CHAPTER – II

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS IN THE NOVELS OF SAHGAL

Political consciousness is a lifelong exploration to discover one’s identity, their values, the path of development and the shaping of their generation. It is a journey filled with conflict and growth that can be both energizing and painful. Political consciousness not only involves the questioning of current power and dynamics but also building new forms of more inclusive and transformative power. That transformation leads to the improvement of human life and create bridges of cooperation across culture, racial, ethnic and religious differences.

Literature cannot remain unaffected by the social and the political changes of the society. Political awareness forms an integral part of the artist’s consciousness as a human being. But the artist’s dialogue with the social and the political forces must be subsumed within the creative process which transcends the horizons of society. The primary fragrance of the imaginative experience is characterized by immediacy and closeness. Politics in the novel has to be integrated with the patterns of life traced, and has to function as the germinal nucleus fermenting the human story. Politics, thus, is to be presented in art through the medium of living men and women and their actions.

Nayantara Sahgal is acclaimed as the only political novelist available, at least among women writers of her period. A.V. Krishna Rao observes, “Nayantara Sahgal is perhaps one of our best socio-political novelists today” (Rao, Nayantara 6). She confines her novels to the affluent society involved in politics. Her main contribution thematically has been her deep involvement and 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 humane.
Their personal predicaments, sometimes, run parallel to the political crises they face. Sahgal is the champion of individual freedom which is reflected profusely in her novels. Her novels portray the various social and cultural changes that take place in India and the individual’s response to them. Her familiarity with the society which she portrays in her novels lends them 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.

Nayantara 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 Nehru’s in Allahabad. It is beyond doubt that politics is in her blood. Jawaharlal Nehru was her mother’s brother. Her father died because of an illness he suffered in prison when he was jailed for participating in India’s freedom struggle. As Sahgal herself comments in *The Book I Enjoyed Writing Most*:

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 attracted to 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 (Sahgal, *The book* 41).

Nayantara 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 embedded in her “bones and marrows” (41) and in her “emotional and intellectual make up” (41) to such an extent that she can no longer remain a mere passive spectator to the happenings around her. Her family — parents, cousins, uncles and aunts were very actively engaged in the country's struggle for freedom and were at the centre-stage of the Indian politics. Jasbir Jain aptly describes:

All around them were political and moral ideas were being discussed and formulated and the girls were a part of it. If it was Nehru’s idealism which has influenced her political stance, it is her own father’s gentleness and courage which has influenced her moral values (Jain, *Nayantara* 12).

Nayantara Sahgal has earned a name for herself as a keen and fearless political commentator. Nayantara Sahgal’s writing is famous for keeping in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tinge of Western liberalism. Her novels truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political theme. Her attitude in the novels is tantamount to Nehru. Nayantara Sahgal never professes any specific political ideology or favoring any political creed or political movement. All her major characters of the novel are centripetally drawn towards the vortex of politics. She herself comments in *A Passion Called India*:

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… 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 by that we mean the use and misuse of power—invades our lives every day, both at the private, domestic level, and at the national level (Sahgal, A Passion 244).

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels weave different 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 between the years 1930s and 1980s. In 1930s, there was a mass awakening in the country to rise and revolt against the British Empire, and the time of emergency in 1975. Her novels make covert and some rare overt references to significant political happenings, especially the novels she wrote during 1970s and 1980s. Critics have also considered her as a political novelist or a novelist with political consciousness. She deals with issues related to historical reconstructions more self-consciously. She combines personal and public history by intertwining the past of individual lives with India’s historical past. She has been a witness of the turmoil, both before and after the independence in 1947. Nayantara Sahgal writes in her autobiography Prison and Chocolate Cake:

Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity — a different kind of political maturity from any that the world has seen before, based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion
and peace (*Prison* 15).

In her novels, on one hand, she exposes the power-hungry politicians and their vaulting power-ambition and on the other, she highlights the ardent freedom fighters and their sacrifices for their motherland. She says, “The heroes in my novels were patterned on pre-Independent examples and the villains on contemporary personalities” (Sahgal, *Not* 16). 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 observations of the universal behavior and reactions of the people, her sense of humor and her depiction of the changing social conditions in contemporary India are quite interesting.

The major themes in Nayantara 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.

Important political events can be sensed from the background of Sahgal’s novels. Her first novel, *A Time to Be Happy*, presents the dawn of Indian independence. *This Time of Morning* comes later, when the initial jubilation has worn off. *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with the partition of the Punjab on linguistic lines just when the state had recovered from the trauma of the 1947 partition. *A Situation in New Delhi* presents the Naxalite Movement and student unrest and moreover, the aftermath of Nehru’s death. *The Day in Shadow* is profusely inspired by the political movement of the society. Nayantara Sahgal gives 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 faces. Her novels are concerned with the present depravity of India, and how creative use can be made of its past. It is this concern with the country which led her to protest against the Emergency.

Nayantara Sahgal, born in an illustrious family of freedom fighters, is eminently qualified to write political novel of a high quality. Her first-hand acquaintance with political issues and personages is an enviable asset. Her political characters seem authentic. All her novels integrate the aspects of Indian political and social history into their plots and settings, in particular, representations of colonialism and the struggle for independence, the partition, the breakup of the Punjab, the death of Nehru, the evolution of the Indian political scene in the post colonial context, and India’s state emergency. These larger socio-political events are generally refracted through the lives of individual characters caught up in domestic and personal conflicts that parallel, intersect, and interrupt power struggles in the public sphere.

Nayantara Sahgal gives her novels a strong practical basis, and despite the focus on individuals rather than incidents, the historical reality of these novels is wonderful. The argument put forth by Bhattacharya, is more relevant because it refers to the conversion of a state of political awareness into a dominant emotion of the creative mind:

The true artist writes because he must. If the events of today have moved him so deeply that he must have a creative outlet for his feelings, why should he put those feelings in cold storage, as it were, and leave them there until the present time has slipped into the vista of dim yesterdays? (Srivastava, Literature 5)

The political consciousness, which dominates her literary creations, is real
and inseparable from herself and her surroundings. In the preface to *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Nayantara 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.” (*Prison* 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” (*Prison* 31).

Her novels present the reality of the contemporary scene and they not only analyze the present trends in all their human details, but also foresee the direction in which the political wind would blow next. It can be reasonably maintained that it is her responsibility to the society that she chooses to discharge through the writing of politically conscious novels. Her novels are instilled to the core with an awareness of the political happenings and the manner wherein these circumscribe the potential of the individual for self-fulfillment. They also probe deeper and come out with a diagnosis of the afflictions of the body politic as well as with a suggestive prescription to cure these distortions. With a view to analyze this, she has reacted and represented the very spirit of Indian political ethos in her novels and they have also depicted the agony and the plight of the dislocated people who had been the victim of political game.

Nayantara Sahgal’s concern does not reveal itself through political satire or futuristic anti-utopias; instead it is concerned with the reality of the contemporary situation. She has attempted consistently and comprehensively to analyze the political happenings and trends, revealing all the gaps of political life and exploring all its depths, intrigues and plotting which as much a part of it as sacrifice and dedication. Through her concern with politics, Nayantara Sahgal also projects a wider vision of
the values she upholds and the novel becomes a concern for the quality of life. All her novels are political and her concern with humanistic values is also a political concern. One can say that her concern with politics is a humanistic concern for in her work both are inter-related and equated.

In her novels Nayantara Sahgal is extremely outspoken and factual. She is concerned with wide range of issues but in essence they all reveal her concern for the growth and development of the individual whether the individual be a man or a woman. She firmly believes that “no human problems will be understood or solved unless human beings regard one another as equals” (Sahgal, Meaning 6). And this is also applicable to the relationship between men and women. In this connection, Sahgal highlights the need for sex education and self respect, for a change in the social customs and attitudes. According to Sahgal women are also individuals filled with feelings and marriage is a partnership not an institution. But the whole social setup is geared towards the domination of men over women: in marriage, in sexual relationship, in childbirth and even in adultery it is the woman who is victimized. This is amply illustrated in Sahgal’s novels. Sahgal’s characters display that a new age would begin the day women are accepted and treated as equal partners in human relationships.

Nayantara Sahgal’s work is different from the work of most of her contemporaries in the field of Indo-English fiction in several ways. She does treat the East-West theme but it is not a confrontation between two sets of values or a value judgment on any one of them. The foreigners in her novels are not very important characters and their contribution lies in their individual reactions and response not in any kind of representation of a set of values. So far her locale, like her social and
cultural milieu, has always been Indian. The Westernized middle or upper class Indians are criticized for their Western attitudes and a blind adherence to them and for their alienation from their own background which has reduced their value as individuals. The fault lies not in the values themselves but in their transplantation which has been defective. Similarly it is not possible to categorize her values as a simple confrontation between tradition and modernity, for there is much in tradition that she values and a great deal in modernity which she admires. It is enough to say that for her the test of a value is in the freedom and growth related to a sense of fulfillment.

Nayantara Sahgal is interested in the historical background of a country because, she says in *Passion for India*:

> It would be true to say that what possesses me is a sense of history, rather than political. It is that layer-upon-layer of social / religious / cultural composition that has made us what we are and brought us to where, we stand today, that interest me (Sahgal, *Passion* 82).

Her incessant interaction with Indian politics gets translated into narratives, thereby reflecting her attitude to the past and present day politics in India. Sahgal sincerely admitted once, in *Point of View* “My continuing character is India and my books have been about contemporary hopes and fears, set in political situations, and the implications of political events on people’s lives” (Sahgal, *Point*, 47-48).

The protagonists in her fictions are from different age groups and of varying careers. Her characters are not static and fragmentary but dynamic and whole in terms of the individual as well as cultural consciousness. Thus, for example, Sanad’s problem of identity in *A Time to Be Happy* is the problem of not an isolated individual
but that of whole culture which had been exposed and subjected to the pulls and pressures of an alien rule and politically dominant culture for almost two hundred years. In *This Time of Morning*, it is Rakesh, a young civil servant who views, observes and perceives the politics of opportunism in the corridors of power in New Delhi. In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Vishal Dubey’s personal and domestic crisis is skillfully merged into the general problem of law and order in Punjab in a wake of a linguistic division of that troubled part of India. Lest there should be a merely male-oriented projection of the outer reality, Sahgal chooses Simrit, a middle-aging woman and a divorcée, to focus the old and the new ways of living in New Delhi.

In *A Situation in New Delhi*, it is once again a middle-aged woman, Devi, who is chosen as the protagonist to project the image of changing India in the late sixties. In *Rich like Us*, Sonali, a young woman IAS officer, is the first person observer-participant-narrator who describes the striking details of a constitutional breakdown and the consequences of an unethical exploitation of political institutions to weaken not only the parliamentary democracy established after a hundred years of freedom struggle but also the time-honored cultural and moral values in inter-personal relations.

The novels of Nayantara Sahgal create a need for a total, rather than a separate evaluation of her novels. Nayantara Sahgal’s first six novels, *A Time to be Happy, This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi and Rich Like Us* depict the contemporary Indian political scene of the past forty years, starting from India’s independence in 1947. Sahgal takes her readers to a tour of pre- and post-Independent India.
The protagonists in each successive novel project the views of the novelist in the latest political and historical context. They portray and reveal that there is hope and confidence in the nation even after partition. There is an anguished awareness of acceptance and defeat in 1975 due to the Emergency. Loss of personal freedom, whether it be due to the state or a person, is unacceptable to both Nayantara Sahgal and her characters. This is why her heroines rebel and even break away from the bonds of marriage to find a life of fulfillment elsewhere.

Nayantara Sahgal’s first novel, *A Time to Be Happy* has the references to congress activities and the events of 1942. The novel presents India’s struggle for independence and the changing socio-political life of the country through the characters of the upper middle class. The novel is located in the time immediately after the freedom of the country, but its narrative ore-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 on the basis of details given by Sanad. The problem of Sanad is the search for self-identity and 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 every day. Don’t you see, it has been burned into us? We’re branded with it. My body is in India but my brain doesn’t belong here. I might as well be an Englishman except for the color of my skin. *(Time 234)*

Sanad’s marriage to Kusum coincides with India’s independence in 1947. Sanad and Kusum come to terms with life. Sanad accepts the new changes in the country with an unusual degree of understanding. Kusum gradually recovers from the traumatic experience of Sahadev’s cruel and irrational death and finds the comfort and solace in Sanad.

The novel proposes the point that there is immense difference in the levels of living and thinking of its people and the simultaneous coexistence of several layers of past incidents in the country, which 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 for joining Gandhi’s social and political programme. Others, like Sanad, chose to follow the British blindly, because they considered it both enlightening and rewarding, as it provided a civilized mode of living and an effective road to success. The novel deals with the themes like the East-West encounter, the impact of English or Western education, the desire for identity and marriage. Nayantara Sahgal tries to depict the nation’s consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of an individual.
Thus, Nayantara Sahgal provides a multi-layered social and political history in the novel.

The story is told in the first person narration by a Gandhian bachelor, who assumes the role of a narrator. He claims to be a detached observer, but in the course of the novel he gets involved in its action. Two of Nayantara Sahgal’s favorite themes, identity and man-woman relationships emerge in the novel. He says “I have the feeling of being lost in crowd,” (Time 233) and wishes to go to England to see “what the original is like.” (Time 234)

More awesome is the social and educational reality which has brought change in the characters perspective. Sanad’s own family, however, suffers from none of these perplexing problems. In their own characteristic way they have remained unaffected by dramatic changes brought about by politics and history. Govind Narayan, his father, continues to live in the past, Girish his brother, and Harish his uncle, are more than comfortable in the world of the British though now greatly reduced in impact. His young wife Kusum is very different, coming as she does from a middle-class Indian background. At marriage there exists a large abyss between Sanad’s aristocratic family and that of Kusum’s. Her professor father and four brothers were directly involved in the independence movement, but Kusum’s is a silent transformation from one world to another. There is no conflict, rebellion or bitterness in her she is able to establish herself and her house in the way she would have liked to, and is happy in her own inexpensive and quiet world, quite different from the aristocratic grandeur of her mother-in-law’s house, with its priceless objects of art, and carpets and palatial buildings. Finally Sanad and Kusum discover each other because they have discovered the truth about themselves.
A Time to Be Happy is set in the immediate pre-and post-independent era. The novel creates an authentic picture of those chaotic days. Sohan Bhai, a Gandhian freedom fighter, recreates for us the dreadful famine of 1943 in Bengal. The Quit-India movement (1942) enters the novel indirectly through the happenings in the lives of two minor functionaries in the novel. The narrative in its meandering course creates a society marked by separation of communities, discrimination against Indians, servility among the rich and well-set people. However through the narrator and Sohan Bhai, one learns of the all encompassing movement launched by Gandhi to arouse and uplift the people, Gandhi’s message, as presented in the novel, cuts across simplistic sociological, political or spiritual formulations.

This Time of Morning seeks to present the new India in search of an identity. It is about a country’s first encounter with freedom and the resultant problems. Nayantara Sahgal not only satirizes the politicians, the leaders and the bureaucrats but also the unbalanced educational system with its stress on memory and the overcrowded classes and the emptiness of the imitative modernity. Dhiraj Singh’s children are the examples of this new emptiness – Vishnu who is both extravagant and idle and unable to see any future for him in the country, and Binny who whiles away her time without any purpose. This happens because there is no relation between the practical life and the educational pattern.

Freedom in fact has become only a continuation of the past into the present with a different set of people holding the reins. Conventionality and orthodoxy outweigh commonsense and people do not readily adapt themselves to change. If Kalyan Sinha’s foster parents were the victims of a system, Nita, her mother, Rashmi, Leela – all are victims of the same continuing system. Nayantara Sahgal underlines
the point that the modernity in itself is neither desirable nor undesirable. What matters are the effect it has on a person and the way a person reacts to it. The novel set in the early post-independence years, when a new republic eagerly looks 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 1947. It is a purely political novel which deals with what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of the political figures. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar states it as: “This Time of Morning is written with much greater ease and sophistication that its predecessor and it can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English.” (Iyengar, The Indian 473)

Here it has been hailed as an impeccable novel, most remarkable for its sheer effortlessness. Much of the action takes place in Delhi. The specific context is the decline and fall of one of the pillars of the Government, Kalyan Sinha. The novel 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. The most significant aspect of the novel is that it brings to attention the pivotal role of civil servants in the Indian state 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 in India struggled to squeeze a revolution into the bureaucratic mould and adapt dramatic plans and programme to
everyday consumption. (*Morning* 129)

The central theme of the novel is as Rakesh, the protagonist of the novel states it:

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. (*Morning* 136)

The novel deserves to be read as a piece of fiction rather than as a piece of history. *This Time of Morning* can be aptly described as a song of loneliness, where the novelist dramatizes the mood of uncertainty and the anxiety of the first decade of post-Independent era. The setting of the novel is a few years after India’s Independence. It is a deeply disturbing novel with a high degree of artistic maturity and technical virtuosity. Some of the characters in the novel are so beautifully and symbolically portrayed. The novel deals with the vivid facets of the civil services in the country, which intrudes heavily on the country’s choice of a suitable political and administrative structure for its new needs.

Nayantara Sahgal’s universe of discourse in this novel is peopled with politicians of every description, highly placed and influential bureaucrats, artists and journalists with varying levels of achievements, prominent parliamentarians as well as
the traditional educated housewives.

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 absence to find many changes. He meets the new Advisor on Foreign Affairs, the controversial Kalyan Sinha. He is soon caught up in the whirl 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 people through personal magnetism. So he cannot think of arguing a point or discussing a topic with Kalyan. The growth and development of the individual consciousness of Rakesh, as well as that of Kalyan, is the measure of the artistic achievement of Sahgal. Rakesh, longs for the warmth 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 (Morning 43).

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 is still for survival and victory lies in close identity of aim and effort and in a 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 election just before the partition of India, underline his complete
disagreement with Kalyan. But the Prime Minister supports Kalyan following Kaila’s complaint his disregard for official code of conduct at U.N. he says,

Men of Kalyan’s type do not always function in the routine, ponderous 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 times, but a useful one (Morning 17).

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. The political setting in the novel is the contemporary scene in New Delhi. Her art is 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.

*The Storm in Chandigarh* is one of the best political novels written by Nayantara Sahgal. It deals with the partition of East Punjab on linguistic lines just when the state had recovered from the trauma of 1947 partition. Violence of the sixties becomes the central concern in the novel. The novel deals with the problem of political tension and violence between the two states Punjab and Haryana, quarrelling over their common capital, Chandigarh. It analyses the political crisis in the newly divided Punjab and Haryana, and portrays the personal tensions resulting in the failure of marital ties. The theme of the novel is violence, not necessarily an obvious physical violence, but an invisible and the 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 Nayantara Sahgal’s humanistic
spirit in a traditional cultural milieu and its characteristic response in meeting the
challenges of change. The novel deals with the political upheaval in Punjab in 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: one is
the political, following on the partition of Punjab into two states and the
second is the 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 and the same time do not
isolate themselves completely from the tradition. This blend of tradition and
modernity can be observed in their attitude to morality, education and man-woman
relationship and 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 four walls of their houses. They prefer to go to
picnic and parties to relieve the burden of boredom and domestic monotony. They
don’t hesitate to take 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 consistently explored and commented upon in several novels.
The valuable thing about her treatment is that, like what she does about other aspects
of India’s social and political life, she traces its roots in the country’s past. Besides the
political background which is very well projected, there is also human background,
well picturized in the novel.

Nayantara 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, two new Chief Ministers, Gyan Singh of Punjab and Harpal Singh of Haryana and also Union Home Minister has been figured. 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 set.

Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh, the Chief Ministers of Haryana and Punjab respectively, had been friends and colleagues once, but are now forced to make menacing gestures. In the novel ‘Storm in Chandigarh’ she projects the scene of chilling horror and inhuman violence which could be witnessed at the time of partition of Punjab and Haryana. Violence that was so common feature on the national scene during the sixties captures the attention of Sahgal and becomes her central concern in Storm in Chandigarh:

> Outbursts of brutal, calculated violence had become a feature of the cities. There were too many in the congestion and chaos that had nothing to lose by violence, too many others who sat inert and indifferent, their sap sucked dry, watching it mount and ebb like some great tidal wave, waiting for it to engulf them…violence had become routine and expected. It was given different names, indiscipline, and unrest, disorder (Storm 2).

As the quarrel over boundaries, water and electric power between Punjab and the newly created Haryana intensifies and still the two governments fight for the common capital, Chandigarh; Gayan Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab, threatens to
launch a crippling strike that will affect both the states. Harpal Singh refuses to compromise any advantage and violence breaks out in Chandigarh. This throws the city into a state of continuing crisis. It is at this point that Vishal Dubey, the centre’s most able bureaucrat, is sent to Chandigarh to alleviate the situation. The novel opens with the Union Home Minister’s statement: “Violence lies very close to the surface in Punjab” (1) which reflects the stormy atmosphere in the two states.

*Storm in Chandigarh* can be attributed, at one level to the estrangement between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh. The novel is historical and not merely fictional. The culmination of the populist, narrow-minded, obscurantist forces are brought to light by the novelist. The clash between Gyan Singh and Harpal Singh is a clash of ideologies. It is a fight between the cults of violence versus the idea of non-violence. Gyan Singh who shows little concern for emotions and philanthropy always indulged in a ruthless attitude. Harpal Singh on the other hand is philanthropic and more concerned with general safety and well being. There is a confrontation between the two Chief Ministers throughout the novel and Dubey realizes that there was more than a political battle. 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 adulterous. Even though he knows it well that she is disloyal to him, he thinks he himself is doing her wrong by depriving her of her marital rights and affection. Talking about Vishal Dubey and his wife Leela, Nayantara 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 and 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?

(Storm 69)

Thus Vishal’s life itself becomes an illustration to 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” (Storm 86). Vishal’s marriage with Leela had turned out to be a
vanishing search for communication. They were bound by nuptial knots but failed
to maintain the marital rights and obligations in the midst of all odds. The situation is
described by Sahgal as,

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 on down the ages with never a shaft of new light
on it. Men and women contorted into moulds, 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 pretence (*Storm* 214).

Throughout their lives, they remained strangers to each other. He is possessed by a deep sense of guilt for living with her without love. After bearing these tortures of remorseful life, his relationship with Leela abruptly ended due to her death. Vishal’s marriage had been a failure. The novel is the symbolic representation of stormy activity for social and political 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 in Chandigarh. 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 captured in the possessive spirit of the husband. Their relationship is purely mechanical and superficial without 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” (*Storm* 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, in which she has to live according to a fixed role, pre-Determined for her by the male-dominated society.

The temperamental incompatibility caused disharmony in the marriage of various characters of the novel. The novelist’s main concern seems to be the depiction of the social life of Indian people of post-Independence days. The storm is blown off on both planes the political and the personal, at the end of the novel. Nayantara Sahgal’s awareness of the historical and political developments 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. 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 (Storm 15).

The novel evidently deals with the corridors of power and the problem of visible and invisible violence. The fiction demonstrates Sahgal’s keen understanding of individual relationships and her remarkable ability to tell stories that continue to enthrall readers over the years. The political scene of the period can be vividly understood, when Harpal says, “In 1947 there was still India left to serve. Now there’s no such loyalty to bind us. The big vision has disintegrated” (Storm 132).

The reality is so hard to accept when one comes to know that clash between two individuals has given way to partition of states and disturbed the living of common people. To put it in the words of Nayantara Sahgal’s characters Nikhil and Dubey:

I don’t know why it should surprise us, ‘said Nikhil (…) what actually is the issue between these two men?’ ‘God knows,’ said Dubey (…). There doesn’t seem to be any real difference. It’s a clash of personalities, but that’s what politics has degenerated to. There are no issues left, only squabbles (Storm 134).

“Fiction often overshadows fact” (65), Nayantara Sahgal agrees in her book A Passion Called India. She is herself aware of the anticipatory nature of her
perceptive political analysis in her novels: “Storm based on the second division of the 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” (Sahgal, A Passion, 247).

Nayantara Sahgal’s next novel, The Day in Shadow, which she has called her most personal novel, 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 under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she experiences in the hands of cruel and unjust male-dominated society of India. The novel represents a variety of people, the political leaders, business barons, journalists and free thinkers. Nayantara 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 attitudes to 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 woman by her husband despite the constantly increasing awareness of the need for liberation felt by every educated person. The central pre-Occupation of the novel is the suffering caused to woman in the prison-house of loveless marriage and her sufferings. 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 wives. They enjoy late night dinners and ballroom dances.

The novel opens with the glow and the glitter of the modern society of the capital city of 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 glossy architecture (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, as they arrange parties and spend money lavishly. Against the glittering socio-political backdrop in New Delhi, the Indian cultural paradox inherent in its predominantly Hindu character is presented as a crucial aspect of the background.

The novel is basically concerned with the emotional effects of divorce. It centers on the traumatic post-Divorce experience of a middle-aged woman, Simrit. Simrit’s marriage to Som, an industrialist turns out to be a disaster. Som and Simrit have been married for long years and have three children. 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 guilt 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 suffered from marital incompatibility. She respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. Here Nayantara Sahgal portrays how the lack of proper companionship, communication and equality between man and woman can cause wreck to marital relationship resulting in divorce. It is the clash of ideals that leads to their separation. Through Simrit, Nayantara Sahgal expounds various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Here Nayantara Sahgal reflects her own shadow of life after her divorce. Nayantara Sahgal confesses it in an article: “Of Divorce and Hindu Woman”:

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 (Sahgal, Of Divorce).

Simrit’s friendship with Raj provides her the anchor 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, Aesthetics 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, *Nayantara 57*).

The novel is set in Delhi and close to the seat of power and justice. The inability of the law courts to translate legal theory into action is vividly brought about by Nayantara Sahgal in the novel. On the political scenario, it depicts the rise of politicians such as Sumer Singh, who are inclined towards super powers. The corrupt private life of Sumer Singh with a widow, Pixie is only a typical illustration of the life lived by such top-ranking public servants with a feudal background. He maintains a private flat where he has appointment 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” (*Shadow* 112).

It is a clear reflection on the private lives of the Ministers who had been misusing their public positions. Ram, 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 has lived a life full of action, physical and mental; steeped in the Gandhian philosophy and programmes, he believes in and practices nonviolence as a living value and practical virtue. Ram Krishnan is a unique character in the novel for he takes up fight against everything antisocial or antinational. The novel demonstrates through his view of things the
application of the feminist principles emerging in the West to the situation of Hindu women in particular.

The novel is a fine example of the female literary tradition in Indian English Literature. The Western wave of stream-of-consciousness technique affected the writings of the novelist and she also plunged deep into the inner world of her characters. She adopts 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. The writer reproduces the thoughts and the vision of the future India dreamed 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.

The increasing significance of the plot construction emerges from the people who inhabit New Delhi’s political circles. Raj a liberal Christian, son of an old fashioned, conscientious civil servant, is a Member of Parliament as an independent member and wants his country to come out of its Hindu induced lethargy. A man of vision and integrity, he believes in individual freedom and refuses to accept fate as an answer to the human problems. Through Raj and the Parliament, the readers can have a fresh glimpse of New Delhi on the threshold of unseen changes. Sahgal pictures the new breed of politicians far removed from the compassion of Gandhi, who can auction their principles where the stakes are high. Sumer Singh is one such character in the novel, who once planning to enter the film world is offered a Congress ticket and is accidentally turned into a politician. Entering as an M.P. he manages to become a junior minister in the post-Nehru cabinet. Sumer Singh becomes a formidable leader
of the political hierarchy and uses politics, as well as sex, as a means to overcome his sense of personal inadequacy. Flouting the country’s policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence, he makes the Oil Deal with Russia under the pretext of future ties and friendly relations. Blind to the possible threat to the defense of the country, a profligate dictator in his political approach, Sumer Singh ignores even the senior Cabinet Minister's advice.

When the Soviet offer wins the majority vote in the Parliament, thoughtful politicians like Raj, in a mood of disgust and somber detachment can only ruminate helplessly: “Well, that’s democracy – the victory of numbers – and like progress it doesn’t always do the right thing” (Shadow 21).

Nayantara Sahgal’s sarcasm at the way the Parliament functions becomes obvious when Sumer Singh is rewarded with a promotion to the rank of a Cabinet Minister with the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. She portrays the Indian assembly as a microcosm of all the growth and decay, the hope and despair of India and its brave modernity along with its gross old superstitions. Nayantara Sahgal employs pungent satire and sarcasm in describing the way parliamentarians function. The chaotic, inept system of our democratic government, its hypocrisy, futility and sheer incompetence is laid bare in the following passage where both the Houses of the Parliament assemble to transact their business:

It was unwise to enter the Lok Sabha in a contemplative mood, especially on a day of debate and decision though the voting on the oil exploration offer would not take place till afternoon or evening, after the debate. This was a place of business, enacted among men and women who were not at all Parliamentarians by conviction or
temperament. Some were openly committed to overthrow parliament and they imagined the world would be a better place as soon as privilege and good taste had been driven out of it. (Shadow 42)

Nayantara Sahgal growing up during the national movement in a family that played so big a part in it cannot avoid being intensely interested in Indian politics. Each of her novels is strongly moved by the political atmosphere of the time in which she was writing. The atmosphere seems to foreshadow and foretell certain events. As she confesses in one of her book that the atmosphere works on her very powerfully, in at least two novels (Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow) she anticipated events that later took place:

Storm, based on the second division of the 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. The Day in Shadow was heavy with the possibility of a whole, new Soviet-influenced direction in Indian affairs, and the Indo-Soviet treaty, which came several months after I had finished writing the book, seemed to me almost a continuation of my own novel. While I was writing The Day in Shadow the whole political atmosphere of the book became so strong and overwhelming, it almost became another character, with a life of its own. (Sahgal, The Book 41)

The next novel A Situation in New Delhi fictionalizes the uncertain state of education and politics in independent India, and was 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, in total, 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 Indians in the context of opportunistic politics pursued in New Delhi. The novel concentrates on a sense of disintegration giving way to chaos and disorder that engulf the capital. The title of the novel suggests that the situation in New Delhi summarizes the situation of the entire country. The novel depicts the aftermath of the death a great popular Prime Minister Shivraj, who dominated the political and national scene for a full decade.

In the novel, Nayantara Sahgal weaves the narrative around a number of characters: Devi, the sister of the dead Prime Minister Shivraj; her son Rishad, a young college-going boy and a 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 who returns to India from England to write his biography. The novel attempts to estimate the personal qualities of the dead leader, his approach to nation building, and his power to influence the lives of people. The novel builds a contrast between the times before and after Shivraj. The novel begins with the news of the death of Prime Minister Shivraj, the idealist leader of India. Here, the three characters, Shivraj, Usman and Michael, represent the three main religious segments of the Indians, namely, Hindu, Muslim 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 student-terrorists. The nineteen year old Rishad gets killed in one of his underground operations. The novel is the
portrayal of the city torn apart by the failure of political leadership and the violent student unrest. It would be true to state that the entire book is a tribute to Nehru. Shivraj was the one who sacrificed his and his aristocratic family’s comforts for the freedom of India. Now he is dead. And with his passing away, 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 be the Education Minister. She portrays her position as, “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? (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 follower 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. Usman is over-burdened with the troubles of unrest and violence in the University campus. Usman believes that the great ideals should not remain as mere words in the scriptures. In fact, the scriptures live only when the people follow them. He condemns the political interference in the academic world and laments for the loss of a leader like Shivraj who had a unique sense of perception, Usman had taken the Vice-Chancellorship to bring about some fundamental changes. He is being pushed into taking back three rusticated students for a rape case. His wife Nadira always blames him for accepting such a post and she proposes to leave the country for any other country if not 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.

Michael, who can be considered another important character of the novel, is a renowned English biographer who 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 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.

To conclude, the novel is a finely crafted book, with its neatly structured action in sixteen chapters. Nayantara Sahgal’s analysis of the problems that confront a newly independent and developing country by focusing her creative attention on the young men and women of free India is convincing and sensitive. A Situation in New Delhi is really representative of the situation in the whole of India.

Rich like Us is honored with the coveted Sahitya Akademi award and Sinclair Prize. It is probably her best novel in which the action dates back to the period of India’s National Emergency during 1974-75 when the Parliament was in a state of suspended animation. The novel presents a picture of India after Independence but shows primarily the state of affairs in the country under the Emergency imposed by Sahgal’s cousin Indira Gandhi. Her 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 Emergency, the backdrop of which is Delhi. The novel projects the failures, frustrations and exploration of women—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 is a fearlessly presented 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 (Situation 213).

Besides depicting the anguish during Emergency, the novelist takes the reader to the scenario of the Second World War and nostalgic pre-Partition days and describes the magnetic, transforming influence of Gandhi on the masses. The novelist weaves a narrative around a number of characters: Ramlal Surya; his English wife, Rose; his Indian wife, Mona; Sonali Ranade, the I. A. S. Officer, the narrator; Dev, Ramlal’s son; Ravi Kachru and Kishori Lal 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 Sahgal women. Here, Sahgal introduces three major female characters. Each one of them is different in their outlook and background.

The novelist traces the impact of the Emergency on a large number of
characters, simultaneously highlighting the responses of these individuals to the social tension created by the Emergency. Among many victims, Sonali, a conscientious Civil Servant and Rose, a cockney shop-girl turned an Indian businessman’s foreign wife who tries her best to make a passage to India and at last meets her death in the hands of a hired men employed by her step son, Dev appear to be the victim of the corrupted society. Dev can be reported as 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 in the period of National Emergency.

Rose’s life is 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 Ram had not prepared her for a life-time commitment to someone like Ram, far less to his life-style. Rose had broken her settled engagement with Freddie in order to marry Ram, a Lahore based businessman. Though she knew all about Ram’s first marriage and a son of him, she married him for love. She believes in the ideal of love. There was 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 he asked her, a victim of casual unthinking sorcery, to marry him. And it was a sign of the distance
she had travelled (Situation 41).

Rose has undergone silent suffering with an undeclared war around her in Ram’s house and the bonds of blood and flesh and the laws 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” (Situation 71). The cold war between Rose and Mona reconciled only after Mona’s attempt to commit suicide. Once again, Rose finds herself the unwanted third in a love triangle when Ram falls in love with Marcella. In all her troubles, Sonali remains her friend and fights for her right to property. And finally, Rose is murdered. But people are made to believe that she invited death on herself.

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 is secure in her status as the lady of the house. She instructs the servants in the daily running of the house, sometimes only to assert her role. Mona has unshakeable 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 taking another wife. Even then, Mona continued to be ruled by the predictions of astrologers. When she focuses all her attentions on Dev, her son, all dreams and hopes for her son’s future are once again ruled by the planets. Earlier Mona was suffering because of Ram’s love for Rose and then Rose also suffers in the same manner because of Ram’s love for Marcella.

Ram enjoys life fully with both the wives, with Mona looking after the
household affairs and the child, and Rose providing sensual pleasure and a company in business. Both the women feel lonely and insecure. Nayantara Sahgal strongly condemns the attitudes which reduce women to an object. In her study of Nayantara Sahgal, Neena Arora observes:

Man considers it as normal male 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 towards his wife and starts persecuting her (Arora, Dorris 61).

Sonali is a thirty-eight year old I. C. S. officer who as a narrator, is far from being a passive observer. During the Emergency, her strong opinions on democracy cost her job, an event she accepts as symptomatic of changing times. In Sonali, we find a woman whose life is deeply affected by the various twists and turns that the Indian politics take. Sonali falls in love with Ravi Kachru soon after independence. The novelist focuses on Sonali Rande, 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 centre of consciousness. There is interaction among each of these three characters and the events which brings 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 Government, declared industrial policy in rejecting a 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 from the service rather than be
cowed down by a hypocritical government.

She recalls her past days when fifteen years back she had topped the list in the competitive examination for the civil service. On this achievement, her father had tears in his eyes with the hope that her new responsibility could bring a peaceful historical change. Though the fires and fevers of Sonali were different from her father, it touched both of them with its magic. Her memories of it had been her inheritance. The distinction between politics and the service had become badly blurred over the last few years,

The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politicians meddling in administration and favourite like Kachru, the prime example, playing politics as if his life depended on it... suddenly he was indispensable here, there and everywhere, the right hand and left leg of the Prime Minister and her household (Rich 28).

Her witty and ironical voice never rises above the levels of decorum and culture as when she talks about the attitude of the civil service administration towards the Emergency:

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 why we were careful not to do more than say hello when we passed each other in the building, and not to talk about our work after hours, which made after hours sessions very silent indeed. No one wanted 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 (Rich 102).

Sahgal has special regard for patriots like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharhal Nehru. Some passages in the novel reveal 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. Relationships, anecdotes, encounters with Panditji popped up like jack-in- the boxes” (Rich 143).

To conclude, the novel delineates different incidents such as the murder of the narrator Sonali’s great grandmother in the name of sati, the mutilation of the sharecropper because he asks for his due; the rape of the village women by the police because their men folk dare not resist the landlord; and the murder of Rose, the large-hearted Englishwoman in New Delhi just because her frank talk is an embarrassment to her stepson Dev; are all described in an entirely credible manner. The narrative technique is interesting. The novel ends on a note of hope that in the midst of sycophancy, there are persons like Kishori Lal, a petty shopkeeper, who has the courage to protest against tyranny.

It is vital to note the importance that Nayantara Sahgal has given to women emancipation in a society. She strongly believes that a society’s upliftment lies in the enhancement of women’s position in it. It is noteworthy to consider Sahgal’s concern for female community as a part of her social consciousness.
Nayantara Sahgal has turned towards the woman’s world with great introspective intensity and authenticity. She has launched a voyage within to explore the private consciousness of her women characters and to measure them. In her novels women are no more goddesses; they are human beings and move from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion and from weakness to strength. Her female characters are subjected to binary pulls torn between tradition and modernity, between the desire for emancipation and her need for recognition, between her duty as a daughter, a wife and a mother and her dignity as a human being. Women in her novels are beyond doubt victims of social and economic pressures and disparities. She has portrayed women from varied age groups and social backgrounds in her novels. She has also shown how changes in economic and social order adversely affect women more than men. However, her women emerge out of the darkness, bravely throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependence and resignation seeking equality with their male counterparts.

Her novels are concerned with the woman’s quest, an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist’s place in it. A common pattern of the feminine aspirations can be discerned in all her novels. They deal with Indian woman in disharmony with her sexual, cultural and social roles. She tries to assert herself not only as a woman, wife or mother, but also as an individual. Nayantara Sahgal, in all her novels exhibits a sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of the human mind and society. As Jasbir Jain observes: “in almost every novel, Nayantara Sahgal has a central woman character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs” (Jain, Nayantara, 145). The emotional world of woman is explored and analyzed with admirable insight and sympathetic perception.
Nayantara Sahgal’s novels read like commentaries on the political and social turmoil that India has been facing since Independence. Her concern for the women who are caught in the dilemma of liberty and individuality or stability and protection of marriage as an institution is understandable. She has shown an admirable understanding of the problems and the predicaments of women.

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand, she is at the peak of the ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality, they have to still travel a long way. In the modern times, Indian women are given liberties and rights such as freedom of expression and equality, as well as right to get education. But still today, we are fighting for issues such as dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortions, health, domestic violence, malnutrition, sexual exploitation, molestation, rape and even murder.

In her fictional depiction of women attempting to free themselves from repressive relationships, Nayantara Sahgal is more direct in her feminist sympathies. She makes a systematic and sustained effort to demolish deeply ingrained attitudes regarding women, before indicating ways in which a new image can be formulated. With an admirable steadfastness, she upholds her commitment to man-woman relationships based on mutual trust and honest communication between two equal individuals. In almost all the novels, Nayantara Sahgal has gone deep into the female psyche. She explores the nature and scope of the trauma of womenfolk in all her novels. Her female characters are individuals who can remain independent within the framework of society into which they are born. She
has portrayed women’s sufferings without sentimentality and with such vividness that she may well be described as “anatomist of the feminine psyche” (Swarup, *The Sound* 10).

Nayantara Sahgal tries to portray the sensibility of a woman: how a woman looks out at herself and her problems. She feels that woman should try to understand and realize herself as a human being and not just as an appendage to some male life. In the novels, there is a very sensitive depiction of the way women suffer due to the sexist bias in the patriarchal society, which gives a subordinate position to women and always treats them as second rate citizens. Sahgal has a very different idea of virtue and virtuous women, different from the stereotype virtuous women in India. But women in her novels represent different kinds of virtues. They do not suffer but take a stand. Indeed, they stands for the new morality, according to which woman is not to be taken as a mere toy, an object of lust and momentary pleasure, but man’s equal and honored partner.

With insight and understanding, the novelist presents the dilemma which modern women are facing in recent times. Women, who are conscious of their emotional needs and strive for self-fulfillment, reject the existing traditions and social set-up. Those who long for a more liberal and unconventional way of life find their place in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Her novels portray women trampled and oppressed because of their dependence upon men. The harrowing experience they have to face in their struggle to come out of the bondage and stand on their own feet is vividly portrayed by Sahgal. The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of divorce and the
resultant alienation between parents and children can be observed from the thematic concern of Nayantara Sahgal’s novels.

Almost in all the six novels taken for the study, Nayantara Sahgal goes deep into the female psyche. In novel after novel, she explores the nature and scope of the trauma of women folk. Suffering and loneliness have mellowed Nayantara Sahgal and she has been able to transform these into understanding and compassion. She believes that the potentialities in women are not exploited to the full. Sahgal’s female characters are individuals who can remain independent within the framework of society into which they are born.

Husband-wife alienation resulting from lack of communication, East-West encounter, extra-marital relationship, existentialist problems and temperamental incompatibility were also focused as the major themes in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels. In most of her novels, Nayantara Sahgal portrays women who herald a new morality — a morality not confined to physical chastity. It demands accommodation of individual longings for self-fulfillment and seeks consideration not for just the deed but for the heart and feeling. As Shyam Asnani observes, “Her concept of free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom and becomes a mental or emotional attitude” (Storm 143). The concept of freedom constitutes to be the central concern of the novelist in her novels. Her protagonists so deeply and loyally rooted in Indian culture are portrayed to be struggling for freedom and trying to assert their individuality in their own way.

Nayantara Sahgal shows women suffering in marriage life and then deciding to come out of the suffocating bondage by preferring divorce. She depicts her women deciding to prefer divorce rather than live a stifling life of injustice and agony. Her
women like Saroj, Simrit, Rashmi and Anna all leave their husbands or break the marriage which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. She represents that through divorce they will be free from the suffering and agony of an unhappy or unjust relationship.

Women who feel frustrated either because of marital disharmony or loneliness in life is shown to indulge in social or religious activities. For example, Maya in Sahgal’s *A Time to be Happy* is a woman who tries to submerge her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in social work and religion. Nayantara Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships and the loneliness of living alone; hence, most of her women remarry. Most of her couples seem to be happy and contented, but they often experience loneliness and complain of silences in marriage, as Maya appears incapable of emotion, but this lack of communication is the result of her emotional isolation in marriage. What she wants is just some kind of response, recognition of her existence: “Not a good one or an approving one, necessarily, just a response of any kind. Even when we live or die is not important unless it is important to someone” (*Time* 125). Maya’s childlessness is a symbol, not a cause of her unhappiness. Maya is a silent victim at the altar of marriage.

Nayantara Sahgal’s pangs of marriage and estrangement get reflected in her characters like Simrit in *The Day in shadow* and Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*. Simrit’s divorce carried the same magnitude of pain that the marriage had created. She felt

It was painful how the connection continued, like a detached heartbeat. The tissue of marriage could be dissolved by human acts, but its anatomy went on and on. And skeletons could endure for a million
years. Just living together, daily routine produced that uncanny durability. It made the question of whether one had loved or not, been the transgressed again trivial by comparison (Shadow 24).

Som avoids any individuality or identity in women, for he feels, “a thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own and command her and that’s the man she’ll respect” (Shadow 28). Significantly this echoes Nayantara Sahgal’s own marriage life about which she once wrote:

I came across the shocking assumption of inequality. A man’s ego and ambition, I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict the man’s will and desires must prevail I was uneasy and restless adjusting to the demands of a personality and an environment whose goals and texture was different from anything I had known or been comfortable with.

(Morning 7)

Likewise her women in the novels achieve emancipation from very unfaithful, unreasonable and domineering husbands. So Rashmi in This Time of Morning, Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit in The Day in Shadow, Sonali in Rich Like Us emerge as a liberated women. Marriage often makes the enlightened and sensitive women very unhappy and discontented. In This Time of Morning, Rashmi’s divorce and her extra-marital relationship with Neil in are not to be mistaken for a “tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity” (Morning, 146), but an inner urge for communication and emotional involvement of the self. Marriage makes Rashmi “a moth trapped in cement” (Morning 35).

The novelist seems to be deeply concerned with the need of freedom for women. In The Day in Shadow Simrit does not want to be known as her husband’s
wife but as her own self. When someone asked her about the profession of her husband, she thinks:

Wasn’t it odd, when you were standing there yourself, fully a person, not to be asked what you did? There was such an enormous separating gulf between herself and these women, most women—most people. May be the question would be different in the twenty-first century. Simrit herself had never accepted a world where men did things and women waited for them (Shadow 6).

After divorce, the woman often experiences a sense of inability to control her life while a man feels free from all social, moral and financial responsibilities. Through Simrit, Sahgal expounds the various aspects of divorce and its implications for a lonely woman. Through Simrit’s divorce, Nayantara Sahgal thus makes a strong plea for a change and revitalization of the Indian society. It is her courage which frees Simrit from the bonds of marriage as well as the divorce settlement. Sahgal confesses in an article:

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, were women are equal citizens, a woman can be criminally exploited without its creating a ripple. Again, I am not speaking of any recognizable form of exploitation against which most people will naturally raise a cry. If a man beats his wife, for instance, hardly anyone will condone the fact. But if at divorce he inflicts a financial settlement on her that enslaves her with taxes and makes it impossible for her to make a decent living, no one
will take any notice because this is a kind of beating where blood and bruises don’t show (Sahgal, *of Divorce 7*)

*Rich like Us* is filled with social commitment and contemporary relevance. It pictures the social activities of that society. While they are mainly seen as fictional expression, they also point to social and historical realities; for example, in their depiction of sati during the twentieth century. Although sati was outlawed in 1829, it has never been fully eradicated; Nayantara Sahgal also provides fictional narratives of female infanticide, child marriage and ‘purdah’ in *Mistaken Identity*. Her perspectives offer valuable insights into the dynamics and complexities of human relationships, and her feminist concerns can be placed within historical and theoretical frameworks.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels also suggest that even women’s clothing (more than men’s) takes on political implications as a public signifier of cultural identity within India. If the ‘purdah’ (for Muslim women) is uncomfortable and restrictive, so too is the sari (for Hindu women) which Sonali complains about in *Rich Like Us* “Ravi, as a man, had never had a sari throttling his legs, making walking in the wind and running to catch a bus threat to lift and limb” (*Rich 112*).

Overall, her novels offer the sharpest critique of marriages. She presents the only female character that explicitly rejects marriage because of the constraints it places upon women. Remembering the weddings she had seen in her childhood, Sonali in *Rich Like Us* resolves never to marry, for the brides seemed to her ike prisoners, with their clothes like tents, their jewellery like chains and their postures submissive.

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels deal with men and women in eternal search for freedom to express themselves, freedom to be their own selves. The novelist feels
strongly about female exploitation and male sarcasm towards the issue of women’s identity crisis. She demands social justice for women, her focus being on freedom.

Sahgal’s world consists of two types of women characters. The first group consists of women who are happy in the confines of Hindu orthodoxy, and the other of those with a strong sense of individuality and an analytical mind but shuttling between traditional and modern values. Her women are not career women treating men as their rivals in a highly competitive society. Rather they wish to relate themselves to the people around them; they would like to be treated as equals. Nayantara Sahgal’s women are of the view that they should move with time and they should not compromise with the issue of their individual freedom in the male-dominated society.

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: “It is a tribute to her as a political novelist that she could sense and show the danger in the new trend... years before the country had actually experienced the culmination of such a trend” (Sahgal, Point 44).

Nayantara Sahgal does not profess any specific political ideology nor does she propagate any definite political values, or reveal futuristic anti-utopia. She neither glorifies ancient India nor exhibits chauvinistic nationalism. Her novels portray and interpret contemporary political realities and explicate, in artistic terms, the somber mood and widespread disillusionments of the post-Independence generation. Unlike ideological novels, her works are endowed with greater artistic objectivity. Politics is the central point of whatever she writes. That is why almost all the major characters of her novels are drawn irresistibly to and deeply involved in the vortex of politics.
Against this backdrop, she analyses and interprets various political events with an intelligent and perceptive mind. Sahgal reads the individual responses of the characters to these events with the unusual sensitivity of a mature artist. By juxtaposing the corruption and idealism of the political world, the novel provides an insight into the working of politics explores and examines the consequential problems that this country with the newly-won freedom is likely to encounter. The political freedom of the country means many things to many persons, but it is only through Rakesh, that the author seems to convey her own point of view. It is, contemplates Rakesh:

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. 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 a foster each other’s humanity as individuals (Morning 106).

Nayantara Sahgal’s humanistic concern is also her solution to the problems of the world wrought with the social hypocrisy, political pretence and individual discontent. “Discussion always serves a purpose” (72), says one of the characters in This Time of Morning gravely. With an unusual depth and understanding, This Time of Morning provides an authentic account of what goes on in the whirl of Indian politics after Independence. In Storm in Chandigarh an elderly Home Minister feels that “the restraining voice has great value at a time like this” (Storm 14). That is why, perhaps, he chooses Vishal to mediate because he “has the capacity to counsel patience and has a gift for tackling a problem at the human level” (22). In The Day in
Shadow we are assured that men like Raj feel a sense of hope even in a chaotic situation: “There seem to be the bright rays of hope amidst the dark jungle of disorder and chaos where violence lies close to the surface everywhere” (122).

The novelist analysis and interprets variegated aspects of political life in depth and through her active involvement in politics she emphasizes the humanistic values she upholds and the “novel becomes a concern for the quality of life” (Jain, Nayantara 19). Her concern with politics is just a part of her humanistic concern because each of her explorations into political life reveals her newer and deeper insight into the human psyche. It can be noticed that all Nayantara Sahgal’s novels are set against a background of contemporary Indian politics. The characters in these six novels belong to the rich, urban milieu consisting of politicians, bureaucrats and high government officials, successful businessmen and their families. These similarly placed characters move forward in the same way that Indian politics and politicians move forward.

On the political scene, the absolute surrender to men at higher position at first becomes the gateway to success, but later becomes suffocating as Ravi Kachru soon realizes. The only hope this situation is to draw inspiration from the past and prepare for the future with greater conviction and dedication. By fore-shadowing the inevitable political reality through her deft portrayal of human actors, who are caught in circumstances where the political gets inextricably intertwined with the personal, Nayantara Sahgal obviously accomplishes a great deal more than what is generally expected of a novelist.

Nayantara Sahgal puts history to creative use in her novels. She brings her artistic armory to play and infuse color 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, and get merge 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 endeavors to realize them.

The portrayals of human reality in her novels are imbued with an acute consciousness of history as it conditions their dramatist personae. By integrating her protagonists with the political process rather than isolating them from there and by subjecting political platitude and developments to a thorough scrutiny from a human angle, the novelist reflects a perceptive consciousness of the unprecedented relevance for the individual of the way the political wind blows. Politics is deemed too much of an all-encompassing activity to be left to politicians or historians alone. It is obvious how it is in this sense that Nayantara Sahgal plays a perfection role of a political chronicler.

This deep-rooted political consciousness of Nayantara Sahgal makes her the only political Indian woman novelist of India dealing with politics in an effective way. Her six novels, discussed above, emphasize the basic fact that politicians and individuals are inter-dependent and they greatly influence each other. Nayantara Sahgal strongly believes that it is the conscious moral obligation of all right-thinking people to protest against injustice and wrong. The autobiographical element once again comes uppermost when Nayantara Sahgal’s heroines are seen rebelling against established social inequalities and Hindu ambivalence. Nayantara Sahgal’s literary achievement lies in her ability to transmute the social, historical and political forces of her time into the organic structure of the novel.

Sahgal has the unique distinction of being the only political novelist on
the Indian English literary scene. Thus, Nayantara Sahgal’s novels not only constitute an impressive segment of the Indian English novel but also sum up the saga of India’s struggle for freedom and the changes it has brought about in the traditional social set-up in India. Her work has a strong realistic base and reflects 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 and cultural milieu has always been Indian.