinto, is concerned with giving a truthful impression of actuality as it appears in the normal human consciousness. Realistic art is likely to meet the following conditions:

1. It will describe normal situation and average character in ordinary settings (often with emphasis in lower strata of society.)
2. It will renounce the use of far-fetched images and metaphors.
3. It will endeavor to reproduce actual speech and tend to approximate prose rhythms.

In realistic writing the author assumes an objective attitude towards the events he/she relates and claims to report, to give the facts to conduct an inquest of the situation and thus rigorously excludes his/her own feelings, normative judgment, philosophical interpretations, and recommendations for actions. He/she also aims to give the reader a strong sense of participation in circumstantial and relative fullness of detail and tendency toward objectivity, toward letting the facts speak for themselves, and toward stressing the ordinary aspects of experience.

The most vital, and perhaps the most lasting, achievement of realism has been its persistent seeking out of new subject-matter for literature, especially situations and language which previously were excluded by religious or sexual taboos. Psychological realism is another aspect of social realism that has given way to a more comprehensive portrayal of human nature.

Indian politics was deeply ingrained in Sahgal’s personality, in her emotional and intellectual makeup. Right since the last episodes of the
Indian struggle for independence, she remained a vigilant observer of the incidents and scenario, of disintegrating social, political, cultural and ethical values in the mid-Seventies. She has scrutinized the modern tendencies and situations to the minutest realistic details in her works while prophesying the futuristic drifts of political actions at the same time.

Nayantara Sahgal is a realist out and out. She has raised social and political problems in her fiction. The theme of politics has been abundantly enriched by Sahgal in her fictional works. Politics is profoundly related to the social reality of life. In her autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Sahgal accepts that political awareness is there in her blood and background and verily a predominant influence on her:

*With us, political awareness was a gradual and unconscious process and the most important influence in our lives. We were born and grew up at a time when India had come under the leadership of Gandhi and was maturing to nationhood under his guidance. (18)*

Nayantara Sahgal has been acclaimed as the only political novelist, at least among women writers. A. V. Krishna Raohas been observed by, “Nayantara Sahgal is perhaps one of our best socio-political novelists today” (6). She has confined her novels mostly to the affluent society involved in politics. Her main contribution thematically has been her deep involvement in concern with politics. However, her absorbing concern with politics is not divorced from humanistic concern. Her characters, though very much involved in political situations, are very human too. Their personal predicaments, sometimes, run parallel to the
political crises they face. Sahgal is a champion of individual freedom which is reflected profusely in her novels. Her novels portray the various social and cultural changes that take place in contemporary Indian and the individual’s response to them. Her familiarity with the society which she portrays in her novels lends them marked authenticity. In spite of her sound understanding of woman’s plight and concern for the dilemma of the new woman, she is restricted by the very political background of hers that lent authenticity to her novels, and deals with the predicament of only the elite and the affluent.

Sahgal has first-hand knowledge of politics and political figures in India, for she spent most of her childhood in Anand Bhawan, the ancestral home of the Nehrus in Allahabad. It is beyond doubt that politics in her blood and bones. Jawaharlal Nehru was her mother’s brother, while her father died because of an illness he suffered in prison he had been was jailed in for participating in India’s freedom struggle. The important political events form the background for each of her novels. As Sahgal’s own comments in this regard are:

*I am a novelist and a political journalist. My novels have a political background or political ambiance. I didn’t plan it that way--- I was dealing with people and situations –but looking back, each one seems to reflect the hopes and fears the political scene held out to us at the time. In the course of a lifetime one is many things, fiction is my abiding love, but I need to express myself on vital political issues. Political and social forces shape our lives. How can we be unaware of them? I believe there is a “poetics of engagement” where commitment and aesthetics meet and give each other beauty and power (Web. http.).*
Sahgal’s novels present obviously a chronological account of Indian politics from the last phase of the freedom struggle to the breakdown of democracy in the mid-Seventies. She herself explains that politics is embedded in her “bones and arrow” (Ramachandraiah 41), and in her “emotional and intellectual make up” (Ibidem) to such an extent that she could no longer remain a mere passive spectator to the happenings with far reaching fall-out affecting vital human interests. Her family- parents, cousins, uncles and aunts were very actively engaged in the country’s struggle for freedom and were at the center-stage of the Indian politics-“All around them political and moral ideas were being discussed and formulated and the girls were a part of it. Nehru’s idealism influenced her political stance on the one hand; her father’s gentleness and courage influenced her moral stance, on the other” (Jain, Nayantara Sahgal 12). Sahgal has earned a name for herself as a keen and fearless political commentator.

Sahgal’s writing is famous for keeping in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tint of Western Liberalism. Her novels truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political scene and theme. Her attitude in the novels is tantamount to that of Nehru that is co-mingled with the Western outlook. Unlike the other political writers, she never professes any specific political ideology or favoring any political creed or political movement. All the major characters of her novels are centripetally drawn towards the vortex of Indian politics. She herself comments:
Politics was, of course, my background, and my environment, and it became my natural material. I grew up at a time when literature and politics went hand in hand, and helped to illumine and interpret each other. It was a time when songs, poems and stories were the focus for the struggle against foreign rule. Who can forget the songs: Sar faroshi ki tamanna aaj hamare dil mein hai: and there was a song in the street of Allahabad when I was a child, Bharat Ka danka aalam mein bajwaya veer Jawahar ne---azaad bano, azzad bano, kahwaya veer Jawahar ne. But I am not a political animal myself, and my political philosophy is very simple. I do not believe in kings, queens, or political dynasties. I have no ideology. I’ve never belonged to a political party. But in this country, politics---if any that we mean the use and misuse or power---invades our lives every day, both at the private, domestic level, and at the national level. (Sahgal, A Passion Called India 244)

Sahgal’s novels weave aspects of Indian’s social, political, and cultural history into their narrative framework and subject them to a close critical examination. The period covered is roughly between the 1930s, when there was a mass awakening in the country to rise and revolt against the British empire, and the time of the Emergency in 1975. Her novels 1980s make covert and sometimes overt references to significant political happenings especially the novels she wrote during 1970s. Critics have also considered her a political novelist or a novelist with political consciousness. She deals with issues related to historical reconstructions more self-consciously. In her earlier novels, too, she combines personal and public history by intertwining the past of individual lives with India’s historical past. She has seen the turmoil both before and after the independence in 1947.
In her novels, she has exposed the power-hungry politicians and their vaulting power-ambition on the one hand and she has highlighted the ardent freedom fighters and their sacrifices for their motherland, on the other. In all her works there is a juxtaposition of two worlds - the personal world of man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. Her observation of the universal behavior and reactions of the people, her humours and her depiction of the changing social conditions in contemporary Indian are quite interesting.

The major themes in Sahgal’s novels are socio-political backdrop of the country, East-West encounter, man-woman relationship and man’s quest for identity. Her fiction also focuses attention on Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realization. The important political events form the background for each of her novels. Her first novel, *A Time to be happy*, presents the dawn of Indian Independence. *This Time of Morning Came* later, when the initial euphoria had worn off. *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with the partition of the Punjab on linguistic lines just after the state had recovered from the trauma of the 1974 partition. *A Situation in New Delhi* presents the Naxalite Movement and student unrest and moreover, the aftermath of Nehru’s death. Her autobiographies *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free* are relatively more effective than her earlier novels. *The Day in Shadow* is profusely inspired by the political movement of the society. Sahgal has given an authentic picture of high-profile politicians and bureaucrats, wrapped up in their cocktail parties, worried more about themselves than about the problems that the country faced. Her novels are concerned with the present decadence of India, and how creative use can be made of its past. It is this concern of her with the country which led her to protest against the Emergency imposed by her cousin Indira Gandhi.
Sahgal wrote her first volume of autobiography at the time of the publication of her latest novel. She has shown equal interest in the history and culture of her country. The two autobiographical works, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free*, present the changing social and political climate of the times in which she grew up. She describes what it was like growing up with her uncle Jawaharlal Nehru during the years of Mahatma Gandhi’s prolonged freedom movement. They also provide clues to the essential core of her thinking which informs her understanding of India’s past she constantly invokes in her later novels, to make sense of the post-independence time. The book was published when she was only 27 years of age. Both the autobiographies become important because they provide the basis for a better understanding of the novelist and her novels. *Prison and Chocolate Cake* presents the powerful associations and experiences of Sahgal’s childhood and provides invaluable insight into the shaping influence on her life. The political consciousness dominating her literary creations is real and inseparable from herself and her surroundings.

In the preface to *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Sahgal points out:

> We grew up at a time when India was the stage for a great political drama and we shall always remain a little dazzled by the performances we have seen (9).

In the same book, she writes:

> With us the growth of political awareness was a gradual and unconscious process and the most important influence in our lives (Ibidem 31).

The book provides evidence of Sahgal’s impression of the two most important leaders of modern India, Gandhi and Nehru. The two were household name for her, and the impact of their thought and ideas is found
in all her writings. Though she at first had contrived a dislike for Gandhi’s moral lapses but very soon his rare qualities like compassion, love for all, trust and regards for truth, spiritual uprightness etc. impressed her very favorably. In a very short time, Gandhi had become a strong force and an unavoidable presence. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, she says:

> 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 one of light. Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity... based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace. (Ibidem 32)

Sahgal’s second autobiography *From Fear Set Free* depicts an account of events and happenings in her personal life. The book chronicles her life in India and abroad and records some memorable anecdotes of her eminent mother. She incorporates into it the events from India’s social and political history, because of which we get to know more details about her views on several issues that form the core of her later fiction. It is the work of a mature married woman with an increasingly clear vision of life. She is still very much under the influence of Gandhi and Nehru. The title sums up the burden of her narrative, which is to demonstrate how the most vital concern of her growing up was to learn to free herself from fear, which had also become the common aspiration of the vast majority of people in the country. The book consisting of eighteen chapters deals with her meeting and marrying Gautam Sahgal, the birth of their three children, the consolidation of national freedom under the leadership of Nehru whose aloneness in the world of the spirit increased with advancing years.
Sahgal’s first novel, *A Time to be Happy* has the reference to congress activities and the events of 1942. The novel presents India’s struggle for independence and the changing socio-political scenario of the country presented through the upper middle class. The novel is located in the time immediately after the freedom of the country, but its narrative space is dominated by pre-independence times. The protagonist of the novel recalls his past life, especially the changes in his thinking and actions brought about by Gandhi’s call to the people of India. Apart from this, the protagonist links it with the story of the children of his close friend, concentrating mainly on the youngest son Sanad, who finds himself a total misfit in independent India. The narrator recreates past events partly from his memory and partly from the details given by Sanad. The problem of Sanad is one of identity or self-discovery. The novel takes off from a crisis in Sanad’s life, when he seriously meditates giving up his job with a reputed foreign company. Sanad feels ill at ease in the company of his British officers. The relationship between the narrator and Sanad is deeply personal because Sanad absolutely regards him as an idealist whose integrity is extraordinary. Sanad’s dilemma about himself is typical in the cross-currents of the East and the West. He explains his problem by saying:

*I’ve studied English history and literature. I’ve read the English poets. It’s all the more real to me than the life I live very day. Don’t you see, it has been burned into us. We’re branded with it. My body is in Indian but my brain doesn’t belong here. I might as well be an Englishman except for the colour of my skin* (Sahgal, *Happy* 234).
Sanad’s marriage to Kusum coincides with India’s independence in 1947. Sanad and Kusum come to terms with life - Sanad by accepting the new changes in the country with an unusual degree of understanding and developed sensibility; and Kusum by gradually recovering from the traumatic experience of Sahadev’s cruel and irrational death and finding the comfort and solace with Sanad.

The novel has it that because of immense differences in the levels of living and thinking of its people, there was a simultaneous co-existence of several layers of past incidents in the country, and the same made people respond differently to the British. They either chose to remain unmoved and fixed, like Sanad’s father or evolved new ways for combating their influence by invoking a part of their native tradition. Some, like the protagonist, gave up their rich and prosperous life and joined Gandhi’s social and political programme. Others, like Sanad, chose to follow the British blindly, because they considered it both enlightening and rewarding - a civilized mode of living and an effective road to success. Thus, the novel deals with the themes which are taken up by Sahgal in her later novels mainly the East-West encounter, the impact of English of Western education, the desire for identity and marriage. Sahgal has tried to depict a nation’s consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of individual and provide a multi-layered social and political history in the novel.

This Time of Morning is set in the early post-independence years, when a new republic eagerly looked forward to a future full of hope. It gives a daring expose of the happenings in the world of politicians and administrators of the South Block as the power changed hands in 1974. It is purely a political novel which deals with what happened in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of the political figures. In K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s opinion:
This Time of Morning is written with much greater ease and sophistication than its predecessor, and it can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English. (473)

Here it has been hailed as an impeccable novel, most remarkable for its sheer effortlessness. Much of the action takes place in Delhi, and the specific context is the decline and fall of one of the pillars of the Government, Kalyan Sinha. As one reads the novel, and summarizes the political events in India in the last years of Nehru’s prime minister-ship, one cannot resist the temptation to equate some of the characters in the novel with historical figures. But, of course, the novel deserves to be read as a piece of fiction rather than as a piece of history. “This Time if Morning can be aptly described as song of loneliness” (Kalinnikova 183), where the novelist dramatizes the mood of uncertainty and the anxiety of the first decade if the post-independent era.

In This Time of Morning, independence is already a few years old. Unfortunately, there is more chaos than order in Delhi. It is a deeply disturbing novel with a high degree to its artistic maturity and technical virtuosity. Some of the characters of the novel are so beautifully and symbolical portrayed that they are equated with the contemporary political personalities. The novel deals with the vivid facets of the role of the civil service in the country, which impinges heavily on the country’s choice of a suitable political and administrative structure for its newly emerging needs. For examining different facts of the Gandhian mode of governance as one of the options, a good part of the pre-independence past of the country has been brought into the narrative. The most significant aspect of the novel is that it brings to notice the pivotal role of civil servants in India at the time when they did not figure in the writings of the historians. The novelist states:
The old Civil Service jealously guarded its rights and privileges against the encroaching new services, both foreign and internal, and the polite tension between the old and the new affected this and every other Ministry as India struggled to squeeze a revolution into the bureaucratic mold and adapt dramatic plans and programs to everyday consumption (Sahgal, Morning 129).

Sahgal’s domain of discourse in this novel is people with politicians of various occupation, highly placed and influential bureaucrats, artist and journalists with varying level of achievement, prominent parliamentarians, and gossiping, liberated and libidinous society ladies as well as traditional educated housewives. There are glimpses of current history or history in the making. The main characters in the novel are Kalyan Sinha, the Minister without portfolio; Kailas, P.M.’s reliable assistant nurtured in the Gandhian Congress Movement; Rakesh a young I.F.S. officer; Sir Arjun Mitra, the pragmatic and seasoned Secretary General of the Ministry of External Affairs; Hari Mohan, a businessman and for a while the Minister of Industries in the Government of Uttar Pradesh; Mira, the devoted wife of Kailas; Rashmi, the only daughter of Kailas and Mira; Nita, the daughter of Narangs and a newspaper columnist; and Uma, Arjun Mitra’s lawfully-wedded beautiful wife. The central theme of the novel has been stated by the protagonist Rakesh thus:

*It was the assurance that every man counts that life is the sum total of moments, that the human being through the exercise of his reason is the instrument of all progress. A group was individuals. What was needed was not the burial of the self but its rebirth and*
celebration, for surely the only hope for people anywhere was that they should recognize and foster each other’s humanity as individuals. (Ibidem 136)

Rakesh, a young officer in Foreign Service, who had grown up at a time when young men were ardent nationalists, returns to Delhi after a six-year of absence to find many changes. Her meets the new Advisor on Foreign Affairs, the controversial Kalyan Sinha and is once again drawn to the magnetic personality of the politician whose ruthless manipulations are, in a way, precursor of the moral corruption in the years to come. He is soon caught up in the whirlwind of politics, social life, careerism and intrigue. It comes to his realization that people like Kalyan Singh, are a threat to social freedom because they try to enslave through personal magnetism. So he cannot think of arguing a point or discussing a topic with him. The growth and development of the individual consciousness of Rakesh, as well as that of Kalyan, is the measure of the artist achievement of Sahgal. Rakesh, longs for the warmth and domesticity of a normal family like that of Kailas, Mira and Rashmi:

*Rakesh, sitting down to dinner with Rashmi and her mother, warmed to the familiar glow of their company. This was a family, even with Kailas away. These were people involved with one another. He and his father were just two people not a family (Ibidem 43).*

His return to New Delhi and Rashmi’s separation from her husband rekindle his personal interest in Rashmi which may well mean the beginning of a new and mature relationship on the emotional plane. Finally, he determines to communicate with Rashmi as they have quite a good deal in common to share.
Arjun mitra, a top bureaucrat with a western background, at the age of thirty-three marries a young and beautiful girl, Uma. The brilliant, responsible and successful officer, however, remains absorbed in his officialdom. He represents the merits and demerits of the position he holds. Uma longs for his love and company, but Arjun “condemned himself to an isolation where she could never touch him again” (Ibidem 28). His indifference makes her so desperate emotionally and sexually that she takes to drinking and moving alone with men, deviating from the social norms. Kalyan Sinha, on the other hand, swears by the group and emphasizes the need to protect society from the predatory individual. He believes that the battle in this country, still for survival and victory, lies in close identity of aim and effort and in merging of interests. Kalyan’s enemy is Kailas, a Gandhian type of freedom-fighter and social worker whose statement as head of the selection board that would choose candidates for the election just before the partition of India underlines his complete disagreement with Kalyan. But the Prime Minister supports Kalyan following Kailas’s complaint against his disregard for official code of conduct at the U.N.:

*Men of Kalyan’s type do not always function in the routine, ponderous, bureaucratic manner. That is their value. They have the ability to shed all non-essentials and go directly to the heart of the matter and get things done. It is an irritating quality at time, but a useful one.* (Ibidem 17)

Although women like Barbara, Celia and Nita all come under his romantic influence, yet Kalyan fails to connect himself meaningfully to any of be them and perforce remains unmarried because he cannot communicate himself through personal love.
Thus, the first two novels deal with the effect of the colonial encounter on the pre- and post-independent India through the institutional structures which the British had established in the country. It is true that the political setting in the novel is that of the contemporary scene in New Delhi but it is difficult to accept a critical analysis such as:

As a work of fiction, the novel is not successful. Mrs. Sahgal does not seem to care much about her characters and there are passages which are too polemical. The novel is in one sense a political assessment of India’s capabilities put forward with much beating of the official drum. The characters in the novel such as Kailas Vrind, Hari Mohan, Somath and Kalyan Sinha are not real, for they really have no lives: they are symbols representing Gandhian ideals or pragmatic politics of power .... Mrs. Sahgal points out the moral behind the novel: that in India it is not expected to pay homage to the politician, it is the politician who must pay homage to the people. (Nicholson 167)

Of course, this is a sample of critical illiteracy and does not merit out attention beyond the explanatory statement that Sahgal’s controlling and clarifying vision of art gives full scope for the development of every character in the novel as has been shown in the foregoing pages. Thus, her art is a more mature medium of communication as well as more satisfying process of illumination of the experience of life with all its stresses and strains in the highly sophisticated society in Delhi.

*Storm in Chandigarh* is one of the best political novels written by Sahgal. It deals with the partition of East Punjab on linguistic lines just after the state had recovered from the trauma of the 1947 partition.
Violence of the sixties becomes the central concern in the novel that deals with the problem of political tension and violence originating from the city Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states - the Punjab and Haryana, and portrays the personal tensions resulting in the failure of marital ties. The theme of the novel is violence, not necessarily physical violence but rather an invisible and more subtle form of violence - the infliction of one person’s will on another. Though superficially the novel depicts violence, chaos and the uneasy political situation of the late sixties, it also reflects Sahgal’s human spirit in a traditional cultural milieu and its characteristic response of freedom to meet the challenges of change. The novel deals with the political upheaval in Punjab during the post-independence period. Sahgal focuses her attention on the national illness. In this sense, she is authentic in portraying the reality of the political situation. The metaphorical term ‘storm’ in the title of the novel works at two levels; the one is the political, following on the partition of Punjab into two states, and the second personal or emotional crisis in the marital conflicts between husband and wife. The two backgrounds - the political and the personal run parallel to each other and are well integrated in the theme of her fictional work.

The characters in the novel behave like moderns but, at the same time, they do not isolate themselves completely from their tradition. This blend of tradition and modernity can be observed in their attitude to morality, education, man-woman relations and to love. There are details of complex human relationships against the backdrop of India’s current political discontent. Women characters in this novel no more like to remain confined within the four walls of their houses. They prefer to go to picnic and parties in order to get relieved of the burden of boredom and
domestic monotony. They don’t hesitate in taking whiskey in the company of men. Sahgal demonstrates that violence has spread into social relationships also, especially in relations between men and women which she has consistently explored and commented upon in several novels. The valuable thing about her treatment is that, as she has done in the case of the other aspects of India’s social and political life, she traces its roots in the country’s past. Besides the political background which has been very well projected in this novel, there is a human background, too.

Sahgal’s fictional world is represented by a variety of people, politicians, high-ranking civil servants, and wealthy businessmen with international connections. On the political side the two new Chief Ministers, Gyan Singh of Punjab and Harpal Singh of Haryana and also the Union Home Minister have figured in it. Vishal Dubey, Trivedi, Prasad and Kachru represent the civil servants. The prosperous textile industrialist, Nikhil Ray and his wife Gauri, the manager Inder Mehra who runs Nikhil’s textile company in Chandigarh and his wife Saroj and the liquor manufacturer Jit Sahani and his wife Mara complete the business class.

Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh, the Chief Ministers of Haryana and the Punjab respectively, had been friends and colleagues once, but they are now obliged to make menacing gestures towards each other. The political fissure between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh took place over state boundaries, water and electricity. The hostile Chief Minister of Punjab threatened to lead a strike at Bhakhra. This situation resulted in a grave crisis in Chandigarh. The novel opens with the Union Home Minister’s statement: “Violence lies very close to the surface in the Punjab” (Sahgal, Storm 7) which reflects the stormy atmosphere in the
two states. As the tension mounts up, New Delhi deputes Vishal Dubey to watch the situation at Chandigarh. After a careful appraisal, Vishal backs Harpal and persuades him to accept Gyan’s challenge of a general strike. Violence breaks out inevitably and Harpal is wounded and hospitalized. A critic states: “The Storm in Chandigarh can be attributed, at one level to the estrangement between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh” (Ramchandraiah 70). The clash between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is a clash of ideologies. It is a fight between the cult of violence and of non-violence. Gyan Singh who with little concern for emotions and philanthropist always indulges in a ruthless attitude, Harpal Singh, on the other hand, is philanthropist more concerned with general safety and well-being of people, each time there is a confrontation between the two Chief Ministers. Dubey realizes more than a political battle between them.

Vishal Dubey, the protagonist of the novel is an idealistic and upright civil servant. He displays admirable detachment and endurance when Leela, the girl he married turns out to be an adulteress. Even though he knows it well that she is disloyal to him, he thinks he himself is doing her a wrong by depriving her of her marital right and affection. Talking about Vishal Dubey and his wife Leela, Sahgal writes:

She had selected what she wanted of him: the distinguished escort at parties, the successful civil servant with a promising future, the husband who could be relied upon to take pains with whatever problems she took to him. And she had ignored the rest. She had given herself selectively too, what she had considered it prudent and convenient to give, and left him empty of the reality of herself. Even her vitality had needed an
audience. She scintillated in company. Time and again he heard her talk animatedly of what had happened a day or a week earlier, of an article she had read, an idea she had had, at a party. Alone with him she had little to share. Had their failure been their fault, or was there something at the very core of human dreams and longings that was fatal to fulfillment through marriage (Sahgal, Storm 69).

Thus Vishal’s life itself becomes an illustration of the fact that suffering is the mark of such honest people for whom life is a persistent quest for the Higher Morality, which means “a search for value and an attempt to choose the better value, the real value, in any situation, and not just do what’s done or what is expected” (Ibidem 86).

Vishal’s marriage with Leela had turned out to be a vanishing search for communication. They were bound by nuptial knots but had failed to maintain the marital right and obligations in the midst of all odds.

She was dedicated to the cult of conformity, to observing forms that his most intense pleas had not been able to penetrate…. The whole mindless mess going down the ages with never a shaft of new light on it. Men and women contorted into molds, battered into sameness; the divine spiritual spark guttered out…. Somewhere under the sun there must be another way to live, with relentless honesty, where the only cruelty would be pretense. (Ibidem 214)

Throughout their lives, they had remained forced strangers to each other. He is possessed by a deep sense of guilt for living with her without love. He suffers from the tortures of remorse for his relationship with Leela
abruptly ending due to her death. Vishal’s marriage had been a failure. A widower, he is deriving satisfaction in a liaison with Gaur, a Bengali businessman’s wife who finds security in arranged marriage but she needs satisfaction based utterly on physical sex and therefore she establishes a relationship with Dubey.

The novel is the symbolic representation of stormy social and political activity in the background. The political violence between the two newly-formed states is reflected in the personal violence of Inder and Saroj. In Chandigarh, Vishal gets acquainted with two young couples: Inder-Saroj and Jit-Mara. Both Inder and Jit are young industrialists. Inder looks after Nikhil Ray’s nylon plant in Chandigarh and Jit is the whiskey manufacturer. Saroj and Inder present a picture of typical traditional Indian family in which womanhood is captivated in the possessive spirit of the husband. Their relationship is purely mechanical and superficial devoid of any feeling of affection and tenderness. “This, the touch without sexual significance, the caress of affection, was different. It cost him an effort to make it” (Ibidem 53). His treatment of his wife and children is extremely immodest. He treats them as if they were non-living objects. Inder’s problem with his wife arises from his view of the destiny of women which has descended down the generations and as per which she has to live a fixed role pre-determined for her by the male-dominated society. The temperamental incompatibility causes disharmony in the marriage of various characters in the novel. There are extra-marital relationship among characters which Sahgal portrays through the relations that Mara, Jit’s wife, has with Inder, Inder’s wife Saroj has with Vishal Dubey, and Gauri, a Bengali Businessman’s wife sighing for Dubey, and love. Saroj’s pre-marital relationship becomes the cause of the failure of their marriage,
which neither Inder has forgotten nor he lets Saroj forget it. Saroj’ quest for mutual communication and emotional sharing naturally leads her toward Vishal whom she finds more understanding, considerate, and emotionally responding.

Another couple in the novel, Jit and Mara, also suffers from a similar malady. They are childless couple blessed with all needed comforts of life but even then they suffer from emotional void in their life. The search for communication makes Mara come towards Inder. But soon she is disillusioned when she finds him a hypocrite and subsequently breaks all relations with him. By that time Jit also realizes that there is something lacking in their relationship and attempts to come closer to Mara. The realization makes them be reconciled and remain true to each other.

The novelist’s main concern seems to be the depiction of the social life of Indian people living in the post-independence days. The storm is blown off in both planes- the political and the personal at the end of the novel. Sahgal’s awareness of the historical and political development in Asia and Europe is quite evident in this novel. The one event that is continually kept in the backdrop is the partition of India in 1947. It acquires a special ironic significance in this novel because of the second partition of the Indian part of the Punjab on the basis of language into Haryana and Punjab with Chandigarh as the joint capital. Thus, the novel depicts the violence that enveloped the free India in the sixties:

_The map of India, once a uniform piece of territory was again suffering the pangs of another bifurcation of the two states of Haryana and Punjab, and had become a welter of separate sensitive identities resurrected after the independence. (Ibidem 15)_
According to Sahgal, her next and the most personal novel *The Day in Shadow* has the autobiographical touch in it. Sahgal combines the social and the political issues that pose a threat to a developing country. The novel concerns itself not only with the release and recognition of the individual consciousness but also with its growth and maturation. The novel deals with the struggle of a young, beautiful, and daring Indian woman trapped in a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she experiences in the hands of the cruel and unjust male-dominated society of India. In the novel, Sahgal represents a variety of people, the political leader, business barons, journalists and free thinkers. Sahgal has presented the social life of these people living in India in the early sixties when India was on her way to progress after independence. The novelist shows that though Indians have got freedom yet it is only on the surface level as in their attitude towards love, morality, marriage, sex, education and religion, they are still the slaves of the West.

In the novel, the major theme is the continued domination and exploitation of the women by her husband despite the constantly increasing awareness of the need for liberation felt by every educated person following the achievement of independence from abolition of slavery to the British. The central pre-occupation of Sahgal’s novel is the suffering caused to woman in the prison-house of loveless marriage and her suffering when she makes a breakaway. The crisis is already over when the story opens. The continued tendency toward exploitation of the woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system and reconstitute it on her terms. The chief characters of the novel are - Som, Raj, Simrit, Sumer Singh, Brij and Ram Krishan. People in India think that they can become modern just by imitating the Western life-style. The
people in New Delhi love organizing parties, drinking wine and flirting with women other than their won wives. They enjoy late night dinners and ballroom dances. The novel open with the glow and the glitter of the modern society of the capital city if India.

*The huge mirrors of the Zodiac Room at the inter-continental, festooned in carved gilt, reflected everyone of consequence in the Ministry of Petroleum, and a lot of other officials besides their wives. And some of their daughters---the supple, flat-stomached young with their saris tied low showing their navels, their hair swinging long and loose or piled high in glassy architecture.*

*(Sahgal, Shadow 1)*

This shows the superficial modernity of the Indian people who blindly imitate Western style in their fashions and manners which take them away from the traditions and customs of their own country. They try to be modern as much as possible by following modern life-style, arranging parties and spending money lavishly. Against the glittering socio-political backdrop in New Delhi, the Indian cultural paradox inherent in its predominantly Hindu character has been presented as a crucial aspect.

The novel is basically concerned with the emotional fallout of divorce. It centers on the traumatic post-divorce experience of a middle-aged woman, Simrit. Simit’s marriage to Som, an industrialist turns out to be a disaster. Som and Simrit have been married since long and have three children born of them. As a businessman, Som’s ambition in life is to move up fast. At one point, Simrit is shocked to find that she has become irrelevant in his scheme of things. After moments of hesitation and with guilty feelings, she finally walks out of her home, because she
finds a supportive friend in Raj. She leaves all the wealth to Som but takes the children with her at the time of divorce. Simrit suffers from marital incompatibility. She respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. Here, Sahgal portrays how lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between man and woman can wreck marital relationship resulting in divorce. It is the clash of ideals that leads to their separation. Though Simrit, Sahgal expounds various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Here Sahgal reflects her own shadow of life after her divorce. Sahgal confesses it in an article “Of Divorce and Hindu Women” written on 12 December, 1971 in The Hindustan Times:

*In this book I tried to figure out something that has happened to me—the shattering experience of divorce. I wanted to show how even in a free country like ours, where women are equal citizens a woman can be criminally exploited without creating a ripple.* (6)

Simrit’s friendship with Raj provides her anchorage and helps her to come out of the shock and stupor and establish a life of her own. First, the mind then the body opens up to new responses and life affirms itself in a sense of fulfillment in her relationship with Raj. “The relationship which she builds with Raj is thus an entirely different one --- it is born out of a real need, not a habit and it begins with the mind, not the body” (Jain: Morality, 46). In fact, Raj never discusses marriage with Simrit but only encourages her to be assertive and independent. But in the last part of the novel, he suddenly declares that they are going to be married. He can be aptly described as, “a Christian by birth, a liberal thinker by temperament and training and a fearless exponent of his ideas as a matter of faith ….” (Rao 57-58).
Set in Delhi, the novel is close to the seat of power and justice. The inability of law courts to translate legal theory into action is vividly brought about by Sahgal in it. On the political scene, it depicts the rise of a politician Sumer Singh who is inclined towards super powers for collaboration and not for non-alignment for self-sufficiency. The corrupt private life of Summer Singh with a widow-turned sex companion Pixie is only a typical illustration of the life liver by such a top-ranking public servant with a feudal background. He maintains a private flat where he has tryst with Pixie twice a week. Even the taxi driver who drives him there knows about his affair for “No Minister could be anonymous for long in Delhi and he had been using this side entrance for three months, though he had kept his own car before and left long before morning” (Sahgal, Shadow 112). It is a clear reflection on the private lives of the ministers who misuse their public position. Ram Kishan, the spiritual mentor of Raj and a good old friend of his father, is instrumental in bringing about the union of Simrit and Raj --- the separated Hindu Brahmin woman and the unattached middle-group Christian bachelor. Firmly rooted in the Indian tradition, Ram Kishan has lived a life full of action, both physical and mental. Steeped in the Gandhian philosophy and programmes, he believes in and practices non-violence as a living value and practical virtue. Ram Kishan is a unique character in the novel for he takes up fight against everything anti-social or anti-national. The novel demonstrates through him the application of the feminist credo gaining ground in the West to the situation of Hindu women in particular.

The Day in Shadow is a fine example of the female literary tradition in Indian English literature. The Western technique of stream-
of-consciousness had started affecting the writing of the novelists everywhere. Sahgal also plunged deep into the inner world of her characters. She adopted an interesting method of creating her characters in the novel in order to promote her theme of women’s suppression and revolt in the socio-political set up in modern India. Her characters are not so much individuals as types pointing to contrasting themes. She creates such contrasting pairs as Som and Raj, Sardar Shib and Sumer Singh, N.N. Shah and Ram Kishan. She has reproduced the thought and the vision of the future India dreamt of and put before the nation by its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. According to Nehru, science and technology were the means by which India could realize its dream of a better future in the science-dominated world.

Sahgal’s next novel *A Situation in New Delhi* fictionalizes the precarious state of education and politics in independent India. It had been banned during the Emergency. It was first published in abroad and then reprinted in India. The novel points out the Naxalite Movement and student unrest and, above all, the aftermath of Nehru’s death. In this novel, there is no gap between the private world and the political world; both the worlds are reciprocally treated in which actions and characters are co-mingled. It deals with the problems of alienation and frustration of the younger generation of India in the context of opportunistic politics being pursued in New Delhi. The novel concentrates on a sense of disintegration giving way to chaos and disorder that engulfed the capital. The title of the novel suggests that the situation in New Delhi symbolizes the situation in the entire country. The novel depicts the aftermath of a great popular Prime Minister Shivraj, who had dominated the political and national scene for a full decade.
Shagal has woven in it a narrative around a number of characters: Devi, the sister of the dead prime Minister Shivraj (Nehru in disguise); her son Rishad, a young college-going boy, member of a Naxalite group, who dies in an explosion in a cinema hall; her friend Usman, the Vice-chancellor of Delhi University, an admirer of Shivraj’s policies; and Michael Calvert, an old acquaintance of Shivraj and Devi, who returns to India from England to write his biography. The novel attempts an estimate of the dead leader’s personal qualities, his approach to nation building, and his power to influence the lives of people. The novel begins with the news of the death of Prime Minister Shivraj, the idealist leader of India. It builds up a contrast between the time before and after Shivraj. Here, the three characters, Shivraj, Usman and Michael represent the three main religious segments of the Indians - Hindu, Muslism and Christian. The chosen time of action is the late fifties and early sixties when Rishad, Devi’s son joins a secretly operating group of students-terrorist. The nineteen years old Rishad gets killed in one of his underground operations and his girl-friend Suvarnapriya becomes the protege of Devi. The novel is the portrayal of the city torn asunder by the failure of political leadership and violent student unrest. It would true to state that this novel is a tribute to Nehru.

Shivraj has sacrificed his aristocratic family’s comforts for the freedom of India. And now, after his death, the country which he had ruled so well begins to fall apart. His intimate followers- Devi, Usman and Michael try to live with Shivraj’s ideology. Devi, the most intimate follower of Shivraj is invited to join the Education Ministry:
They hadn’t known, when they asked her to join… though how it could have escaped them was ironic…that she had a mind of her own and in a position of authority she would use it. Wasn’t that what authority was for? (Sahgal, Situation 15).

Devi, a beautiful lady, a widowed mother of a college student, now in her early fifties, takes up the reins of the office in her strong hands and starts asserting herself. She appoints Usman, an old flower of her late brother and her dear friend as the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. Usman is forced into accepting the offer as it comes from Devi who needs him to survive in the office with the political ideology they share. Over-burdened with the troubles of unrest and violence in the University campus, Usman believes that the great ideals should not remain mere words in the scriptures. In fact, the longevity of scriptures depends on the people who follow them. He condemns the political interference in the academic world and lamenting for the loss of a leader like Shivraj who had a unique sense of perception. Usman had accepted the post of Vice-Chancellorship solely for bringing about some fundamental changes. He is being forced to take back three rusticated students for a rape case. His wife Nadira always blames him for accepting such a post and persuades him to leave the country for any other country, if not for Pakistan. When the tension reaches its peak, Usman advises Devi to resign from the post and from the party. He realizes the futility of his efforts to free the University from political influences. He decides to give up the Vice-Chancellorship. When Shivraj dies, Devi needs Usman body and soul. He makes love to her as she lies in her bed mourning for her husband Ishwar. Even in her love affairs, she is neither honest nor mature, nor unselfish. Ishwar’s bed is still warm when Usman occupies it.
Michael, another important character in the novel, is a renowned English biographer who had spent his childhood in India. As a young British boy, he was fascinated by Shivraj. He visits India to pay his homage to the great hero by writing his biography. Both, Usman and Michael have very special relationship with Devi. Both had loved her once, and they still love her. She had accepted their love in a very natural way and she still accepts it. Though he is a foreigner, he also has his share of disillusionment in the new political set-up. Michael had observed Devi closely in relation to her brother. Michael remembered Devi as a young girl who had many admirers but chose only her brother as a companion. He could remember her enjoying boat rides and horse rides with her brother and he could also remember:

...a picture as distinct, of a family enlarged by friends and relations at a long polished table reflecting light from the candelabra above it, the boy and girl, cherished as roses, facing each other across it and leaving it later to walk arm in arm in the light of the stars. The Pharaohs had married their sisters. (Ibidem 51-52).

Her commitment to her brother was too strong and firm. Sahgal shows a strange relationship between brother and sister. Sahgal has never shown clearly whether their relationship was sexual or not but they behaved like lovers, or rather as husband and wife would behave towards each other. Michael had noticed that ‘physical contact’ between the brother and sister “was so constant, hand touching, his head bent to hers” (Ibidem 54). Duty to a husband, or wife or child, Michael could understand. But what duty was this?

With herself, with Shivraj, it was all the same thing they were so much flesh of each other’s flesh, their very souls mixed. He had been jealous of Shivraj. (Ibidem 55)
It may be concluded that Sahgal’s analysis of the problems confronting a newly independent and developing country by focusing her creative attention on the young men and women of free Indian is convincing and sensitive. Structured action in sixteen chapters, *The Situation in New Delhi* is really representative of the situation in the whole of India.

*Rich Like Us,* the coveted Sahitya Adademi award and Sinclair Prize winning work of Nayanatara Sahgal, is probably her best novel in which the action dates back to the period of India’s national Emergency during 1947-75 when the Parliament was in a state of suspended animation. The novel presents the picture of India after Independence showing primarily the state of affairs in the country under the Emergency imposed by her cousin Indira Gandhi. Sahgal’s searching look at India during the Emergency reveals that democracy and spirituality are only skin-deep. She delineates the socio-political scenario of India particularly during the Emergency against the backdrop of Delhi. The novel projects the failures, frustrations and exploitation of a woman - a faithful wife, a middle-aged unmarried civil servant or a cockney English woman. There is a remarkable blend of the two worlds here, the public and the private. The novel presents a fearless account of the harassment caused to all sections of people during the period of National Emergency. As Dev, one of the principal characters, states early in the novel:

*This emergency is just what we needed. The trouble makers 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 good for business (Sahgal, Rich 10).

Besides depicting the anguish during the Emergency, the novelist takes the reader to the scenario of the Second World War and describes the magnetic, transforming influence of Gandhi on the masses.

The novelist has woven a narrative around a number of characters- Ramlal Surya and his English wife, Rose and his Indian wife Mona; Sonali Ranade, the I. A. S. Officer, the narrator; Dev; Ramlal’s son Ravi Kachru and Kishori La are the principal characters while the Prime Minister and her staff are in the background. Beginning with an ironic title with multiple meanings the flow of action in the novel constantly fluctuates between the past and the present through two consciousnesses, one of Rose and the other of Sonali. Both Sonali and Rose are typical Shagal women. Here, Sahgal introduces three major female characters, Each one of them is different in her outlook and background.

Sahgal traces the impact of the Emergency on a large number of characters, simultaneously highlighting the response of these individual of the social tension created by it. Amount its victims are Sonali, a conscientious Civil Servant; Rose, a cockney shop-girl turned an Indian businessman’s foreign wife who tries her best to make a passage to Indian and at last meets her death in the hands of a ‘youth camp tough’ employed by her step-son, Dev, one of the small tyrants the Emergency has created; Kishori Lal, a petty merchant, arrested and harassed by the police for being associated with the RSS; a youth from the Nehru University severely manhandled and imprisoned for being a member of the Marxist Party; and Ravi Kachru, a shrewd administrator who manages
to ride the tide of popularity in the early days of the Emergency. These are the representative of the common predicament shared by the majority during the period of National Emergency.

Rose’s life gets changed after she meets Ram. When Ram first meets Rose, she is a twenty-year old lower-class cockney English girl. She is the daughter of a factory worker. Her life before she meets Ram had not prepared her for a life-time commitment to someone like him, far less to his life-style. Rose had broken her settled engagement with Freddile in order to marry Ram, a Lahore based businessman. Though she knew all about Ram’s first marriage and a son born of him, she marries him merely for the sake of ideal love. She believes in there is something romantic about her attitude to Ram:

She had entered an emotional labyrinth and she was drawn magnetically on, with Ram doing no more than holding her hand for the entire two weeks before asked her, a victim of casual unthinking sorcery, to marry him. And it was a sign of the distance she had travelled (Ibidem 43-44).

Rose suffers silently the callous attitude towards her in Ram’s house because of the law of the Hindu Undivided Family coming in the way of her freedom and privacy. She realizes that “without a child of her own she would never be the mistress of the house not even her half of it” (Ibidem 71). The cold was between Rose and Mona reconciles only after Mona’s attempt to commit suicide. Once again, Rose finds herself the unwanted third in a love-triangle when Ram fails in love with Marcella. In all her troubles, Sonali remains her friend and fights for her legal right to property. And finally, she is murdered. But people are made to believe that she herself invited her own death.
Mona, Ramlal’s first wife, comes from a typical conservative traditional Punjabi family. She takes refuge in, and draws strength from prayers, ‘bhajans’ and ‘Kirtans’. She leads a conventional life. In fact Rose in those early years at Lahore had never seen her, even though they lived in the same house. She in secure in her status as the lady of the house. An assertive lady, she instructs the servants in the daily running of the house. Mona has unshakable faith in astrology. Her marriage with Ram had been arranged with the help of astrologers and horoscopes. But all this had not prevented Ram from having another wife. Even then, Mona continues to be ruled by the predictions of astrologers. When she focuses all her attentions on her son Dev, all her dreams and hopes for her son’s future is once again governed by the planets. Earlier, Mona suffered because of Ram’s love for Rose and now Rose suffers in the same manner because of Ram’s love for Marcella. Ram enjoys life fully with both the wives Mona looking after the household affairs and her child and Rose providing sensual pleasure and a company in his business. Both the women feel wronged, lonely and insecure. Sahgal strongly condemns the attitudes which reduce women to an object. In her comparative study of Sahgal and Doris Lessing, Neena Arora observes:

*Man considers it as normal behavior to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage while at the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not involve sex, man turns violent and hostile toward his wife and starts persecuting her.* (61)

The narrator Sonali, a thirty-eight year old I.C.S. officer, is far from being a passive observer. During the Emergency, her strong opinions on democracy cost her job, an even she accepts as symptomatic of
changing times. In Sonali, we find a woman who life deeply affected by the various twists and turns that the Indian body-politic takes. We are Sonali falling in love with Ravi Kachru soon after independence. The novelist focuses on Sonali Ranade, an I.A.S. officer and joint secretary in the Union Ministry of Industry. The three characters---Sonali, Kishori Lal, and Dev ---- act as the center of consciousness. There is inter-action among each of these three characters and the events bring out the inner tension between diverse points of view and raise a number of socio-political, moral ethical and human questions. She gets demoted and transferred to U.P. because of her honest adherence to the Governments declared industrial policy and rejection of multinational company’s application for a license to produce a fizzy drink called Happyola. She is replaced by her former class-fellow and present colleague, Ravi Kachru. She resigns her service rather than being cowed down by a hypocritical government. She recalls her past days when fifteen years back she had the list in the competitive examination for the civil service. On her achievement, had welled up in her father’s eyes new responsibility could bring a peaceful historical change. Though the fires and fevers of Sonali were different from her father’s it touched both of them with its magic. Her memories of it had been her inheritance. The distinction between politics and civil service had become badly blurred over the last few years.

*The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politician’s meddling in administration, and favorites like Kachru, the prime example, playing politics as if his life depended on it ... suddenly was indispensable here, there and everywhere, the right hand and left leg of the Prime Minister and her household ...(Sahgal, Rich28).*
The action of the novel begins after the declaration of the Emergency and does not take us to end Sonali is thirty-eight and having been born in 1973 she is old enough to have absorbed the idealism and the hope of the pre-independence period. She has something from the past to which she can compare the present. Saonali, as an honest and outspoken person, find that the reasons given by the government for the imposition of emergency were not true. Her witty and ironical voice never rises above the levels of decorum and culture. While talking about the attitude of the civil servants towards the Emergency, she says:

*We knew this was no emergency. If it had been, the priorities would have been quite different. We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule. And we were involved in a conspiracy of silence, which is way we were careful not to do more than say hello when we passed each other in the building, and not go talk about our work after hours, which made after hours sessions very silent indeed. No one wanted trouble. So long as it didn’t no-one want trouble. So long as it didn’t touch us, we played along, pretending the Empress’s new clothes were beautiful. To put it charitably, we were being realistic. We knew we were up against a power we couldn’t handle, individually or collectively. Though I am sure the true explanation is that we are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth. (Ibidem 29)*

The novel deals with the changes brought about by the emergency in the social and political fabric of the country by analyzing the response it evoked among individuals, classes and groups. Here Sahgal provides for two narratives, the main narrative and the shorter one by Sonali. The novelist vividly dramatizes the historical scene and comments elaborately
on some of the crucial, contemporary issues raided. The novelist shows primarily the state of affairs in the country under the Emergency imposed by her cousin, Indira Gandhi. Her own abhorrence of the Emergency got expression in resigning her membership of the Sahitya Akademi’s Advisory Board for English. Her description of the Emergency shows how tyrants of different dispositions were created by that one act of Indira Gandhi and how they operated with impunity.

Sahgal nurtured special regard for patriots like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawahar lal Nehru. Some passages in the novel her true respect for Pandit Nehru. She pays a tremendous tribute to his overall personality:

What a man, what character, what integrity, what ability, what democracy. What refinement such as never-before seen … Relationship, anecdotes, encounters with Punditji popped up like jack in the boxes (Ibidem 162).

It may be concluded that Rich Like Us delineates different incidents in credible manner such as the murder of the narrator Sonal’s great grandmother in the name if suttee; the mutilation of the sharecropper because he asks for his due; the rape of the village women by the police because their men folk dared to resist the landlord; and, the murder or Rose, the large-hearted Englishwoman in New Delhi just because her frank talk embarrassed her stepson Dev. The narrative technique is quite interesting. The narrator is Sonali, but alternate chapters deal with her father Keshav’s friend Ram, a businessman who loves Rose and then Marcella even though he has a wife named Mona. The novel ends on a note of hope that in the midst of sycophancy, there are persons like Kishori Lal, a petty shopkeeper, who have the courage to protest against tyranny.
Sahgal’s seventh novel *Plan for Departure*, winner of the 1987 *Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Eurasia*, registers an important stage in her growth as a novelist. The novel takes the readers back to the colonial past and represent a picture of the subcontinent poised for revolution in the backdrop of the world standing on the edge of a cataclysmic war. In the novel Sahgal moves away from her familiar contemporary political era. The major part of action takes place at a hill station in North India between 1913 and 1914. This subtle, sharply imagined, skillfully plotted, and elegantly written novel is about a young woman’s rendezvous with India at a time when the status on both women and India was on the edge of change. A reviewer of this novel in *The Guardian* observed Sahgal to have handled her ingredients---love, compromise, anguish, serenity, the writing on the well ---with lucent sincerity and a feeling for both kinds of history, outward and inward. The novel, about a love story and a mystery, is set in continent poised for revolution and world on the edge of war---- a novel of haunting power and superb craftsmanship, rich in intrigue, gentle humor and exquisite observation. Most successful and brilliant fiction of history, it re-enacts the drama of socio-cultural change in the Raj in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

*Plans for Departure* has been set in the hill station of Himapur in India, on the eve of World War II. An elderly Indian scientist, alone with his new Danish secretary, has taken a summer cottage to continue his research. Other members of the local ‘gentry’ are a dynamic missionary and his boorish wife, and the local magistrate who has become disillusioned with British rule in India. The plot turns around the secretary, Anna, her sympathies to the Indian independence movement, and her reaction to the mysterious disappearances of the magistrate’s wife
and murder of the missionary’s wife. Although somewhat dry and slow moving the intelligent writing and popular setting make this novel appealing to some readers.

The major characters in the novel are: Sir Nitin Bose, the sixty-year-old botanist; his secretary, Anna Hansen, a young Danish woman with a mind of her own; Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate at Himapur, a serene hill station and the Missionary couple Mr. and Mrs. Croft and Nicholas, her boy-friend in England. It is the story of Anna Hansen, a Danish girl, a protagonist of the novel who postpones her marriage to an English diplomat, Nicholas, because of her desire for self-realization. She wants to understand life and asserts her right to be her authentic self. For this aim, she sets out on a travel for one year, visiting Copenhagen, London, Madras, Calcutta and finally Himapur. She gets the job of a Secretary-cum-companion to Sir Bitib Basum, a renowned botanist who has come to Himapur during the summer to carry on his work. During her stay in Himapur, she comes into contact with Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate and feels attracted towards him. Gradually, she falls in love with him and is thrown into confusion as she and Nicholas have decided to get married.

The major themes in the novel include human relationship, East-West encounter, status of woman, British imperialism and the Indian national Movement. Anna’s unyielding independence and her sense of freedom provide a striking contrast to the British imperialism and the suffocating political situation of 1914. She is conscious of the span of India’s history, its cultural tradition, as well as its present predicament she reflects:
The struggle for self-mastery was all that was really real. If that was Hinduism in a nutshell… it was pity it had not stayed grand and simple in the nut (Sahgal, Plans for Departure 47).

She has come to India for self-realization the age-old Indian concept of the goal of life. Anna is more Indian than any other Indian character in the novel. During her stay at Himapur, ana comes to Henry’s office everyday to collect mail and borrow books from his personal library. She is moved by Henry’s predicament as she always sympathized with grieving souls. Gradually, their relationship develops and she falls in love with him. And then she stumbles on vague evidences of two unnatural deaths on a faraway hillside which point to Henry being a murderer and imagining him to be associated with a secret crime, she makes plans for her departure. On returning to England, she marries Nicholas and is shown living as a grand old lady whose grand-daughter, Gayatri and her husband, Jason, adore her.

Gayatri and Jason provide the symbolic line between not only the past and the present in the novel but also the idealistic intermingling of cultures and the integral vision of the novelist. Though the main events in the novel concern the passage of year, it moves into both the past and the future. Anna’s grandchild Gayatri and her husband Jason continue the efforts of distinguishing right from wrong.

In Himapur Anna comes in contract with the small European community such as--- the District Magistrate, Henry Brewster, who rules over the miniature world, feels the mountain moving closer every evening and the missionary Marlowe croft and his wife lucilie croft. Madhav Rao, a photographer-cum-chemist is probably the only Indian who has his
nationalist aspirations on the one hand, and his camera on the other. The
tile of the novel links the Croft and the Brewsters to Anna, Sir Nitin and
Madhav Rao with a common intention. They are all birds of passage in
Himapur, a and must return to the plains before the monsoon breaks as so
should they the British, must leave India some-day. The plans that they are
constantly making for departure show that all of them are essentially aliens
and bring out the ephemeral nature of their mutual association.

In this novel, Shagal deals with how love can mean different thing to
different people. Anna realizes that what she shared with Henry was
special, but she takes a long time to arrive at this understanding. Initially
she deceives herself into believing that she could never love a murderer.
Therefore, she emphatically tells Nicholas that she could never have
married a murderer or even loved him. Later on, after reading Henry’s
letter in which he tries to explain his marriage to Stella and its subsequent
failure. Stella is the daughter of a colonel. As soon as she realizes that
Henry does not share her beliefs, she shuts herself off from him, unable to
see the sensitive, loving man that he is. Henry writes to Anna about how
Stella’s politics dominated her life:

If she had left me because she was her father’s daughter
Iwould have accepted it and let her go without a fight. It
would have been an honorable reason for parting. But
her political commitment got muddled with other
reasons (Ibidem 192).

In spite of Henry’s devotional affection for Stella which makes him
give up his dreams of a new political life in England, she develops an
affair with Robert Pryor, the Home Secretary, even when they tell henry
that they are fond of each other, henry is not ready to leave her:
I said to Pryor, since Stella wouldn’t talk “Is she pregnant” is that the trouble? If she is, I’ll adopt the child”. They looked at each other as if they were dangerously unbalanced, and this the final travesty in my dementedness (Ibidem 195).

Stella pushes Henry to the depths of desperation and makes her journey downhill only to marry Robert. By this time, Anna comes in contact with Henry.

There is also another story of Marlowe Croft and his wife Lulu. Marlowe comes in the life of Lulu in a dramatic way. Lulu had fallen in love with an American preacher, Croft. Lulu had once attended his last sermon in a country church. She tells her father about Croft’s moving sermon in a country church. She tells her father about Croft’s moving sermon that had put her in a trance. Mr. Firth, Lulu’s father, gets Croft two month’s jail term for daring to meddle with his local administration. Lalu marries Croft soon after his release from jail. After sometime, she realizes that Marlowe Croft did not need her. He had his church and his mission to build a special church. Gradually, the life Lulu had made with him is now over. She thinks that Marlowe’s charm had slowly worn off. For all her shrill foolishness, Lulu has been a good wife. But when Marlowe baptizes a sweeper’s child and thinks of adopting it, Lulu finds it unbearable. With her “good wifeliness gone, and her loyalty to his loyalties at braking point… the life she has made with him was over (Ibidem 146-47). Then, she plans to depart. But before her departure, she meets with an accident.

As per the title of the love, Sahgal portrays most of her characters making plan for departure for different reasons. Most of Sahgal’s
characters are constantly making plans for departure because most of them are essentially aliens and bring out the ephemeral nature of their mutual association. The centrality of the Himapur experience is spread over twelve chapters. The thirteenth chapter describes Anna’s return to England and her marriage, the Great War and Henry’s death. In the concluding chapter, we see Anna as wife, mother and Member of Parliament. The novel ends with a moving picture of her in extreme old age with Gayatri by her side. Looking back over her much splendorised life in which Himapur represents the irresistible lure of what might have been:

The good, satisfying memories folded peacefully away.... The once that kept one alive and stirring belonged to lost opportunity...for there was no release from the embrace of things that had never happened. Imagine the horror of getting everything we want, and that lumps and clods we’d be but for our yearning. Oddly enough we are the legacy of our aches, of plans that never came to pass. (Ibidem 213)

The novelist leaves the novel open-ended, without giving the reference of Anna’s death. She stretches the reader’s imagination outwards, extending the meaning of the novel beyond itself.

The time in which the novel is set coincides with Tilak’s trial, the ramblings of the Indian freedom struggle and the outbreak of the First World War with its carnage and self-inflicted destruction. The novel is an artistic metaphor for the historical movement and moments between 1885 and 1914. The novel is replete with copious references to such well-known nationalist leaders as B.G. Tilak, Motilal Nehru, Ranade, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Bhagat Singh, Khudiram Bose and M.K. Gandhi. The
public and the private issues are subtly integrated and resolved on this novel. Apart from weaving into the plot a number of plans for departure, Sahgal synchronizes a number of bigger events and gives her novel a kaleidoscopic perspective.

Sahgal’s recent novel *Mistaken Identity* registers and important stage in her growth as a novelist and branches out in a direction. Possibly, the writer is attempting to understand a country and its cultural-political life, the happenings and events, by adopting the technique of biography. The novel is a significant milestone in Sahgal’s long career as a novelist. It is graphic document of the twilight years of the Raj in India and may well serve as a reference point to many events and actions of the freedom movement. Sahgal had watched history in slow motion. The novel provides a glimpse into Sahgal’s hawk eye for details and sound grasp of the world history. Located in the year 1929, it places itself in a historical setting where the politics of the period is important. The epicenter of the novel is the prison cell where men from different parts of the country, different religions and political beliefs are put together.

*Mistaken Identity* is again a political novel imbued with socio-political events in India during the British Raj. It was the time when the country was gradually awakening to nationalism and witnessing unrest, strikes and mass arrests. Here, the novelist combines the life stories of individuals with the history of the nation. The world of politics and personal relationship run parallel in her novels. In *Mistaken Identity*, we get rapid glimpses of the stirrings of the 20s and 30s, the time of strikes, suspicion and Hindu-Muslim unrest. Gandhiji’s Dandi March, Civil Disobedience movement, execution of Bhagat singh and the anger erupted throughout the country has been vividly portrayed by her.
Besides referring to Gandhi and Kamal Pasha, the historical scene is made more immediately relevant by citing the Lahore Conspiracy case involving Bhagat Singh and others who had avenged the death of Lal Lajpat Rai. The novelist refers:

_The Lahore Conspiracy Case is closed—with three hangings.... Bhagat Singh and its two close colleagues were executed in Lahore jail yesterday, march, 23 and surreptitiously cremated on the banks of the Sutlej River—Gandhi is out of jail but he could not get the exciting stayed_ (Sahgal, Mistaken Identity 157).

Gandhiji’s salt march to the sea at Dandi has been vividly described in the novel as:

_A civil disobedience campaign is in full swing. Our newspaper says immense crowds cheered him on and thousands joined the march. People are manufacturing salt in pans all over the country_ (Ibidem 98).

_Mistaken Identity_ is written from the point of view of Bhushan Singh, the protagonist, the son of the Raja of Vijaygarh. While on his way home from college in America in 1929, he is arrested on a mistaken charge of sedition. He has to spend almost three years in jail where in his companions are idealistic followers of Mahata Gandhi and militant trade union leaders, both trying to win freedom in their own ways. The hero’s interaction with them is at times quite comic. As the months of awaiting trail stretch into years, Bhushan entertains his communist cell-mates with tales of his colorful past—of his veiled mother; of his very modern Parsee girlfriend; of the American flapper who taught him the Turkey Trot; of his forbidden boyhood affair which ignited two blood-spilling Hindu-Muslim riots and led to his banishment abroad.
The narrator of the novel is Bhushan Singh, the lovelorn son of the Raja of Vijaygarh. After long months of sojourn abroad, he is arrested and thrown into jail on charges of treason against the Empire. He is in fact a case of mistaken identity. The narrative shuttles back and forth in time-space as the colorful past of Bhushan hangs tantalizingly in air and the political events of the day appear as a running commentary. As Bhushan becomes friendly with other political prisoners, he tells stories from his colorful past. Essentially his imagination is captivated by a Muslim girl, Razia, whom he had courted briefly in his youth. He tells them of his boyhood affair with this lovely Muslim girl that sparked off communal riots and subsequently led to his banishment abroad. He also tells them of his life in America, a life full of freedom and of his rejecting the offer of a movie-star role there. But he longs for his love and tries to return home and search for her. During his travel, he is arrested by the police in Bombay and jailed on the charge of sedition. Finding himself in the company of common criminals and self-confessed communists, Bhudhan desperately tries to get released but in vain.

In the novel, Bhushan’s personal life becomes intricately connected with the political. His reminiscences of his trips abroad connect his present with his past and through it, he tries to find meaning in his present as well as the uncertain future. The novel which is for all practical purposes is Bhushan’s story, of his mistaken identity, and of his several love affairs. First of all, Bhushan tells the story of his love affair with Razia, the Muslim girl of sixteen years old. Trapped in her religious and cultural confines, she is attracted by the fleeting moments of freedom the strange boy Bhushan offers her. He falls in love with Razia, whose face tells a history:
I thought of her face. It took me years to decipher its spells and understand why it haunted me. It defied unwritten laws. The Tartar cheekbones of the face should have had slanting eyes above them, but hers were long ovals, the Lidded eyes of temple sculpture. Their width took me unawares when they pounced upon her tonga. It was the manifest racial impurity, a mix belonging to a vision of future, of communal union that made it unforgettable, and retreat impossible for me. (Ibidem 49)

Razia’s face is an image of his own creation, a representation of his own desire. But Razia has no special feelings for Bhushan. As Sahgal confirms in one of her interviews:

*She was not in love with Bhushan Singh. This is clear from the beginning. You read that she is anxious to get back to her class. She enjoys herself, but she is not besotted. He is besotted. (Varalakshmi 9-18)*

The relationship between Razia and Bhushan sparks off Hindu-Muslim riots at Vijaygarh and her father request Bhushan’s father to get him transferred out of Vijaygarh. When their affair is disclosed, it ignites communal violence. There is a lot of blood-shed and his father sends him to America, where Mr. Goldbager’s daughter Willie-May has plans for him to become an actor. He had tried to grope towards some definition of womanhood in Razia whose counterpoint is Willie-May:

*The women of this country had the mathematical proportions of buildings, a dome-and-minaret beauty that made the beauty of other races look unplanned and haphazard. Their anatomies knew where to grow and stop growing … The milk Willie May poured into her*
body by the glassful seemed to flow forcibly onto her curves. Her skin glowed with chicken-gravy, creamed corn and blueberry muffins. Every line of her had succulent meat juices and fruit juices locked into it. (Sahgal, Mistaken Identity 102-03).

Special significance of Bhushan’s love for Willie-May identifies him with the burden of belonging. Obsessed with his childhood love and unable to make any plans for his life except to find her again, Bhushan returns to India to become an exile nearer home in Bombay. He becomes the friend and lover of Sylla, a vagrant and modern Parsee girl, but even her energy and devotion are not enough to heal his wound. Sylla is a modern girl, who smokes and wears stylish Western out-fits. They develop healthy, ideal and perfect love relationship. Bhushan is a man with no ambition, no occupation, he tells Sylla, “You are may nest from storm, plague, pestilence, not to mention the Hindu-Muslim love-madness that rages in my middle ear”, (Ibidem 143) and so he needs her. But Sylla needs him or she can come to him whenever she wants him, Bhushan needs her love and company to come out of the Hindu-Muslim love-madness. Bhushan accepts that his religion is Hindi-Muslim and his mother-tongue poetry. He makes his answer more specified by adding that his mother-tongue is Hindi and father-tongue is Urdu. His mother is a traditional Hindi women; she can read only the Hindi script. His father has no knowledge of Hindi, he writes Urdu. Bhushan develops a composite culture-religion which is not accepted by common people, whether British of Indian.

After his release from the jail, Bhushan comes to Vijaygarh, plans to go to Bombay to meet Sylla and marry her and live a carefree modern life. On the other hand, Sylla thinks that they cannot marry because
Bhushan has no faith in any god. She decides to marry Nauzer, a Parsee young rising star, the advocate. Thus, Bhushan’s identity as a true lover is mistaken by Sylla also. Here, the novel reaches its climax and Bhushal comes from romance down to reality. He decided not to come in the way of Sylla again. He decides to stop moving from Vijaygarh to Bombay, from Hindu-Muslim love madness to carefree modern life At Vijaygarh, he meets Yosuf, his cell-mate in jail and the communist social reformer. Yusuf proposes Bhushan to write songs, inspiring revolution in Vijaygarh, but Bhushan, can write poems only about Razia, in the Hindu-Muslim harmony line. Finally, he finds fulfillment in his marriage to comrade Yusuf’s daughter.

In Mistaken identity, the action flows back and forth in the stream of consciousness method. Bhushan’s personal life becomes intricately connected with the politics. The story of the contemporary political life is narrated through the experiences of the protagonist Bhushan Singh and his cell-mates in the prison. Sahgal states in “A passion called India” in Authors Speak:

"My just published novel, Mistaken Identity, is partly about religious fanaticism. I talk and writer a good deal about Hinduism, but I am, of course, half-Muslim by culture, part Christian by education, and beholden to far-flung countries for the literature that forms part of my consciousness. My opportunities have given me a foot in two worlds, so I feel as comfortable in the skin of an English character as an Indian one. (247)

Thus novel is connected with the pressures, the cultural design, and the social, political and historical forces of India’s past, present and future. Full of mystery and gentle humor, Mistaken identity is a story of love and
obsession that brilliantly summons up the turmoil of India in the twilight years of empire. In the novel, Sahgal frames her narrative against a turbulent period of Indian history. The novel draws the currents and cross-currents engulfing the country and other parts of the world in the first three decades of the last century. The title of the novel itself suggests it mock-heroic representations of the historical reality. The central idea in the novel seems to be the absurdity of a dogmatic attitude to the question of identity itself. The novel is provides a historical perspective in which the ideal of Hindu-Muslim Unity has been projected.

Sahgal has the unique distinction of being the only socio-political novelist on the Indian English literary scene. Her novels not only constitute an impressive segment of the Indian English novels but also sum up the saga of India’s struggle for freedom and the changes it brought about in the traditional social set-up in India. Her fictional works have a strong realistic base and reflect not only her personal values but also the changing values of a society exposed for the first time to both freedom and power. Her social, cultural and political milieu has always been pukka Indian.

Sahgal’s major contribution to the art of fiction in Indian English writing has been her deep involvement and concern with politics, she has broadened the scope of the political novel, widening its area of content and adding a new dimension to it. In her novels, politics not the concern only of politicians, but is and all pervasive influence, affecting life at all levels. Socio-political consciousness is also seen profusely in women characters portrayed by Narantara Sahgal. In fact, women are immensely affected by political events such as the Emergency. By underscoring socio-political reality in her fictional discourse Nayantara Sahgal indirectly focuses on social and political marginalization of women in India.
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