Chapter II

Historical Consciousness

A noteworthy aspect of Nayantara Sahgal's political chronicling is that she captures the essence of some real historical figures so authentically and in so, large a measure that their fictional counterparts immediately reveal the originals. Sohan Bhai, depicted Happy not only has been influenced by the, Mahatma (87-88), he is directly suggestive of Gandhi with his spinning, his broad humanitarianism, his from others' eyes. The unnamed PM in Morning and Shivraj, the Prime Minister in Situation both visionaries as well as tireless workers for their ideals, are clearly drawn from the figure of Jawaharlal Nehru. Prakash Shukla in Morning, with his anti-corruption zeal, resembles Pheroze Gandhi. Kailas Vrind, the Chief Minister of U.P. in Morning, in his commitment to high ideals in politics, in his concern for human values, and in his scholarship reminds one of the novelist's father, Ranjit Sitaram Pandit Kalyan's ego-mania, his preference for personal loyalty over ideology, his rhetorical propensity—in fact that totality of his public image immediately brings to mind Krishna Menon, active on the political scene in the late fifties and early sixties. Gyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab in Storm with his earthiness, his zest for action uninhibited by norms is
suggestive of his real life counterpart around that period, Pratap Singh Kairon, Vishal and Raj Garg seem fictional prototypes of E.N. Mangat Rai, an ICS officer at the centre, who had felt on his pulse, as he himself explains in his *Memoir, commitment My Style*, the growing authoritarianism within the haloed precincts of administration. Usman, the academician, bringing to politics a fresh whiff of idealism and personal involvement resembles Jayaprakash Narayan, a staunch Gandhian and selfless Sarvodaya worker who had political limelight focused on him in early seventies.

*Rich* is embarrassingly abundant in such parallels. The Madam in the novel who has promulgated the Emergency is Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the son who uses the official pull to make his small-car project a success, is Sanjay Gandhi. The novel faithfully records quite a few of the developments historically set in motion by them: the family planning and afforestation drives, the move for Japanese collaboration in the small car project etc. However, the novel goes beyond this to include a number of things attributed in popular imagination to the duo-nepotism, attempts to foist family rule, PM's designs to make herself President and to bring her son to power by the back door, violation of all norms in making the Prime Minister's son an entrepreneur overnight, government-arranged rallies to hail
the promulgation of Emergency and so on. Jayaprakash's arrest for his anti-government activities, his incarceration under Emergency-provisions, his deteriorating health—all historically verifiable facts figure in the novel and they are accompanied by the apprehension that the authorities would not let him out alive-again reflection of a wide spread fear.

Nayantara Sahgal, in a letter, played down some of the parallels suggested here, lying emphasis on the fictional roles these characters play in view of the thematic totality of the work they figure in. It would certainly be hazardous to overemphasize such resemblances and thereby oversimplify matters. It is true that in their moments of impatience with the stubbornness of their countrymen in clinging to their outworn traditions even in the face of new problems, Kalyan, Sumer and Rishad also exhibit shades of Jawaharlal Nehru. But what is significant is how such characters even though suggestive of some historical figures, do merge themselves into the narrative and represent some one easily comprehensible "approach" or another with a clear preference for definite political stands which condition all their actions. Once related to a fictional situation, they round off their angularities and respond to its demands both personal and political.
In all her novels Nayantara Sahgal uses political chronicling for a perceptive analysis of the political process. The steadily growing un-scrupulousness, the accumulating problems and the diminishing will to take hard decisions, the long term vision succumbing to short sighted populism—all these could not but undermine the democratic superstructure.

The Storm in Chandigarh is historical and not merely fictional—the culmination of the populist, parochial, obscurantist forces brought to a head by the government policy of the linguistic reorganization of the states of the Indian Union. The novel traces the growth of abrasive political culture percolating upwards from die states to the centre. The reference to "the congress cracking up" (Morning.24) "the clash of personalities" (Morning 24) gives the novel a firm grounding in the post-Nehru phase.

However it is Shadow which brings a more complete picture of the political scenario of the late sixties. Here the novelist chooses to cast her net wider instead of merely probing into some one aspect in its minutiae. Shadow depicts the post-Nehru scene with "more fever than calm" (storm 149) in Delhi, "the belligerent new politicians" (3) coming to the fore, the bureaucracy shedding its anonymity to assume a vague
unobtrusiveness (Storm 3). The fissiparous forces splitting the nation along parochial lines, which were subjected to scrutiny and analysis in Storm here assume multifold manifestations in a conducive climate for "the government since the recent split in its own party, needed every vote it could get and the scene in the lobbies before a major debate could look like the Stock Exchange on market day" (Storm 151) To catch the imagination of the people, slogan-mongering was at a feverish pitch, with socialism the newest 'catch word' (163). In this frenzied game with no holds barred, only the discerning could foresee how the "socializing ballyhoo", would gather together if not checked in time, an "avalanche in driblets" (229) and wipe out not only the rich but also "the growing, struggling, middle class". (148)

**Situation** is set ostensibly in the sixties. But in its capturing of the desperation and the urgency of the situation, it suggests the immediate pre-and post - Emergency political scene. Rather than attenuating the "mute agony" of the people, the attempt of the government was directed towards covering it up. There is a general drift in the direction of more controls over newspapers, films, books and so on, more censorship. (106). Through a brutal show of strength and through tracing "intricate maps of bums.(Situation 103)
On the bodies of those who dare to raise their voice against the apathy of the government the authorities seek to cow down all dissent. The novel presents graphically the indifference of the Western countries to a nascent democracy. Taking it for granted that the democratic experiment would fail in the poly religions, multi-cultural and pluralistic society in India, they "led the chorus prophesying chaos instead of supporting...[her] Herculean labours" (Situation. 5-6) Now they seek to support tacitly the repressive measures of the government, topping it all with seemingly wise comments in an I-told-you-so vein: "it is an Asian country...And therefore we can't apply our yardsticks here" (emphasis in original) (107). "These people need a strong leader" (Situation 107). Situation truthfully captures the western attitude to democracies in the Third World, especially India: the refusal to think anew, to have a dose look at the situation, to help where help was needed.

Rich (1985) takes the story farther in the same setting—here it is one month after the declaration of the Emergency. The present is sought to be seen through a selective filtering of the memorable past—of a totally different flavour altogether. One is led through the epoch-making Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi (Rich.59), the fierce Quit-India movement and
the communist betrayal of the national cause at that crucial hour (Rich 99) the lightning 'mutiny' by the Navy in Bombay, the fall of Singapore, the INA trials (Rich.142-43). There flits before one's gaze a skeletal and fanatic who couldn't speak his own language, [who] hardly ever wore any but English clothes (72)—the man who singlehandedly brought about the partition of die country. The movement of a vast army of refuges, their Pro-Jana Sangh leanings the assassination of the Mahatma, the visionary Nehru and then the underrated but equally devoted and dynamic. Shastri as Prime Minister is suggested almost effortlessly to give finishing touches to the scenario before "populism burst upon us" (Rich.153). This retrospection, which is diffused all over, doesn't reduce the novel to a loose sally of the mind'. Rather it creates an environment wherein the present transgression—the proclamation of Emergency—is to be faced. The chronicling of the past is solely motivated by the design to demonstrate the sea-change which the leaders, their means, sense of ends and also the institutions have undergone. The Emergency in all its political and human fallout is graphically painted: trade unions crushed, news blacked out, bureaucracy politicized, in short, the silence of suspended animation has descended on the nation. Delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children entrepreneurs and other pass through the motions of praising the leader for timely wisdom.
Congregations and conferences mushroom to take on the chant. There are also woven into the narrative factual bits like the blinding of criminals (Rich.30) and the raid on J.N.U. (Rich.185).

Nayantara Sahgal fairly reflects the new crop of post-Independence leaders. In one respect the leaders may themselves fell roofless but their demagogy, their "swearing by the masses and not by God" (Situation. 20) does imbue them with a "crude, elemental attraction". As is said of Gyan and others of his ilk in Storm, their very narrowness gave their arguments a crude strength ....that no larger vision could ever have" (Situation. 126). "Uncomplicated in....their functioning" (Storm 78), such leaders, hold forth an apparent panacea for the perennial problems of the people and meet with a ready constituency in masses afflicted with a perpetual anxiety-syndrome and waiting. However, in all her works, Nayantara Sahgal seeks to explain how such attempts represent "a complete repudiation of India's assimilative, absorptive tradition-this genius for being able to contain and cradle its contradictions."(voice 52) The novels show how this humanitarian perspective along with the political structures involved, "the climate of debate and dissent it bad built, and the human give-and-take it had engendered.....began to be eroded. The political atmosphere began to be reduced to a
simple formula of for-and-against, either-or. The greatest casualty was "the huge and heroic experiment of development with consent, development with compassion. Storm and Situation are built around "the narrow, rigid atmosphere about us", (voice 64) says the author. These two novels, "reflected the mounting unease and, at times, the feelings of impending disaster I had as' I wrote them." Shadow points to the attempt to "reduce the political scene to cut-arid-dried categories which are far from factual." (voice 62) Situation analyses the impossibility of simple definitions, for "Left and Right cannot be divided up like sheep and goats at opposite ends of a political pole." (voice 62) The novel records her "mounting horror of the Gtdg Archipelago growing invisibly about us." (voice 18) Even a cursory leading through any account of the current history of Indian Politics e.g., Kuldip Nayar's Between the lines, India After Nehru. The Critical Years, In Jail. Durga Das's India Form Curzon to Nehru and After, would vouch for the validity of the picture drawn in its minutiae by the novelist.

What is perhaps Nayantara Sahgal's singular-most achievement is her perceptive depiction of the political scene. She gazes at the politics of the time so minutely that even mere straws in the present air spring into view as tokens of typhoons in store. "It is a tribute to her as a political novelist that
she could sense and show the danger in the new trend...years before die country had actually experienced the culmination of such a trend." (voice 102) Storm anticipates the "manoeuvre outside political channels and conventions, outside the party and outside the cabinet", (voice 57) "the street rallies and demonstrations efficiently organized ...and the languages of excitement and incitement...used to stir up the people" (voice 57)...all characteristic of the Indian political scene after the Congress split in 1969. Storm also foreshadows the arresting the natural development of post-Nehru leadership within Congress, so that a nation accustomed to Jawaharlal Nehru's heart searching and eloquence, a party once led by towering intellectuals should now be at the mercy of what Sahgal calls "a handful of midbrains with three-and-a-half catch phrases between them in place of a vocabulary. (Voice 106)

"Fiction often overshadows fact", (voice 107) Nayantara Sahgal agrees. She is herself aware of the anticipatory nature of her perceptive political analysis in her novels:

Storm based on the second division of die Punjab and the creation of Haryana State, with both...demanding Chandigarh as the capital was written a year or more before this even came to pass voice of freedom (108)
The Day in Shadow had had an accompanying background to Simrit's divorce settlement, the growing Soviet influence on our sub-continent and definite Indian tilt in that direction. I finished writing the book in February 1971. The Indo-Soviet Treaty, a landmark of its kind embodying the tilt was not signed until August that year. The "situation" creeping up on us in A Situation in New Delhi—a book I had completed writing in January 1975—was upon us in June, and I myself was hung with it. (Voice 20)

By fore-shadowing the inevitable political reality through her deft portrayal of human actors, who are caught in circumstances where die political gets inextricably intertwined with the personal, Nayantara Sahgal obviously accomplishes a great deal more than what is generally expected of a novelist. One significant aspect of the treatment of political consciousness in the novels of Sahgal is that the narrative is frequently interspersed with objective accounts of the political developments.

Rich quotes from "original documents with National Archives of India" to buttress the Sali-episode (Rich 6). Though it is in the backdrop, it is given a central role in providing Sonali,
the protagonist, the motivation to oppose the emergency. The repeated references to Gandhi (pp. 100, 101, 113, 114, 115) are obviously meant to highlight the sea-change in the scenario.

Obviously far from being inartistic excrescence the incorporation of verifiable development of the period wherein the novel is set meets the artistic requirement of contributing to the tenor of the narrative. What is of equal significance is the manner in which it establishes" the texture of the created society", which is deemed by Michael Wilding to be an important ingredient of political fiction. Orwell, writing about future had to invent his documents, to cater to this requirement of Nineteen Eighty four. Bhattacharya, Malgonkar and Sahgal put history to creative use in their novels. They bring their artistic armoury to play and infuse colour and blood into the bare facts of history. Political events are charged with human emotions and history, far from remaining a lump of dead facts, merges itself into the current of human lives. From a mere chronological iteration of past happenings, history emerges in these novels as a moving spectacle of human aspirations and endeavours to realize them.

Nayantara Sahgal's Rich Like Us (1985) and Plans for Departure (1986) are different from her earlier work in several ways.
They depict the historical biography of the writer who has treated the current political situations in her writings. Though on the face of it they continue the thematic explorations of her earlier work, they are different in both character portrayal and narrative structure. Sahgal appears to have successfully thrust aside the autobiographical element, what she is now writing is political biography. *Rich Like Us*, like the later novel *Plans for Departure*, is the story of a country told with interest, humour and sardonic wit. None of the traditional approaches will work. There are no protagonists in the conventional sense. The protagonist is India and it provides a centre for different points of view to converge on.

Biography attempts to reconstruct the life of a person and to trace the major influences which may have shaped his character and life. The narrative approach is analytical, trying to put the various pieces of the puzzle together to form a pattern. It differs from autobiography for it need not have the element of self-reflexivity autobiographical narration may have biography of autobiography, it is always committed to the history that the writer lives that that lives with. It also does not necessarily follow a linear development, and may at times be meticulously concerned with the details which appear significant with the advantage of hindsight. Biography necessarily looks at
events from a distance. In these novels, Sahgal is concerned with India and its past, and attempts to account for the course of events in interpretative terms.

Rich Like Us is a double-edged title, ambiguous and divided even in its double meaning. Who is “rich”, and who is “us”? From the point of view of foreigners, Indians are aspiring to be rich like them. But the title from the Indian point of view is ironic in another sense. It is a pity to be rich in the way we are. From amongst the Indians, the rich, corrupt business people, bureaucrats, politicians are rich in a material sense, but bankrupt in terms of human values. The poor cripple, in contrast, is rich with his own wealth of defiance, courage and royalty. The novel, even though its title, moves further back into India's "rich" heritage and examines its present "richness" of economic and political manipulations. It raises several questions: who is rich like us? are we really rich—and if so, in what way? and finally, is it worth being like Rose's stepson Dev? The reference is right in the beginning of the novel. Neuman had been briefed before the trip:

The first thing those local elites do... is to get themselves the biggest, latest model foreign cars, and
why not? We like the way we live. We can't blame them for wanting to live like us.(Rich 7)

Beginning with an ironic, title with multiple meanings the novel moves constantly between the past and the present through two consciousnesses, one of Rose and the other of Sonali. Rose is an English-woman from a working class background, speaking cockney English, but bold enough to cross all racial and class barriers. Rose had broken an almost settled engagement with Freddie in order to marry Ram, a Lahore businessman, when the British were still ruling India. She had married for love, and had incongruously enough, done so with full knowledge of Ram's first marriage and the existence of a son. Thus the adjustment required of her was at many levels, requiring not only the acceptance of a joint family system, but also the feeling of guilt aroused by the presence of Ram's first wife and her child. She had abandoned all-her home, her country, her parents, even the familiar structure of love and marriage. The only thing she had not abandoned was a feeling of herself as a person, as a human being.

Sonali is contrasted with Rose. She is an IAS officer in a free country and has all the advantages-parental support, an education abroad, and above all a mind of her own. But having
all this she is willing to detach herself from her background and look at it critically—her mother’s caste feelings, her sister’s social graces, her colleague’s manipulations—all leave her cold. But Sonali and Rose come together in the battles they fight in post-independent India, ‘with the area of their freedom becoming smaller and smaller the die battle gets fiercer.

There are other characters and other points of view which reveal helplessness of the bewilderment of the past in the face of the new uncertain future. These include figures like Dev’s father-in-law, and Sonali’s father. But for the main part there is Rose’s part of the story, narrated in the third person, with Sonali’s first-person narration moving to and fro between the past and the present. There is also the middle ground inhabited, by Dev, Rose’s stepson, and Ravi Kachru, Sonali’s child-hood friend, colleague and one-time suitor. The meeting point is provided by the foreign collaborator Neuman.

Neuman is responsible for the generation of action. Sonali is in political disgrace because she has failed to understand the importance of this collaboration; Kachru is on the rise because of his ability to have understood it. Dev's financial position begins to improve from this point onwards, and politics for once rules all other spheres of life, ranging from the
economic to the personal. It is not merely the perpetuation of power, but it is the calling into the being of new alignments and those who fail to these are left out in the cold. What is it that goes into the making of a people—their past heritage or the present pressures of existence? And, more important than this is the question? what goes into the making of history: the quality of men, or the events?

Rose's life provides some of the answers. She never had the advantages which accompany family background or education, or even marriage, but she proves herself quite capable of bridging the inequalities at two levels—the economic inequality where Ram has all the advantages, and the political inequality where she belongs to the race of the rulers. She is able to do this because she is conscious of herself as an individual and compels others to recognize this. Her husband had "learned to respect her for the individual she was." (40) Life is harsh: her parents die, there are moments of doubt, of being and remaining alien, the country's division, shift to Delhi, Ram's illness; all these happenings take their toll but she is still capable of reaching out to people and extending sympathy and warmth.

Alternating with the accounts of Rose's life and thoughts are Sonali's accounts of her life. (Chapters 2, 4,7,9, 11, 13,19
and 21 are all first-person narrations by Sonali). Sonali realizes that her administrative training has not prepared her for handling the new situation which has arisen out of political concerns dominating the administrative:

Once upon a time who had thought of the civil services as "we" and politicians as "they," two different sides of the coin. "We" were bound by more than discipline. We partook of a mystique. Our job was to stay free of the political circus. We were successors to the I.C.S., the "steel frame" the British had ruled India with, but with more on our hands since independence than the steel frame had had in two hundred years... The distinction between politics and the service had become so blurred over the last few years it had all but disappeared. The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politicians meddling in administration, and favourites like Kachru, the prime example, playing politics as if his life depended on it. (24)

Sonali is unwilling to bend the rules to suit people, or to liberally interpret them. Therefore she has to be transferred and demoted all in one stroke. All along she is against the current. Idealism, heritage, character, integrity, value
structure, even personal relationships - all are outdated!
Sonali’s problem is that she has to unlearn all that she has learnt so far. The quality she is being asked to give up is courage—a quality which she has inherited and has nurtured. Though individually idealistic and brave, she has also been naive and politically ignorant. When she is pushed out of the corridors of power, she begins to realize how the rot had set in, how silence had led to further demands on one’s loyalty—and how loyalty and courage had begun to seem incompatible:

Nothing anywhere made sense, since in a moral universe either everything must have meaning or nothing. Memory dragged me backwards to reports I had read with momentary shock and then deliberately pushed away because they were too terrible to remember. (29-30)

Reports of bride burning, of prisoners being murdered, of justice being denied, of resistance being suppressed, reports she had ignored perhaps in the interests of survival, winch survival is also being threatened now:

And how naive the cast-iron idealism I had been brought up with, believing we were moderate, tolerant people, steeped in civilized ways, I should have been differently taught, told how casual we are about
cruelty, depravity. I had grown to adulthood nourished on monumental lies. But the end of my illness I had sloughed off my upbringing, the orgy of idealism I had been fed, the second skin of it I wore. It was a relief to tell myself in die dark on one of those interminable nights, "In many ways we are barbarians. All the evidence says so." (30)

There was no logic in the happenings in the political world. The only logic that worked was one of power. Against it, heritage, human values, idealism, justice were all nothing. Even marriage was a way of reaching the right people. If the civil services found the bottom knocked out of its structure, the intellectuals and the upper classes also crumbled like nine pins. Political rights, it was felt, were the privilege of the upper classes and if the lower classes were being sacrificed, there was no cause to be unhappy. After all social justice had to begin from somewhere. Conversation at dinner party at Kiran’s house "was milky and mild, the leisurely exchange of people on the winning side, who don't have to lose their tempers in the argument" (82) The lawyer and the editor talk about the hereditary principle in politics, not worried about the value of character at all. Dev was successful, and as a winner he was exempt from all criticism. There was no need to consider his
bonafides as a man. In Sonali's opinion he's a dunce, but his unreliability and mediocrity no longer have any importance. They cease to be negative qualities because he is now chairman of the New Entrepreneurs. It is the strategic "location" of a man which is valuable: nothing less and nothing more. People had ceased to be individual or to have opinion; there were simply two categories, those in power and those out of it.

The indifference to human beings has not descended on us all of a sudden, the contradictions lie in India's past which holds ample evidence of greed, cruelty, apathy and wrong. There is need to be more analytical and self-critical. Sonali is fighting not only against the stranglehold of the political system but also against the myths which persist about a glorious past. In the end she realizes that it has to be a constant fight. Others who have nurtured their idealism have been fighters like her father, the boy in the Connaught Place, the cripple Rose has adopted, and Rose herself.

From a narrative point of view though the two strands adopt contrastive techniques, both move backwards in time. Sonali's memories of the past and her father's records allow us to see the idealism nourished by idealism. Rose has her own memories, of England, of her English friends, and her husband's business.
The cleanness which invested these relationships contrasts sharply with Dev's collaboration with Neuman. Rose and Sonali are two of a kind and their affinity goes to prove the value of individual strength.

In terms of time the period covered is less than a year, but in terms of history it stretches back into the past. Ravi's shame-faced confession of failure gives Sonali her freedom, the possibility of a continuity of the hope and idealism of the past makes her look forward to the future. India has been through a lot and has recovered from many setbacks. There is every reason to hope that it'll come out of its present political crisis where values and value structure have been jostled and shelved. There is hope that people may be able to conquer narrow claims or narrow pre-occupation with the present—as people like Dev are. Rose saw the symptoms of this malady in Dev:

He had nothing in his head except the present. There's no more to him than that, she thought, no dreams at all. Even—especially—the mad have dreams. He hasn't even the saving grace of natural, harmless madness. Locked up in the present like in a cell, he's a lunatic of another kind, cut off from continuity before or behind. (141)
And Rich Like Us examines the possibility of going on dreaming against the current activity which now needs to be supported by action. It is not enough to dream by itself.

Plans for Departure adopts a different narrative mode, but here also there are at least two points of view projected through the narration. One in Anna Hansen, who, like Rose, is an outsider to begin with. She is, again like Rose, outside the imperial ruling class. Thus her version is one of a sympathetic and yet an objective narrator. Anna Hansen is Danish, and not directly involved in colonial issues. She stands outside both—the native and the imperial circles. India, Sir Nitin, Tilak, Brewster and his estranged wife Stella, Marlowe and Lulu—she sees them from outside until she goes on being drawn towards involvement. The second consciousness is that of Sir Nitin in the background—gentle, perturbed, feeling things are getting out of control—but there it is. The novel opens with Anna Hansen landing up as a secretary in Sir Nitin's household. The tall foreign girl puzzles him, appears to be of indeterminate age and an indeterminate religion. He wonders why she has come to India. Anna, on the verge of getting married to Nicholas, suddenly decides to travel and to discover her own identity, "to break out and be me. (62)" As a result Anna comes to India, and is now
involved in the Brahmo-Samaj movement, the efforts of the local missionary, the woman question, Tulsidas's biography and the concept of Henry's wife Stella and the mystery which surrounds her disappearance, and Tilak's six year term of imprisonment.

Anna is the narrative centre where thoughts and actions converge: her letters to Nicholas—are censored by Henry (in his official role), and while talking to her Brewster reveals his view of the British rule. He is aware of another England, one that doesn't preside 'over executions on soil where it has no right to be in the first place. There's new world in the making at home." (128) On the other side is Sir Nitin, formal and upright, and astonished by the speeches of Tilak, not only by their style but by their content. To him they appear to be seditious. He is surprised that "such a tone and sentiments should come out of the Congress, one of the noblest monuments to British rule!" (135)

like Forster's *A Passage to India* and Orwell's *Burmese Days*, Sahgal's *Plans for Departure* is about the divided historical conscience both of the Indians and the British. Henry and Stella disagree on the road to power, and the values of power itself. Sir Nitin and his countryman Tilak have very little in common. The basic conflict is between love and power.
It is also between freedom and power. Anna loves Nicholas but is unwilling to submit to a power relationship. What is applicable to her as a woman, is also applicable to the country to which she has come. Henry loves Stella but the barrier between them is the size of an empire. There is need to know oneself, a need which cannot be sacrificed. Tilak with his demand for a half-load is just doing that, as Anna through her visit to India. Even Tulsidas's wife, when she turns away from his obsessive love, is doing just that. It is character which is important. It is important to have the awareness of oneself, and to make a protest against the power structures—no matter how private or how feeble the protest. Anna points this out in her comment on Tilak:

There must be something extraordinary about a man who can set even these words ablaze, so far from Delhi, and after so many years of absence. (143)

The division of conscience and of opinion is there on every plane, at every level—amongst the British (to every Henry Brewster there are many Pryors), amongst the Indians (the Tilaks are outnumbered by the Sir Nitins), and every Marlowe seems to be hounded by a Lulu. Idealism and oratory have a dangerous habit of getting mixed and confusing issues. Even the very
intelligent are taken in. Sir Nitin was one of them. He had spent

the years of national protest against the partition of
in his laboratory, while the fanatics seized arms and
ammunitions from wherever they could and took to
revolutionary violence, and Bengal's greatest poet
marched across Calcutta at the head of a procession
singing a song he had composed for the occasion. (162)

What was wrong with India was not merely the wrong had
people in power, but also the stooge Indians, the ones who had
been taken in by oratory, and promises of equality, the ones who
had been charmed by the show of liberalism.

Anna Hansen is like a mirror reflecting the lives around
her, and like a mirror is often ruthless and distorts the
reflections to reveal the reality behind the pleasant cover.
Anna Hansen is, in herself, an idea—an extraordinary woman, more
humane than political.

Though the main events in the novel concern the passage of
year, it moves both into the past and the future. Anna's
grandchild Gayatri and her husband Jason, continue the efforts
of distinguishing right from wrong. It is the continuity of this
approach which is Sonali's mainstay amidst the disruptive political actions in *Rich Like Us*; in *Plans for Departure*, the continuity and the hope are evidenced in Gayatri's lineage. Anna's spirit seems to be pushing the world forward. It is as Gayatri says:

She says she invented me. She was so disappointed the world hadn't changed enough in her lifetime, she had to hurry along my father was not the sort to branch out and many a dynamo on the other side of the world all on his own. (211)

A lifetime is not enough. There have to be others to push the world forward, to continue the battle.

Even though Anna Hansen becomes the main consciousness through which the narrative is unfolded, she remains intangible and abstract. It is India, with its confusing ideals, and England with its divided conscience which are real. The war in Europe reflects some of the issues of the sub-continent. The Bosnian youths "stuffed with socialism, nationalism, and anarchism," (63) trained to blow up bridges and to blow up the empire. The Austrian's philosophy of life is echoed by other imperial races, "Timely big wars prevented trig wars." (63-64) The Balkan issues, somewhere, in some mysterious way linked up
with the straggle of the suffragettes, with the need for freedom and love, it is when men want power not love that the result is violence.

At the narrative level the recurring references to Tllak, his speeches, his followers, his imprisonment, his ideals provide one line of continuity, while the wars, the Pryors, the tyrants form another line of narration. Sahgal is not merely giving an account of happenings, or elaborating upon historical events. She is also not describing a political situation, as she has done in some of her earlier work both autobiographical (From Fear Set Free) and fictional (A Situation in New Delhi). Irving Howe, in Politics and the Novel, defines the political novel as one in which political ideas are dominant, the kind in which the idea of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behaviour ...... some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification.(19)

Sahgal’s main concern is not with politics, or with ideology. Her concern is with values, and with analyzing what has gone into the making of a country. To this task she applies herself, bringing in little known facts, ferreting the past,
filling up the gaps, interpreting happenings and what has led to them, reconstructing in fact, a whole country with its complexities of men and views.

The *Plans for Departure*, referred to in the title are many, the title works at various levels. The beginning of the realization that the British would have to leave India is forced on them by such men as Tilak, and women like Anna. Earlier Anna leaves Nicholas in 1913 and comes to India. Stella also leaves India and Henry Brewster. Finally Anna summons her granddaughter to her deathbed and is thus planning for her departure. Journeys are begun, never ended, and every arrival at a destination is a new beginning. But primarily long before the British became consciously aware of the need to free India, at a subconscious level, and also at a personal level, it became increasingly clear that they would have to leave.

In both these novels the multiple vision and point of view of a political biography is at work. It is a narration of history-in-the-making with the advantage of hindsight *Rich Like Us* has a multiplicity of narrative techniques in addition to the variety of point of view, while *Plans for Departure* has Anna as the centre of consciousness. The techniques of fiction are used to arrive at an understanding of a country and its life, to
understand the happenings and events which appear to be separate and limited in scope but actually relate to each other in order to weave a pattern. The novel adapts itself to the techniques of biography, or one can say the other way round that a biographical approach governs the narrative. There is thus a similarity between the approach of the creative writer and the historian, the creative writer using events in order to comprehend the reality of the world. Sahgal’s work is different from an ordinary biography on two counts: first the protagonist is not a person but a country, second the focus is not on major historical happenings, but on the psychological processes and the emotional conflicts which have gone into them. Judith H. Anderson in *Biographical Truth* asserts that the essential truth of biography

> is a matter of perception, insight and judgement, never reducible to act and at times, like life itself, irreconcilable with certain kinds of fact... To a greater or lesser extent, biography is inseparable from fiction (13).

Sahgal depends not only on fact, on psychological understanding, on cultural analysis, but also makes no attempt to present a unified picture. She presents India with all its contradictions, depicts the political situation with all the ulterior undercurrents, and succeeds in presenting the ideal and
the real working against each other, the real undermining the ideal and the ideal resisting erosion. There may not be fidelity to fact, imagination and ideology have a dominant role to play, but there is in the end a comprehensible totality.

Sahgal's fiction is avowedly political. As the noted critic Elleke Boehmer points out, in Sahgal "fictional lives run in parallel to history, domestic plots reflect national events" (196). Dennis Walder discussing Rich Like Us argues that Sahgal's fiction deals "explicitly with historical and political realities on a larger national, even international level" (Walder: 102-3). Walder, in a curious interpretation, goes on to contrast Sahgal with Narayan, suggesting that she "lacks Narayan's sense of local detail" (103). The local details describe a historical count of a fiction. This is evident with Sahgal. We could see Sahgal's enormous attention to local details and topographies, and look specifically at Sahgal's spatial politics, arguing that the setting and spatiality are integral to our understanding of her themes and concerns.

The university campus in A Situation in New Delhi is the central public space in the novel. The university as the site of learning functions as a preparatory site, a sort of pre-site for the students' entry
into the "public sphere". It is a site of authority and
discipline and works on a basis of awards and punishments. It is
also a site where agents or actors function in a particular
manner for certain ends. The Vice-Chancellor of this University
is busy preparing a plan for the revitalisation of the Indian
education system itself. He hopes to renew the ideology and
ideals of the great leader Shivraj (whose death marks the
deterioration of political ethics in the novel, as Shivraj's
sister and her circle constantly mourn). This public space is a
site where a new experiment is being conducted: one which will
enhance the quality of student life, reinforce ideals and create
a reservoir of ideas. Thus the university is at the spatial
heart of a projected renaissance of India itself. Sahgal's theme
of the deterioration of India's ideals and culture is imaged
with the transformation of this very idealised tops of the
university.

A student is raped within the official space of the
Registrar's office. The students go on strike, riot and finally
assault the Vice-Chancellor in his own chambers. The Vice-
Chancellor, with a broken arm and several small bruises, refuses
to call the police, believing that there is no "place" for the
police on a site of learning. He resigns and sets about
organising a public movement which he leads onto the streets.
The entire theme of disillusionment revolves around the university incident. The public space of the university expects certain kinds of spatial behaviour: regard for the teachers, the sanctity of learning, and the respect for authority. None of these spatial practices are carried out. Then, the Vice-Chancellor and his officials constitute the iconography of power. Lefebvre's representations of space are precisely these icons. Authority requires icons for its authorization. The paternal "figure" of the Vice-Chancellor (he refers to the students as "children") masks the actual power relations at work within the spatial structure of the university. It is this representation of space that first collapses under the wave of student unrest.

Like the novels of Mulk Raj Anand whose shape is determined largely by their involvement with the history and politics of pre-independence India, Sahgal's novels weave aspects of India'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 fight the British, and the time of emergency in 1975, when its democratic character was rudely shaken—the period that Rushdie covers in a single novel

*Midnight's Children*. Sahgal is different
from him and the other novelists discussed in this chapter in two significant ways. First, she writes about the past without invoking it indirectly that is, avoiding, as far as possible, direct reference to actual events, happenings and people, but in a manner that they become recognizable. Secondly, instead of dealing with long stretches of time, she concentrates on short periods or specific tendencies or issues of crucial import, which have their basis in actuality. She analyzes them in depth, so that the period, the tendency, or the issue is dealt with in its comprehensiveness.

Sahgal's novelistic world is dominated by the selected upper of our society, which includes bureaucrats, politicians, businessmen, big officials, and women, mostly from higher classes. This distinguishes her from a novelist like Anand, whose novels mainly with the lower strata of our society. Since her novels investigate the cultural consequences of the Indo-British connection, English people also figure in them. Like several other novelists, who wrote before and after her, she mixes private and public histories in her work in a pleasing form. Just because she makes use of psychological realism in her presentation of characters and avoids the kind of sweep that one associates with novelists like Rushdie and Tharoor should not make us overlook her claim as a novelist who makes conscious use
of history. Her novels may have a facile exterior, but they are not superficial. If we pay adequate attention to the subtle disguise she resorts to, we can see that her surfaces hide serious explorations into public history. She shows a sensitive response to the social, political, and cultural currents of her immediate past, which she examines and analyzes within the framework of a larger historical past of the country. Even when she deals with the immediate social and political history of the country, her very mode of making sense of it, by seeing it in the context of an older past, gives it the orientation of a historical inquiry.

The major feature and strength of Sahgal's fiction is that she relates the different levels of the country's past through the credible mechanism of a web of human relationships built around avid, thinking, and responsible characters. Drawn as part of a specific time-space continuum, the characters are moulded by events and happenings around them and show a strong awareness of their situation in all its varied dimensions. They constantly interrogate events, happenings, and problems, which are rooted in the actual; they hint at possibilities which could have matured, but did not. Often they even suggest the possible turn of events. Because of this steady and constant interaction between the past and the present in her
novels, they come very close to the conception of a novel in which the two are in a constant dialogue.

Sahgal’s first novel, A Time to be Happy, is located in the time immediately following the freedom of the country, but its narrative space is dominated by pre-independence times. The protagonist recalls his past life, especially the changes in his thinking and actions brought about by Gandhi’s call to the people of India, and combines it with the story of the children of one of his close friends, concentrating in the main on the youngest son Sanad, who finds himself a total misfit in independent India. The narrative has the character of a historical construction, because the narrator shows awareness of the manner in which he writes his account. He recreates past events partly from his memory and partly on the basis of details provided by Sanad.

In her first two novels, A Time to be Happy and This Time of the Morning, the complexities of the Indo-British encounter are analysed with discrimination. She dramatizes its effect on the institutional framework of the country, which in her view is of key importance for understanding the turn of events in post-independence times, because it passed on, virtually without any significant change, from the colonial set-up into the administrative machinery of free India. The novels also bring out the tension between the pre-and post-independence times,
India in terms of the tension between Gandhian and non-Gandhian ideologies of political practice. The next four novels—Strom in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi, and Rich Like Us—have at their center several interesting aspects of the history of post-independence India, with special focus on the problems of political governance. In all of them, the narrator or the protagonist, who functions as a central consciousness, is connected with a significant moment or situation, which is rooted in the actual. By connecting his life with the lives of other characters, this particular movement or situation—weather it is the division of Punjab and the problem of political reorganization of the country, the instability caused by the death of a Prime Minister of a long standing, or the declaration of the state of emergency by Mrs Gandhi—is subjected to a through scrutiny through their actions, attitudes, and thinking. The mechanism is usually the same: the characters are sufficiently individualized, but linked closely with the socio-political scene. They are affected by it; in some cases, even changed and moulded by it. This framework has its limitations. It may not provide the kind of freedom which grotesque characters provide Rushdie in his novels. But it has its own compensating advantages. Sahgal’s work acquires a great degree of credibility and plausibility. Her last two novels are
more self-conscious attempts at dealing with problematic nature of historical reconstructions.

The novel takes off from a crisis in Sanad's life, when he seriously contemplates giving up his job with a reputed foreign company. He finds that the "veneer and gloss" of Englishness which he had acquired during the British rule looked totally unnatural and artificial in independent India. Though it is Sanad's personal problem, Sahgal treats it as the problem of a large section of people in the country, and a cultural issue of far-reaching significance. For understanding it in its wholeness, she locates it in the concrete historical context of pre-independence times, in the 1930s, though, she does not invoke actual names or incidents, and concentrates on the significant changes that the British rule brought about in the cultural climate of the country. Sahgal also tries to suggest that in situations of oppression and tyranny, history can provide a means of hope, not just for surviving, but for getting enthused to fight, for the worst of tyrants had ultimately to yield to popular will.