CHAPTER – III

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS REFLECTED IN SAHGAL’S NOVELS

(GANDHIAN THOUGHTS, VIEWS ON HINDUISM AND TRADITION)

Gandhian values have formed the basis of Nayantara Sahgal’s approach to both political and personal problems. She handles the problems mainly on threefold grounds — their reliance on tradition, consideration for the individual and dependence on moral values. The Gandhian revolution is unique in its choice of nonviolence as a method of resistance. Nayantara Sahgal’s account of her childhood and youth is an account of influence of Gandhian ideas on her. Her childhood was among leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. Living amongst men who were deeply convinced of the strength of Gandhian ideas, she has a strong influence and adherence to Gandhian philosophy.

Her marriage to Gautam, introduced her to two worlds — one, the world of ‘nearly’ British, people to whom Gandhi was only a name and the other comprising of people who were critical of Gandhi and his ideas. Both these worlds are reflected in the world of her novels. At times they are easily recognizable and definable but at times they also overlap. In her work From Fear Set Free Nayantara Sahgal refers to nonviolence as the ‘most fearlessly active force’ (72) because its basic requirement was the human being, cleansed of fear and hate, willing to suffer and surrender reward, a human being fully conscious of the nobility of human life and human effort. Nonviolence did not base itself on material resources but on the strength and quiet courage of men backed by the personal character of Gandhi who identified himself completely with the ordinary people of the country. In Nayantara Sahgal records her opinion in Fear Set Free as:
No single fact had done more to reorient the thinking of an entire nation than Gandhi’s semi-nakedness. It has shifted the political spotlight from town to village, jolting the town-dweller into an awareness of the peasants’ existence and plight. (Sahgal, Fear 25)

According to Sahgal, Gandhi was able to evoke a tremendous response because he was rooted in the same soil, nourished on the same simple diet, reared in the same beliefs and virtuous by the same standards as ordinary people. He had no wish to discard tradition or outlaw religion, or to impose alien standards. His emphasis was on the moral rather than the purely religious aspects of life. His movement had its non-political appeal in its call for self-employment and self-reliance and sought to raise the quality of life. And Gandhi’s call to women to take part in the national movement brought them the much needed equality of opportunity in social and political life.

Sahgal advocates that Gandhi’s whole approach was challenging one which shifted the emphasis from money and ambition to sacrifice and renunciation. Suddenly the success achieved within the framework of British India was reduced to insignificance. From being a question of earning one’s living, it becomes one of earning it with self-respect and dignity. Gandhian methods promised fulfillment to men as human beings. The genius of Gandhi lays in his awareness of people. He never forgot that the nation consisted of persons. His movement had been launched with the cleaning of latrines, ‘an act of infinite compassion that had the effect of dynamite on rock setting the country’s social conscience ablaze against untouchability.’ (Sahgal, Fear 113)
Sahgal’s adulation and respect for Gandhi is overwhelming as revealed in this nostalgic identification with him. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Sahgal writes:

Our parents were adults when Gandhiji appeared on the horizon. Our children will never see him. They will hear of him, but to them he will be only a name, one of the many illustrious names of Indian history. But we are truly the children of Gandhi’s India, born at a time when India was being reborn from an incarnation of darkness into one of light. Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity… based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace.

(*Prison* 32)

Similarly Jawaharlal Nehru, her “Mamu” (128) is not only a “boisterous playmate” (128) and “uncontested hero” (128) of her childhood, but an institution by himself. Sahgal has been influenced by him in every way possible, and has very positive things to say about him whether it be in 1954 or 1985.

In *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), she says:

To each person his country signifies something in particular. My country was for me inextricably bound on with my uncle’s ideal of it. I had sensed this as a child. Now I was convinced of it. His was the India which I wanted to associate myself and in which I wanted to live.

(*Prison* 212)

Thirty years later the dream about India has vanished in *Rich Like Us* (1985), but her admiration for Nehru has not. Sahgal comments through Sonali, the protagonist, who is a thinly-disguised persona of the novelist herself: “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 146)

Sahgal not merely analyses the personal, political situations, but also prescribes a way out, projecting a set of political, moral values. Having been brought up and nurtured under the impact of Gandhian ideology and Nehru's faith in the human being, Sahgal strongly believes in human values. Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals provide solutions for problems, both political and personal in Sahgal's novels. Gandhism for Sahgal was not a mere ideology but it approximated to humanism.

Eminent critics of Sahgal discuss her concern with humanism in her fiction. Shyam Asnani comments that “Nayantara Sahgal has a specific political ideology grounded strongly in freedom and humanism” (Critical Response 122). M.V. Sarma also expresses a similar opinion: “There is an undercurrent of humanitarian concern in Sahgal's work which is also her solution to political confrontations, social evils and individual conflicts” (Sarma, Nayantara 43). Jasbir Jain also endorses this view “There is a genuine concern for human beings and her novels are marked with a humanistic vision.” (Jain, Nayantara 141)

Sahgal adheres to Gandhian principles in every novel. The narrator in A Time to be Happy a thorough breed disappointed his father by not falling in line and taking up the family business. The glaring disparity between plenty and poverty around the factory in Sharanpur disgusted him. Ruskin and Gandhi appealed to him due to their concern for the persevering labourers suffered due to lack of awareness on the part of their employers. The narrator had not seen Gandhi in person but his character had lured him to great extent and he realized that India did not require more Gandhi’s, one was more than enough. India, precisely speaking, needed many more genuine
Gandhians who would not capitalize Gandhi’s name for certain ends but practice it sincerely. The narrator expresses that a true Gandhian should spread it in those corners where people have abandoned him or have just idolized him without understanding the real meaning of Gandhi’s message.

Gandhi’s life-style, his insistence on simple living made him get in touch with everyone with his ideals. Gandhi had reached the deeper chords of millions, out of who sprang devoted Kuntibahens and Sohanbhais. Even Sanad, a product of the elite class ultimately discovered himself through spinning. Triumph of Gandhian ideals, thus beautifully depicted by Sahgal.

Sahgal devotes one chapter to Gandhian ideology in her novel *This Time of Morning*. Kailas, the freedom fighter is a strong exponent of Gandhian doctrines. Kalyan Sinha, the political opportunist and an opponent to Gandhian principles, turns out to be an arch enemy of Kailas. British rulers gave democracy to India but it is Gandhi who added the touch of humanity to it. At last, Kalyan learns the hard way that his corrupt motives succumb to defeat while Kailas is invited by the PM, to be the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

The underlying disgust at the insane violence erupting in Punjab is the indication of Sahgal’s attachment to Gandhian cult in *Storm in Chandigarh*. She portrays the veteran Home Minister, “last surviving figure of Gandhian era.” (Storm 25) Who realized wisely that he was an antique in the new crop of politicians who aim for power exerts chairs alone. The novelist defines Gandhianism in these thoughts provoking words, “Gandhian politics had meant open decision, the open action. No stealth, no furtiveness and therefore, no shame. Every act proudly performed in the sunlight.” (Storm 26) Vishal Dubey, the protagonist mused over such thoughts and
was happy to note that in spite of the darkness all around there were believers like his associates, in the cult of nonviolence.

Simrit’s friend Raj in The Day in Shadow also had discerned that post-Independence politicians capitalized on Gandhi’s name shamelessly. There were ministers like Sumer Singh who were highly impressed by foreign dealers and regarded Gandhi as old fashioned. Summer pondered while thinking about the fantastic progress of Russians, “It was time to bury Gandhi and write a new page of Indian history. The winds of Asia had changed the old connections belonged to the garbage can.” (Shadow 27) But Gandhi had meant much more than spinning wheel. He was a symbol of strength and determination.

A Situation in New Delhi is once again a saga of violence which is the worst of the corroding factors in the health of the nation. Rishad and his companions had no faith in Gandhian ideals; hence they turned in reverse direction. Adopting Naxalite methods to bring in change, his dreams were brutally shattered when his leader Naren died in the explosion. Swarnpriya, his beloved, becomes the source of his enlightenment when he realized that life without peace could be ugly. A more pathetic death was not possible for Rishad victimized by bomblast.

Sonali, very significantly, voices Gandhi in Rich Like Us. When she decides to resign from service, because she could not compromise with dictatorship masquerading as democracy; she says “When the constitution becomes null and void by the act of a dictator and the armour of a modern state confronts you, satyagraha is the only way to keep yourself respect.” (Rich 88) Emergency, which is the back drop of the novel, was in itself a denial of Gandhian values. Saghal refers to the theme in these words,
Using the post as point of reference, particularly the Gandhian age, when love of freedom truly flourished, she contrasts it with troubled seventies in India and demonstrates convincingly that the emergency has put democracy in danger. (Rich 79)

Nishi’s father, is arrested though innocent, because he could not flatter the then leader in power. Such incidents are abundant in the novel. When it is repeatedly emphasized that post-Independence politics in India did not even remotely resemble Gandhian norms and the country paid a heavy price for violation of those norms. Kailas’s total dedication to the spirit of man in the Gandhian tradition stands out in sharp contrast to Kalyan’s contempt for the individual human being. One of his asides puts it: “The framework of democracy we have today is from the British but humanity we learned from the Mahatma.” (Rich 183)

The historical element, as distinguished from the obvious and dominating political aspects of the novel, relates to the Gandhian nationalistic movement. Of the eighteen chapters in the novel, a whole chapter is devoted to the Gandhian phase of the freedom struggle. Besides, there are a number of Obiter dicta concerning the Gandhian impact on the national consciousness. In the novel, the British rule is the centre and the families of Kusum and Sanad become its attraction. Govind Narayan, who favors the British raj, proclaims: “To be loved daughter suitably wedded and sons established in good jobs. These goals are achieved by taking sensible view of the situation, accepting the Raj and using it to one’s advantage.” (Rich 15)

A Time to be Happy is a novel concerning Indian politics and humanistic values of Indian tradition. The Gandhian revolution is aesthetically woven in the narrative and is given much importance with many dialogues revolving around it.
Kalyan Sinha presented in *This Time of Morning*, vehemently attacks the Gandhian formula of nonviolence. He refuses to accept the leadership of Gandhi because he strongly believes that,

> There would have been a revolution like any other if not with guns then with sticks and stones, teeth and nails and there would not have been anomalies to content with today, this oil-and-water regime that could command no singleness or unity or purpose. (*Time* 33)

*This Time of Morning* is set in the post-Independence generation, to whom freedom is no longer a dream but a reality and this generation lives side by side with an older generation which has struggled to turn it into one. There are people like Kalyan Sinha, who have rejected both the nationalist and British worlds not passively but consciously and critically. And there are men like Somnath and Hari Mohan, who adhere to the Gandhian values in name but not in spirit. This process of juxtaposing different kinds of people continues in her later novels where there are many worlds reflecting the confusion and the middle of the contemporary political situation but the question persistently remains the same; one of the validity of nonviolence versus violence. It becomes interestingly a question of material priorities versus human values.

Kailas is the exponent of the origins of the Gandhian revolution, which began when one man decided to take a stand against injustice and tyranny and called for a change in the relationship between the oppressed and oppressor. When Gandhi was forcibly thrown out of first class railway compartment he comprehended the injustice behind it. He also realized that a violent reaction to this kind of injustice would be self-defeating and likely to lead to more suffering. Violence could be suppressed and
lead to feeling of uncertainty and fear. Nonviolence was inconspicuous in its initial stages. It is not only used as a political weapon but became a way of life. It also went beyond the limited religious concept of abstaining from injury, to become a positive form of resistance, inviting injury in a non violent spirit.

There are others who take a sensible view of the British Raj for lesser or bigger gains — Ronu, Lalitha Chatterjee, Harish, Harilal Mathur and social climbers like Vir Da. Kalyan Sinha rejects the implied submissiveness of the long prison terms. He is unable to submit either to them or the British Raj. He goes into voluntary exile because of his basic disagreement with Gandhian policies and even when the country is free he is critical of the Gandhian stance. He feels it is because of Gandhi that the Indians are a backward people dominated by the past, left behind in the race towards progress.

In his impatience for progress and intolerant of suffering, Kalyan fails to realize that there were other values as important as progress. Even personal freedom and sensitivity find no place in Kalyan’s system of values. There are others like him who question the validity of nonviolence as a political method and reject it as an exercise in futility. Kailas Vrind, an ardent Gandhian, is led to reconsider his views on nonviolence. He feels that though non violence is valid as a way of life, it is not a valid political attitude for the sovereign state. Gandhi himself has conceded the necessity of using force as a defensive measure but this had not reduced the moral content of the philosophy. Nonviolence was a positive attitude and required constant striving towards courage and dedication.

Independent India suddenly faced a number of problems arising out of its peculiar background. The administrative system still functioned through a colonial
framework and India found itself burdened by the alien system of values and education. There was also the refugee problem. This was the time when Indianness was put into trial. There were many who considered it difficult unless the official policies were changed and nonviolence abandoned as a political method. Somnath is of the view that running a government is essentially different from leading a freedom struggle. Kailas, however, does not agree with him and thinks that it is important, more particularly at this juncture of the country’s history. Kailas feels that any change involving the erosion of the moral values would be self-defeating:

In all my dealings with human beings I have discovered no magic formula for change—not as you consider the human mind and its willing cooperation necessary to your task. We have made the human being the unit and measure of progress, so we can never at any stage abandon our concern with him. (Time 198)

He puts faith in the quality of the people who are involved in the task of nation-building. Social change can be meaningful only when the human being is not bypassed and remains the ultimate concern. Factories and economic plans are not an end in themselves. For Gandhi and his followers revolution was neither a class war nor a religious crusade; it was also not a road to personal ambition. Hari Mohan in This Time of Morning and Sumer Singh in The Day of Shadow use Gandhian philosophies as a way for their personal development. Kailas maintains that the party should not abandon its moral character which was its main strength. Gandhi had proved that politics was not and need not be a dirty game. Kailas echoes this belief when he reflects: “Any game was a dirty game when dirty people played it” (Morning 185). With more and more unscrupulous people flocking to politics Kailas is thrown
out both from the U.N. delegation and the U.P. Ministry. His return to politics is not a reward for virtue, but a continuation of struggle. He is expected to lead another movement for justice and equality and all crusades demand dedication and sacrifice.

In *Storm in Chandigarh* Nayantara Sahgal is concerned with an India which is puzzled in its retreat from Gandhian values. The retreat has penetrated into the personal world and while on the one hand it is a confrontation between Gayan Singh and Harpal, on the other, it is to be a question of violence versus nonviolence. Sahgal confronts whether the victim to bow down before the oppressor or to claim his right for survival. Gayan Singh had never wasted time on emotions and human beings. He had always displayed a ruthless attitude while dealing with a situation and for him there is always a bargain to be struck. It is not so with Harpal who is more concerned with human beings than with bargains. Similarly there is Inder who has no patience with emotional bylines and Vishal who believes that decent human relations can be built with care and love.

Gayan Singh and Inder are men of a kind in their disregard for other human beings. They do manage somehow to gain public sympathy. Harpal who takes long term view of the political situation is unable to draw the requisite amount of support just as Vishal. The message which the writer wishes to impress upon the reader is the courage involved in taking a stand against injustice and tyranny. This is the meaning of nonviolence and the lesson which the post-Independence generation is compelled to learn all over again. Politically the threat to moral values degrades and it paves way to selfish and corrupt leaders. As a result, ruthless and violent attitude takes the upper hand rather than the spirit of dedication. Kailas is aware of the attraction Communism can have for millions of men and women who have been victimized for ages. For
them it is a promise that ‘they will inherit the earth.’ (Morning 26) Communism, Kailas realizes, had ‘taken to itself the ecstasy of mystic, the rapture of the poet, the crusading ardor of the zealot and transferred them into the stuff battle’ (27).

The Gandhian value of nonviolence is put to the acid test as the title of the novel Storm in Chandigarh itself suggests. The novel opens with the Union Home Minister’s statement: “Violence lies very close to the surface in Punjab.” (Storm 1) Sahgal concentrates on the artistic value of violence in the context of political events and ordinary human relations. The confrontation between Gayan Singh and Harpal Singh is more significant than mere clash of personalities; it is, more fundamentally, a conflict of ideas: the cult of violence and the need of nonviolence. Gayan Sigh, who symbolizes the former, is a political murderer in league with the very devil for money and power. His moral wickedness and political rascality date back to the partition days of 1947 and continue to shadow his conscience even when he becomes the Chief Minister of the Punjab. In contrast, Harpal Singh represents Gandhian values. A stout-hearted integrationist, he is the political counterfoil to Gyan Singh in all matters.

Vishal Dubey stands out as the Jamesian central intelligence in the novel. Saroj recalls Dubey’s advice: “There was only one way to live, without pretence. It would be the ultimate healing balm to the lonely spaces of the spirit, beyond which there would be no darkness” (Storm 201). Dubey’s concept of higher morality is still more radical than Gandhi’s “inner voice.” “It’s 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.” (80) Sahgal’s artistic exploitation of the cult of violence in politics and inter-personal relations comes off successfully towards the end of the novel. The Storm in Chandigarh blows off when Gayan Singh calls off the strike — a gesture of
peace from a violent-tempered man: and when Harpal Sigh gets shot and wounded — a symbolic act of self-purification in the Gandhian tradition; and Vishal Dubey grows and mellows in his search for the real values of life.

Sahgal has cleverly used the actual historical happening of the 1960s leading the principal characters of the political sub-plot to a climactic point. India which had vowed to adhere to the Gandhian order of non-violence is portrayed as a country where confusion, disorder, and chaos is wide-spread, where people have turned to be a furious, stone throwing, factory burning mob. By juxtaposing the situation in the country in 1947 and the one during the post-Independence period, the novelist draws an appalling and bleak picture of the present. Harpal Singh, ruminates, ‘in 1947, there was still India left to serve. Now there’s no such vision left to bind us. The big vision has disintegrated.’ (Storm 104) The conflict between Gayan and Harpal is thus not merely a political battle; it is a battle of philosophies. It is a conflict between idealism and pragmatism. The ‘storm’ on the political plane thus abates temporarily and Dubey feels an intense personal grief. To him the funeral of the old Minister ‘the last surviving figure of the Gandhian era’ symbolizes:

More than a state funeral, it would mark the end of an era known as Gandhian. In politics that had meant, freedom from fear, the head, held high, the indomitable will in the emaciated body of India. If all of that had been worth anything it will have been disbursed over this country, down deep into our blood (Storm 98).

Sahgal is certain that violence ensues from selfish and narrow attitudes of which the consequences are petty agitations, bandhs and satyagrahas – all distorted versions of Gandhism for they lack the purity and spirit of sacrifice that marked
Gandhian resistance. At the same time, she stresses the fact that violence spreads and takes the toll of the people and society because of the apathy and inaction of a majority of people especially the middle class intellectuals at the personal and societal values. According to Sahgal violence is given different names, indiscipline, unrest and disorder. Gayan Singh has no respect for the individual. He transforms Satyagraha, the scared weapon used by Gandhiji to fight against a tyrannical foreign rule, into a demonstration of strength and a showdown.

*This Time of Morning* and *Strom in Chandigarh*, read together, show the author’s deep concern for the fast fading impact of Gandhism in political and social life. The novelist succeeds not only in rendering into fiction the political issues of the late sixties, but also in capturing the spirit of age, the political mood and intrigues of the post-independence era.

The retreat from Gandhian seems to be in full effect in *The Day in Shadow* where the official policy is inclined towards a Soviet alliance indifferent to the country’s future interests. The new breed of politicians is smooth and unscrupulous and is represented by Sumer Singh who is a direct descendant of Hari Mohan and Somnath. The Gandhian attitude is represented here by Raj Garg, a young Independent Member of Parliament, who is sensitive to the threat from the new relationship to democratic and moral values. Sitting in Sumer Singh’s office Raj had the vivid impression that the world as he knew it ‘was slipping away’ (*Shadow* 154) and some bigger outer future was shaping itself remorselessly around them. He and Sumer Singh as he realized: “They were not men of different political opinions supporting the same system. They belonged to different lines of thinking and the future of Asia would depend on which line won.” (*Shadow* 155)
Sumer Singh’s world, as Raj finds, is a narrow closed world indifferent to human being. He aims at drastic changes overthrowing tradition and religious values. Raj is aware that it is no longer enough to uphold the Gandhian values in the abstract. It has become necessary to re-evaluate them and to analyze the reasons for their slackening hold on his countrymen. He comes to the conclusion that the freedom struggle has not involved ‘enough people deeply enough or long enough’ (Shadow 230). The Indians have failed themselves with their warm approach to ideas. They had never been dramatic in their relationship to ideas. In Gandhi’s case it was the man who had the following, not the idea which had ‘remained vague and sentimental’ (213) and had failed to make an impact on the people.

In her earlier novel, Storm in Chandigarh, it is Vishal Dubey who is sensitive to the social and political world around him. The passing away of the older generation of politicians is also the passing of an era, of Gandhian ideals and goals:

Gandhian politics had also meant the open decision the open action. No stealth, no furtiveness and therefore no shame. Every act proudly performed in the sunlight. If all that had been worth anything, thought Dubey, it will have been disbursed over this country, down deep into our blood. Or perhaps that was where it had always been and from where Gandhi had drawn it up like water from well to banish the thirst of defeat and despair. (Storm 239)

In each successive novel the retreat from Gandhian ideals in the contemporary political situation seems to be more final. The reasons for the distancing from Gandhian ideas are many, amongst them the hold of orthodox religion which has undetermined secularism. But in The Day in Shadow it all boils
down to the fact that the people in power are the wrong kind of people who believed that it was time ‘to throw away sentiment, the weak, worn-out liberalism of the past, time to bury Gandhi and write a new page of history.’ (Shadow 186) Simrit is unable to find anything in common between Gandhi and the new radicals and Raj thinks that the Gandhi image ‘sat farcically on the ruling part.’ They are unable to dispense with it for ‘no one could capture and hold the masses without it’ (Shadow 10). Sumer Singh who is a member of the ruling party is not even a radical at heart. He is more interested in his own political future than in the welfare of the people and his father’s property is a closer reality to him than the socialism he professes to believe.

The dedication which Gandhi demanded is now lost in self-interest and power. And power instead of being a means to an end has become an end in itself. The attitude of Sardar Sahib is remarkable in the novel. The ailing Petroleum Minister, who had not worried about appreciation or his own political future but only about the country’s interests, is well portrayed in the novel. Lying ill in the hospital he is aware of the failing of human beings. In an article, “Failure of Educated” (The Sunday Standard, 22nd July, 1973), Nayantara has pointed out the truth of this in the political context. If the leaders were irresponsible and insincere, the people too had failed miserably to be aware, to respond fearlessly and intelligently to some of the challenges that the society faces. The novelist advocates that this is the basic awareness from which all other changes stem.

Simrit In The Day in Shadow is another staunch believer in nonviolence. She remarks:

I have wished nonviolence had, become a way of thinking, made into a law, or given some kind of sanction, so that it could be passed on like
an inheritance. I have wanted to pass it on to my son. I have nothing to give my children except nonviolence (Shadow 177).

In a nonviolent resistance there is no personal enmity, it is the wrong that is resisted. Violence Sahgal feels is an irresponsible, impulsive action and entails burden of guilt. Sahgal feels the retreat of Gandhism is responsible for the ills of modern India. It is this change, this break with the past which is disastrous. Nayantara Sahgal is of the opinion that ‘the rulers who do not understand our history go terribly wrong and even grotesque in judgment and action.’ (Shadow 79)

Her next novel, A Situation in New Delhi captures the aftermath of the death of Shivaraj, the Prime minister of India. His character is established as a staunch believer of Gandhism and non violence. The cabinet members in the novel are men who profess to be radicals but are far removed from the millions of their country and have nothing in common with them. They don’t even have the political aspirations in their way of life. Devi feels ‘queerly isolated’ amongst these men of hackneyed phrases and empty talk. Michael Calvert who revisits India after Shivraj’s death harbors his own suspicions regarding the true reasons of his death. He feels that Shivraj had lost the will to live at the collapse of the value system he had tried to stabilize into a way of life. But this radicalism of the politicians is alien and sterile and yields no results. It leaves even the young discontented because of its inaction. Rishad, Devi’s young son, joins a Naxalite movement in his desire for social change. ‘These young people are involved in their own crusade, led by a desire to find purpose and meaning in life. They are charmed by the instant success that violence brings them. They have their own code and disciplined, unaided by motive, by drugs or mental aberration.’ (Situation 78) They want to build an Indian utopia—for the poor and downtrodden,
not realizing that violence even if it spelt action was in the long run self-defeating for the panic and fear it creates is incapable of positive action.

According to them clinging to Shivraj, Nehru and Gandhi serve no honest purpose in a society which in need of change. Usman realizes the futility of this attitude. Indians had treated the attainment of freedom as a terminating point but this was not so. Revolutions did not end, they simply continued, “they did not get congealed in their tracks or follow beaten tracks’ and people had to be willing to change not once but time and again” (Situation 30). And the way of revolution, he emphasizes, if it is to succeed, must be nonviolent for as he tells Devi: “There never was another way. Besides, do you realize it’s the only way most people in this country understand and will give their allegiance to?” (Situation 116)

Usman is represented as an advocate of all types of nonviolent protests about which he says: “There never was another way. Besides do you realize it’s the only way most people in this country understand and will give their allegiance to?” (Situation 166)

Usman has the Gandhian courage to resign, to disassociate himself from power and to lead a new revolution asking those who wish to accompany him to pledge themselves to peaceful action. While violence is born out of despair, nonviolence is born out of strength. Nonviolence for Nayantara Sahgal is a comprehensive attitude than merely a political weapon. It recognizes the fact that the nonviolence is the ‘central consideration to any problems was the man who faced it.’ (Situation 185) It means not yielding to despair and is the refusal to bend the knee. Ram Krishnan in The Day in Shadow asks ‘what price miracle if it had left not even spark, if it could never happen again?’ (Shadow 181) referring to the Gandhian values
and methods that have not outlived their utility. In fact they are of greater relevance in
the present context. Nonviolence, Nayantara Sahgal thinks, it is an active, powerful
force and will remain a potent force if used in an organized way. Usman Ali is the
most reminiscent of Gandhi.

The novel *Rich Like Us* ironically reflects merits and consequences of various
important national events such as Emergency, partition of India, Nehru’s speeches,
Gandhi’s nonviolence and insistence for acceptance of truth etc. is the backdrop
events of the novel. Sahgal has overwhelming adoration for Gandhiji in her work
*Prison and Chocolate* she describes her great admiration for him. She boldly and
objectively presents the baffling paradox that Gandhi once was. The following
sceptical questionings at the assassination of the Mahatma are at once piercing and
heart-rending:

> Will anyone ever understand the reason why Gandhiji was shot, or for
> that matter. Christ crucified or Socrates condemned to death? Who
> stood to gain Gandhiji’s death? Not the assassin, because he was
> caught, tried and eventually hanged. Not the enemies of Gandhiji’s
> teachings because his death threw the searchlight on his message more
> powerfully than ever before. In his lifetime he had been called a saint.
> His martyrdom crowned him with an even more glorious immorality.
> To ask the reason why he was killed is to probe a mystery which has
> no beginning. The whys of history are seldom answered. (*Prison* 218)

After the rapprochement to the peoples and mourning the loss, she soon steals
herself and the people from this state of utter despondency and tries to instill solace
and strength:
…were my values so fragile, had Bapu lived and died for nothing that I could so easily lose courage when he was no longer there. Millions of people would have been ordinary folk, living their humdrum lives unperturbed but for him. He had come to disturb them profoundly, to jolt them out of indifference, to awaken them to each other’s suffering and in so doing to make them reach for the stars. What if he had gone? We were still there, young, strong and proud, to bear his banner before us. Who among us dared lose heart when there was this work to be done? Gandhi was dead but his India would live on in his children.

_(Prison 223)_

The passage, so lyrical in spirit, is forceful and evocative. It combines in itself the slow pace and sure measure of the cool, calculated, classical style with the color and poetry of the romanticist. It raises an emotional vibration in the reader. Nayantara Sahgal has exhibited here the heights to which human beings and language can rise. Sahgal’s novels remind one of Gandhian ideals, not merely because they were instrumental agents in restoring freedom to India but because today their relevance is increasingly felt due to violence erupting everywhere with incredible force.

Another Common theme in the sextet of Nayantara Sahgal is her pre-Occupation with the Hindus and Hinduism. The ambiguity and ambivalence of this ancient Indian religion provides interesting subject matter for Indo-English writers and Sahgal is no exception. In fact, her characters can be identified on the basis of their religions alone. In _A Time to be Happy_ the narrator states this simply by saying “religion for us is inseparable from our lives” and “It was the reason for nearly everything that happened.” _(Happy 166)_ In _The Day in Shadow_, Raj Garg a Christian
is confused and angry, because he feels that Hindus use their religion to exploit others especially their women. He asks: “This whole question of what a Hindu stands for has yet to be sorted out. No one has begun to do it.” (Shadow 73) And “Even the sun, moon and stars are under analysis today. Everything except Hinduism.” (Shadow 19) In *Rich Like Us*, the anger has subsided and Sahgal concludes “Hinduism is not thought, nor does it seek converts. It simply is.” (Rich 133) Such her characters are faced with the conflict arising out of traditional religious belief and modern scientific education. Sahgal herself is averse to the idea of fate as accepted by the average Hindu, because this in her view gives rise to apathy, inaction and compliancy. The idea of fate prevents a Hindu from being dynamic.

One of the main aspects of Nayantara Sahgal’s work is her concern with religion and religious attitudes which she feels go a long way to explain political and emotional stances and also personal relationship. Sahgal’s work cannot be divided into themes like tradition versus modernity or East-West encounter. There is much in tradition which she values and a great deal in modernity which she rejects. Tradition in India is mainly a religious one, for Hinduism which is the religion of the majority is not confined to temples or other places of worship, it is a way of life and has a sprawling hold over the lives of the people. In India religion seems to be the reason for nearly everything and influences life at every juncture. There is perhaps nothing wrong with this kind of a pervasive influence but unfortunately Hindu philosophy has fostered a number of contradictions and anomalies and has not been able to provide a definitive and clear opinion on moral issues. Its ability to remain unaffected by other religions has, over the years, hardened into an inability to grow and develop and to accept new ideas. The ambivalence of Hinduism is responsible for a great deal that is happening in the present Indian society; it is answer able for both the apathy and the
violence in it. Yet Nayantara believes that religion if it is the despair of India is also its hope.

The duality of Hinduism is touched upon in her very first novel, *A Time to Be Happy*. The central philosophy of Karma can itself be interpreted to support two ways of life. If on the one hand it encourages passivity for man on the other it gives him power to create a better future for himself. The narrator in *A Time to Be Happy* explains this to Melvor that ‘it places responsibility on the individual.’ (*Time* 161) Similarly other opposing attitudes exist side by side; violence and nonviolence, materialism and spiritualism, acquisition and renunciation are all a part of Hinduism. The division between illusion and reality becomes blurred as does the one between non-attachment and inhumanity. Kusum grows up in the liberal atmosphere of the Sahai home, there are others who are not so fortunate, Raghubir, a clerk in Sanad’s office is limited by his Brahmin origins and a false sense of social prestige. He refuses the job of a salesman because though a better paid one it is unbecoming to the dignity of an educated Brahmin. He also had a notion that this job would seriously affect his chances of a good matrimonial alliance. There are others who are its silent victims and willingly accept tradition and religion like Mathur. Man-woman relationships and attitudes towards marriage, divorce and other related issues are governed by religious views. By the examples set by the characters of the religious scriptures orthodoxy in India is mainly a religious one.

The narrator in *A Time to be Happy* believes that ‘things will work out in time’ (*Happy* 231) but this hope is disproved. Rakesh, in her next novel *This Time of Morning*, faces the same uncertainty as young Sanad had puzzled over in *A Time to be Happy*. He finds Christianity and Islam to be unambiguous religions which spell out
clearly what they believe, but Hinduism remains a ‘baffling uncertainty’. (*Happy 219*)

Rakesh turns to Kailas Vrind in his need to understand it. Kailas explains to him the essential duality of Hinduism:

> It was a torpor that accepted maimed limbs, blind eyes and abject poverty as destiny, letting generations live and die in hopelessness, and at the same time it was the majesty of the mind engaged in a lifelong combat with the senses. You could not accept Hinduism in its entirety without harboring ignorance and superstition too. You could not wholly reject it without destroying part of yourself, for it was the story of India (*Morning 40*).

For Rakesh and Kailas and for many others like them in religious India, the choice was not between the acceptance or the rejection of religion, but between interpreting it positively as a living faith or exploiting its ritualistic pattern for narrow selfish concerns. Religion thus became a moral choice. While Kailas Vrind and Swami Satyanand choose the path of enlightened religion, men like Hari Mohan in *This Time of Morning* prefer to exploit it for personal ends. Hari Mohan consciously becomes the rallying point for all the rigid orthodox Hindu elements and does not hesitate to inflame communal discontent and ill-feeling for his own political gains. Hari Mohan also believes—though mistakenly—that by practicing ritualistic religion by proxy he can attain salvation. In *This Time of Morning* it ceases to be a matter of religion and becomes one of the differences in the approach to it. While Hari Mohan approaches it as ‘a tool to be used for political exploitation and personal salvation’, Kailas wants to use it for moral enrichment of both the individual and society. It becomes the difference between secularism and fanaticism, between the ‘modern and
the medieval mind’ *(Morning 197).* Kailas Vrind in *This Time of Morning* tells his wife Mira: “Hindu society has produced extraordinary contrasts, has it not? At its worst it produces men like Hari Mohan, at its best women like you. And both Hari Mohan and you could not be the products of any other society” *(Morning 200-201).*

This is true of more than Mira and Hari Mohan and is applicable to the world of politics which is full of such contrasts. On the one hand is the fictional representation of Swami Satyanand who is stabled while addressing a meeting in a mosque and is commended to anonymity by the deliberate silence of the British press. The man and his attitude are both grossly misrepresented. On the other hand is the actual demonstration by the sadhus in November, 1968 against cow slaughter. While one express humanistic faith the other expresses intolerance and narrow-mindness. Tolerance and intolerance, violence and nonviolence are born out of the duality of Hindu religion which sanctions and upholds both acquisition and renunciation, and these pervade the political and the personal world.

Hari Mohan in, *This Time of Morning* has no hesitation at all in using religious feelings, for politics purposes. He is the “rallying point” *(Morning 92)* of orthodox elements and uses his power as a landlord to create communal tension. Hari Mohan’s moves are all calculated towards consolidating his political position and are all rooted in the world of political expediency. Even his religious faith is for him only means of self-preservation. Hari Mohan uses people to extract as much as he possible can from them. He uses both Somnath and Kalyan Sinha for the political ends without giving them any loyalty in return. He is the kind of man who can descend to the lowest level in order to reach the worldly goals he has set himself. While Hari Mohan believes in religious proxy for the washing away for his sins, Kalyan Sinha rejects the religious
attitude. He scoffs at his foster parents for quietly accepting their lot “like beasts of burden” (103) and is contemptuous of their attitude. He feels that they are the kind of people who do not live “but merely stagnate away in the turgid waters of their lives” (Morning 131). In his rejection of Hinduism, Kalyan Sinha rejects a whole moral tradition and makes a God of himself only to discover in the end.

In the Storm in Chandigarh (1969) Gyan Singh like Kalyan Sinha does not allow any considerations of right and wrong to interfere with his plans. He is a man who believes in action not bothering about human impact. Gyan Singh strives to build a world of strength and progress—but the world creates is neither a human world nor a reasonable one. To this group of people also belongs Som Raman (The Day in Shadow) who gives up his job with a British firm in order to set up business with the childhood friend Lalli. Som burdens his wife with tax payment for the money he wants his son Brij to inherit. Simrit finds it impossible to get her point understood in a society dominated by male prerogatives. Hindu tradition does not recognize divorce and therefore the financial arrangement stands unsolved. Simrit like Saroj before her is the inheritor of a long line of suffering women. Som’s attitude of mind is the same which governs the behavior of Kalyan and Gyan, who never worry about their conscience. Sumer Singh, the Minister of state for petroleum is another Som, living in a narrow restricted world and seeing only what he wants to see. Sumer Singh does not respond to the deeper claims of humanity and there is no meeting point between the dedicated politics of Raj and the opportunistic politics of the oil Minister just as there is no meeting point between Raj and Som in the world of personal relationships.

Politics before independence was the “tidal wave of patriotism,” (Saghal, Passion 32) and after independence it became the parliament and the party. In This
Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow, Nayantara Sahgal focuses attention on the post-Independence world of power politics. The men in this world are of two kinds: the human and the ruthless those who live in a moral context and those who live in a material world and both kinds have their roots in Hinduism. KailasVrind and Vishal Dubey are men who uphold the concept of service and approach human beings as human beings. If Gayan Singh is intent on a show of strength, Harpal continues to value integrity.

Violence and nonviolence comes face to face when Harpal’s men try to maintain normalcy in the face of disruptive forces unleashed by Gyan. This confrontation is the moment of reckoning when men refuse to submit to the tyranny of violence and decide to face it. Harpal at the time of partition had felt that it had nothing to do with religion “it was more like the clock turned back to a primitive century. Men had always wanted power over each other’s minds and religion had been only one weapon in their hands” (Storm 30). This awareness governs his whole attitude and helps him to rise above the narrow claims of religion - he is a Sikh Chief Minister of a predominantly Hindu State.

More than Harpal it is Vishal Dubey, a man steeped in the Hindu tradition, who projects the belief that there should be no compromise with evil. He is of the opinion that evil should not be met halfway. Somnath as Chief Minister of Utter Pradesh in This Time of Morning follows a policy of compromise. He, as the governor points out, not only equates right with wrong but encourages indiscipline and political blackmailing. In Storm in Chandigarh, Kachru, the Cabinet Secretary, does not agree with Dubey and is of the opinion that compromise would have been better than a showdown. But Dubey correctly believes that evading the issue is no solution. The
ability of a Hindu to evade an issue was responsible for the general decay in the quality of life and this Dubey called “the funeral march of Hinduism” (Storm 76). What was required even in the world of politics was a more human approach and more enlightened view; in order to achieve this, religion would have to acquire the ability to change and to think afresh. Though religious moorings are important for a people they should not tie them to narrow ritualism, they should enable people to grow and to progress. Nayantara Sahgal projects the view that though religion is a significant base for a moral conscience, the concept of religion must change and revitalize itself in order to make a meaningful contribution to the political and emotional life of the people.

In Storm in Chandigarh the two approaches are represented by two sets of people. On the one hand are Trivedi, Dubey and Harpal, while on the other are men like Inder and Gyan. Trivedi is disturbed by the ambiguity of Hinduism and tells Dubey, ‘This lack of definition doesn’t suit us at all.’ Trivedi asks: “What use was this heritage to ordinary men? What did it create but quietude? Did it toughen fiber, give emotional satisfaction? Did it help the soldier to fight better, the businessman to do his job better?” (Storm 78)

Dubey, in later years, echoes this view. Brahminism which he feels should stand for a ‘quality of life which people evolve for themselves’ had lost its vitality and become ineffective. Religion is ordinarily expected to provide the basis for compassion and understanding but it no longer does this when men are governed by their surface interpretation of religion. Inder in Storm in Chandigarh and Som in The Day in Shadow are men who are not really religious, still derive their idea of male superiority from religious sources. Inder views Saroj’s premarital relationship form
the limited angle of physical chastity while Som rejects all that is gentle and meek and sensitive. Shaila in *The Day in Shadow* and Leela Dubey in *Storm in Chandigarh* are two women who are capable of living life at two levels; one the reality and the other an illusion. Everything was an illusion according to the Hindu, ‘even your hand was not your hand, your pain was not your pain’ in the indisputable flawless monstrous logic (*Shadow* 105). This was an attitude which encouraged inaction.

Kalyan Sinha in *This Time of Morning* is alienated from Hinduism because of the passivity of his foster parents who, he feels, do not live life but simply bear their lot like beasts of burden. Similarly in *Storm in Chandigarh*, violence spreads because it is tolerated. Nobody takes a stand against it. People are lifeless and uncaring and allow violence to, ‘mount and ebb like some tidal wave, waiting for it to engulf them. Passively waiting, as they waited, for the rains, for the harvest, for the birth of unwanted children, for death.’ (*Storm* 6) While Gyan Singh and others like him are ruthless enough to exploit this passivity, there are also people like Raj in *A Day in Shadow* who want ‘the people to abandon this passivity and to find a working philosophy’ (*Shadow* 13). The Hindus, he is of the opinion, are contented drawing their credentials as they do from an old deep source and are out of step with life. Vishal Dubey in *Storm in Chandigarh* also shares this feeling. The Hindus have a backward-looking tendency and are excessively dominated by the past. Dubey tells a colleague: “I think our great-grandmother does have a formidable influence on what we do. In a number of ways she’s still alive. Sometimes I think it will need a tearing up by the roots to get her out of the way.” (*Storm* 66)

In the same novel Mara finds the Hindu heritage suffocating limiting. It is a bundle of old useless impossible ideas going on and on. She tells Jit that it is a dead
burden: “It’s ours all right, but some of it is rotten, we’ll die if we go on like this. Sometimes I think we’re already dead.” (Storm 138) There is need for action and fresh thought on almost every religious issue.

In *The Day in Shadow* Simrit in her meekness brings to Raj’s mind the image of the Hindu subdued womanhood: “The Hindu race! Mute, acquiescent, letting things happen to it, from a country to the mind and body of a woman.” (Shadow 37) Simrit is ill treated sometimes, misused at other times, pushed to the margin at all times yet she accepts everything with an irritating passivity. The divorce settlement comes as the final blow. Simrit the wife of Som, lost everything and has been shown the doors, her lack of anger and indignation can be analysed only as her meekness and nothing else. She does not know what to do and when to do. Her introspection confirms this: “She was meant, she knew, to accept it peacefully without reason or question. There was nothing else to be done. A person thrown out of a train in the night and forced to find his way home in the dark must feel this” (Shadow 52).

Simrit is inanely passive is proved amply by the fact that even after the shameless ultimatum given by Som she does not ponder leaving him. It takes Raj to fill her with spirit and courage in order to come to the decision to leave him. Raj correctly argues:

What is absent from Hindu civilization of yours is avidity, the positive desire for something positive. You have to unearth that, and if your principles don’t help you to, find some that do. Restraint is a fine thing but at this particular juncture in our history when we have to act, and be responsible for our actions, I think passion and deeds would serve us better (Shadow 102).
This argument of Raj fills Simrit with fire and in a moment of passion, she leaves Som. This is how she rebels a revolt which may at least be called a mockery of sedition. We have yet another strong evidence of her passivity, provided by the novelist’s statement in her article “Of divorce and Hindu women.” She writes:

\[
\text{Divorce of woman nature is a sin, and in expiration of her share of guilt she stays mute and acquiescent over the settlement, willing to accept it as part of karma. Simrit is symbolic of the Hindu race (Sahgal, Of divorce 1971).}
\]

In her involvement with Raj Simrit again shows her docility. Though Raj comes as the promise of a different world, this world again is not as sanguine as expected. The Hindu race is the butt of Raj’s mockery and strangely Simrit a member of this race is convinced by his racist logic and does nothing to refute it:

\[
\text{It made Raj wonder whether a Hindu ever tackled a problem as an individual. Did Hindus have any feelings that were personal and private, in connected with institutions like the family, caste and the beaten track of these past 2,000 years and more? (Shadow 103)}
\]

There are characters in her novels who are not Hindus or who while being Hindus are critical of the inhibiting nature of Hinduism. In A Time to be Happy McIvor is the outsider eager to understand the anomalies of Hinduism. The narrator himself adopts a fairly objective attitude in his understanding of the religion. In This Time of Morning there is Neil who is a European and Kalyan Sinha who is a non-believer. Rakesh though a Hindu has a heightened critical awareness while Kailas Vrind has already broken free from the narrowness of the conventional world represented by his mother. In her world there were no free spirits, only ‘Sons and
daughters, husbands and wives, children and parents, and for each category there rigid rules of behavior laid down” (Morning 181).

In Storm in Chandigarh, Dubey and Trivedi, like Rakesh and Kailas before them, wish to use the Hindu tradition for meaningful positive action. Trivedi turns to the Bhagvad Gita which he feels, alone among the Hindu scriptures tells us something specific, something beside ritual. The Gita recommends action and the performance of duty unallied to reward. Trivedi feels that the Gita is occupied more with ethics than with morality and considers this the basis of its value. Dubey who has imbibed the useful lessons of the Gita turns to action when faced by violence and communal disharmony and applies the same code of behaviour to his personal life. In The Day in Shadow both Ram Krishan and Raj wish Simrit to take a stand against injustice and not to yield to a sense of helplessness and victimization. While Raj is a Christian, Ram Krishnan is the critical insider. He tells Simirit:

Retribution catches up with people who do not face a problem. Religions are supposed to help one face up. Religions are like public schools. Each produces a type, a uniform personality. The type ours produces doesn’t face up—it puts problems into cold storage. But I’ve found a way out of the . . . To fight wrong . . . a man has to believe it is terribly important to fight it. (Shadow 233-34)

In A Situation in New Delhi, it is Usman, the Muslim Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, who points out the duality present in the lesson of the Bhagvad Gita. The performance of duty in a detached manner was on the one hand capable of evoking the best in man, while on the other it could lead to the most brutal and inhuman action. Rishad who is a Hindu by birth and has never really considered it
like this is able to see the point when Usman spells it out. Usman also feels that “it is the boredom of the Hindus with their own apathy and inactivity which manifests itself as violence.” (Situation 78) It is Usman who feels that some action has to be taken before violence engulfs everything. ‘A Hindu remedy has to be found to all this… And since no Hindu in this land of ours had come up with one I’ll have to.’ (Situation 79) There are a number of issues involved but the basic one is that change is natural it has however to be related to reality ‘you can’t make a revolution in the air… It has to come from the ground under your feet.’ (Situation 79)

Sahgal’s criticism of Hinduism is in no way irreligious or malicious. She does not consider religion to be dispensable for it provides a significant base of progress. In the past, India’s leaders who have tried to lift India out of this terrible apathy have been deeply religious, in spirit. She is of the opinion that no worthwhile growth can take place without the religious yearning. Nadira in A Situation in New Delhi clings to the narrow aspects of her religion and if Raj is able to see beyond the narrow religious boundaries the credit goes mainly to his own character.

Post-Colonial Indian Fiction deals with so many vast themes such as, colonialism, nationalism, partition, independence, regionalism, westernization, science, urbanization, feminism, capitalism, socialism, and so on and so forth. Among them one such big theme is "tradition and modernity." This theme seems to hold a lot of explanatory power because of the peculiar social formation prevalent in India. In fact, one way of characterizing modern India would be by considering it a society in transition: a great tradition. In other words, the story of modern India itself is a tradition-modernity story. Every novel, every poem, every work of art in modern India, then, either explicitly or implicitly, is one version and articulation of this big movement
of our culture and nation.

Tradition and modernity are not opposed to each other. There is a tradition of modernity itself as there is the potential for modernity and change in tradition. Tradition and modernity is the repository of both good and evil, and its use and abuse must be separated from tradition. Both tradition and modernity are mixed categories, are value-loaded, one cannot see them in simple unitary terms. One must be alive to their inner contradictions, tensions, and oppositions and be aware of their overlaps and interpenetrations.

Coming to Sahgal's novels, it would be salutary to begin with the conventional wisdom on the subject. A. V. Krishna Rao addresses himself to this question of tradition and modernity:

Unlike some other Indian novelists in English who indiscriminately affirm the Indian cultural milieu, she seeks to criticize the diseased and the decadent part of the Indian tradition. She does not however go with Mulkraj Anand in making loud and strident protests against the concept of conformity to tradition in favour of some alien idea of social justice; on the contrary, she dives deep into the sustaining springs of the composite cultural tradition of India and comes up to affirm that aspect of Indian tradition which possesses and promises a survival value. She is thus neither an out-and-out conformist nor a thoroughbred nonconformist. She is neither too submissive to the dictates of an orthodox tradition nor too much in love with revolutionary romanticism. She accepts the composite character of the Indian tradition and affirms its catholicity which allows for the human
being maximum freedom (*Nayantara* 91-92).

Sahgal is completely against what she perceives to be tradition. In *Passion for India* she points out that the background for the personal crisis in her novels is usually political: “And along side the personal story there is a picture of political erosion, degradation and decay” (Sahgal, *Passion* 85). It seems fairly clear that, in novel after novel, Sahgal expresses her dissatisfaction with the new in politics. The new, the modern, is often corrupt, ruthless, and fascistic. The old, the traditional, is the Gandhian, the humanistic, and the compassionate, which the modern displaces.

Sahgal works out a kind of synthesis between tradition and modernity. She accepts some aspects of the former and rejects others; likewise, she accepts some aspects of the latter and rejects others. Her women rebel against such traditions, which would force them to suffer silently, without redress. Instead, her women walk out, substituting courage for self-sacrifice, thereby redefining the notion of the virtuous woman. Sahgal sees tradition in two related ways. In its broader sense, tradition refers to Hinduism - that set of beliefs and practices which determine the mental makeup of most Indians.

Tradition, in this sense, is responsible for social qualities and thus, ultimately, for how individuals, particularly women, behave within the family and in a marriage. Indirectly, it is also responsible for political attitudes, for how a particular culture responds to corruption and the abuse of power. However, in Sahgal’s world, politics is an area in which Indians have their own positive tradition because of the national struggle for independence. This tradition, chiefly, is the combined legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. There is in it the Gandhian emphasis on truth, nonviolence, satyagraha, social justice, prayer, poverty, simplicity, and so on, and the
Nehruvian emphasis on socialism, democracy, and progress.

In Passion for India she admits that Hinduism is one of the most important themes in her novels.

What does it [Hinduism] mean today? How does this culture affect our conduct, our decisions, that sort of thing? What kind of person is the inheritor of this inheritance? Hinduism is of interest to me because most of us are Hindus, but even those who aren't, live under the social and psychological overhang of Hinduism. It is not something we can ignore, if we want to understand ourselves. (Sahgal, Passion 85).

Clearly, Sahgal believes that the way one behaves or rather the choices that society gives him have to do with this system of beliefs and practices called Hinduism. This becomes obvious with a closer look at her characters, especially the women characters like Simrit, Sonali, Rose and Rashmi. Once Rashmi’s marriage begins to disintegrate, she is forced to ask herself what system it is which expects her to suffer and suffer silently without reacting or trying to change her life. Significantly, Hinduism becomes an issue only in This Time of Morning (1966); it may be recollecting that Sahgal’s own marriage was disintegrating around this time; her divorce came through in 1967. A Time to Be Happy (1958), her first novel, shows no concern or conflict with the prevailing ideology of Hinduism. The conflict arises only when Rashmi, in the next novel, contemplates separation from Dalip. Hinduism, it would seem, is all right as long as one does not break any of its implicit codes. When one does, then one is forced to confront its hypocrisies, double standards, and oppressions. Only those who are burned, so to speak, by the system are forced to question it. They can no longer accept all that is perpetrated in the name of tradition.
It is Kailas in *This Time of Morning* who first addresses this issue in Sahgal's fiction, and Kailas seems to function as the author's spokesman in this case, because he is invested with enormous narrative approval and authority. Not only is he a positive character who enjoys much authorial power, but his view of Hinduism is repeated, with slight modifications, by other positive characters like Vishal, Raj, and Sonali's father Keshav. Hinduism, for Rakesh, is a puzzle because it seems so chaotic; "the creed that he was born into" was "the only baffling uncertainty." (*Morning* 40)

To help him, Kailas explains:

Hinduism was boundless enough . . . to encompass the loftiest of metaphysics, rigid enough to despise the Untouchable. It was goodness and piety and the living light of faith. . . . Yet it was the sufferance of disease and clamor near the temple. It was torpor that accepted maimed limbs, blind eyes and abject poverty as destiny, letting generations live and die in hopelessness, and at the same time it was the majesty of the mind engaged in lifelong combat with the senses (*Morning* 65)

The picture of Hinduism painted by Kailas underscores Sahgal's ambivalence toward it. This ambivalence is summed up by the narrator:

You could not accept Hinduism in its entirety without harbouring ignorance and superstition too. You could not wholly reject it without destroying pan of yourself, for it was the story of India. (*Morning* 72)

Essentially, this is Sahgal's view of tradition through all her work. Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit, Mona, and Rose, Sahgal's heroines, all suffer the brunt of the negative aspects of Hinduism. The prototype of the woman oppressed by marriage begins with Rashmi. When she decides to walk out on her husband, her mother Mira is unhappy:
Rashmi's announcement was worse than bad news. It was a mortal blow to all she held sacred. . . . What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstance, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lepers (Morning 146).

This is a classic example of how conventional Hinduism oppresses a woman. Saroj and Simrit are clearly victims of patriarchal oppression. In both their marriages there is a clash of values leading to incompatibility. In both these marriages the women are not only considered automatically subservient by their husbands, but the final break comes because of the violation of the unstated rule of obedience which the husbands think their wives must follow. In both marriages the woman is little more than property. Inder's fixation on Saroj's one-time sexual experience during her student days becomes an insurmountable barrier in their relationship. Inder's ideas about his wife's supposed violation of chastity before her marriage are not so much irrational as tribal; though educated, he thinks of her unconsciously as a fallen woman, soiled or secondhand goods, so to say. His wife-battering too comes from the same possessive instinct. Lalli, Som's friend in The Day in Shadow, had killed his wife for being unfaithful; Som "kills" (Shadow 94) Simrit financially through a very unfair divorce settlement. Similarly, Ram, though already married to Mona, marries Rose and goes on to have an affair with Marcella, all with a frightening nonchalance which would imply that he considers it his right to behave this way. Therefore, all these women are oppressed by tradition. The patriarchal version of Hinduism tolerates the oppression of women by men.
This version of Hinduism reaches its height in *Rich Like Us*, where we see an upper-class/caste woman of an educated, "progressive" family being forced to commit sati in 1905. This is Sonali’s great-grandmother. No wonder that the strongest indictment of Hinduism is found in this novel. Outraged over his mother's murder/self-immolation, unable to find any way of explaining it to himself, Keshav's grandfather writes: “So I cannot believe in Hinduism, whatever Hinduism might be. Not because of such evils as sati, but because evil is not explained.” (*Rich* 136).

In addition, the readers are introduced to the rape and killing of lower-caste/class women. Sahgal mentions the names of several cities and towns where women are fed to brick kilns after they have been abused—"Muzzafarpur, Samastipur, Bhojpur, Beguserai, Monghyr, Purnea, Gaya, Patna, Chapra." (*Rich* 68). Finally, Rose herself is murdered by her stepson Dev. All these, then, are instances of the oppression of women by tradition.

The effect of tradition on Sahgal's women is, by and large, inimical. Women who are quite placid, passive, and conformist are forced by circumstances to rebel. Their oppression is so great that they have no choice. In Sahgal's novels divorce becomes a powerful symbol of revolt against tradition. The assertion of freedom by the women indicates their refusal to accept patriarchal gender relations. This freedom—which critics have pointed to repeatedly as a prime value in her work—to act, create, and live the way a woman wants to.

Rashmi, Saroj, and Simrit, in choosing personal happiness over suffering, affirm certain modern, post-Renaissance notions about self-Fulfilment. They value the individual over the collective; they value personal fulfilment over social obligation. Moreover, their actions assume a certain idea of individuality which tradition would
seem to deny them. They seek freedom to act, to change, to combine, and to create—options not available to them within a conventional marriage. Tradition would appear to force men and women to stick to their given roles, discharging well-defined duties. In opposing their assigned roles, the women are choosing modernity over tradition. As Vishal tells Saroj, “It has taken a million years of evolution for a person and his cherished individuality to matter and no terror must be allowed to destroy that” (Storm 231). Life with Inder would have amounted to accepting not just a loss of individuality, but, by extension, a kind of living death.

The problems of working women in our society are not directly addressed in Sahgal’s novels. Sonali, the long exception, is an Indian Administrative Service officer of the post-Independence generation who takes constitutional safeguards for granted. When she is transferred, it is not because she is a woman but because she does not accept the new culture of the Emergency. Overall, though, in so far as the status of women is concerned, Sahgal comes across as against the tradition inherent in the default mode of Hinduism. She questions patriarchal norms, endorsing a humanistic modernity in place of the oppressions of tradition. She clearly sees virtue not in self-immolation but in rebellion.

Sahgal herself says of Simrit: "[She] is a passive creature to whom things happen. Simrit is not an individual - she is culture, tradition, a patient enduring passivity."(Shadow 9) If Simrit is tradition or culture, then her rebellion means that our tradition must change, must rebel against its evil. In other words, tradition itself must provide the impetus for change by negating those of its aspects which are inimical to its survival. Hence, though Saroj and Simrit are oppressed by tradition, it is tradition which gives them the strength to rebel. At any rate, it gives them the inner
resources to survive, to reach out to modernity, to seek help from the other side, as it were. In fact, the women in Sahgal are always emotionally and spiritually stronger than their husbands. Simrit, for instance, walks out in spite of having children to take care and being saddled with a crippling financial contract. It seems that this inner strength is very akin to the traditional notion of the woman as Shakti. What Sahgal wishes to say, however, is that Shakti must express herself not through self-immolation but through a demand for equality in the present times.

Tradition takes on a different meaning in the subplots of Sahgal, while dealing with politics, a recurring preoccupation with Sahgal. Here tradition acquires positive connotations, as opposed to the negative connotations associated with it in the main plot. Tradition in the subplots usually refers to the Gandhi-Nehru brand of political action, the legacy of the freedom movement.

A typical Sahgal novel usually begins at a point of transition. The old - that is, the Gandhi and Nehru brand of politics is about to be replaced by the new. In Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow, the old ministers are on the point of death, about to be replaced by a newer, more corrupt, amoral breed of racketeers represented by the likes of Sumer Singh. Even in This Time of Morning there is a sustained ideological opposition between Kailas and Kalyan. In this novel Kalyan himself is seen as divided, and in the end his better instincts triumph. In the later novels, though, the split is complete and unbridgeable. The climax of this indictment of the new is reached in Rich Like Us.

The opposition between the old and the new among the politicians is also echoed in the bureaucrats. Sahgal knows that India is governed by politicians and bureaucrats. These are the two tiers of our political and administrative ruling class. A
degeneration of the government our policy will occur only when the rot sets into both these tiers. The erosion of values of the politicians will be followed by an erosion of values of the bureaucrats. The several images of the old-style Indian Civil Service officers are portrayed as a plodder, a follower of rules and regulations. They are not imaginative, but solid, dependable, and upright. Indeed, his probity and honesty are their chief virtues. Sir Arjun (This Time of Morning), Trivedi (Storm in Ghandigarh), and Keshav (Rich Like Us) are prime examples. As opposed to this, the new type of bureaucrat, best exemplified by Ravi Kachru (Rich Like Us), is alternately ignorant, venial, and opportunistic. All is not lost though; the new generation of bureaucrats also contains Vishal (Storm in Chandigarh), Raj (The Day in Shadow), and Sonali (Rich Like Us) who are travelling in the path of uprighted virtues. It is interesting how the latter has to resign from the Indian Administrative Service. The implication is that there is no place for the honest and law abiding officer in the new regime.

The deterioration in public life is best shown in Rich Like Us, set during the Emergency of 1975-77. However, the tradition-modernity question in the subplot has little to do with the lives of the women characters. Sahgal's heroines are instinctively on the side of tradition and the old values in politics. Saroj, Simrit, Devi, Rose, and Sonali are examples. Still, the two senses of tradition do combine at times. When looking for the causes of the political malaise in India, Sahgal often goes back to Hinduism. She is aware of the complexity of our tradition. As Vishal says in Storm in Chandigarh: "We seem to be in the grip of impotence, stuck for answers, because the most effective part of our inheritance isn't brought into play" (Storm 17). It is this part of our inheritance which Gandhi reactivated so effectively, Sahgal would imply. Vishal's discussions with Trivedi and his proposed paper on Brahminism are all a part of his ongoing quest for the answer to the riddle of the Indian character. Where have
we gone wrong? Where has our leadership failed? Such questions haunt him. The failures of independent India exasperate him.

The disintegration of civil life in Chandigarh is linked to "the funeral march of Hinduism":

History will say, these were a people who couldn't survive modern times. The modern world was too much for them. They never came to terms with it. They just went to pieces. They could have lived if they had the courage to change (Storm 92).

A final area where the tradition-modernity question operates is that of personal relationships. This is where Sahgal is the most suggestive and allegorical, where her own brand of synthesis is most discernible. Here personal relationships mean the values that characters represent and endorse when they are intimately involved with another person. Again, when we examine the heroines Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit, Devi, Rose, and Sonali, we see a whole web of traditional values being affirmed. These values are traditional because they are found in the religious traditions of most of the major religions of the world. Thus one can witness a range of related oppositions: altruism/selfishness, compassion/cruelty, nonviolence/violence, materialism/spirituality and above all, love/lovelessness.

Men like, Dalip, Inder, Som, and Ram, are all selfish. They put themselves and their needs, physical, emotional, and material, above those of others. This selfishness reaches pathological proportions in Dev, who is portrayed as a monster. Dev murders his own stepmother. The other men do not go quite so far. The women, both biologically and emotionally, are givers. They long to share themselves with others. They are not totally self-centered. Rather, they are more sensitive to their
people's needs. As mothers and housewives, they are almost always attuned to the needs of their children and husbands. Saroj and Simrit, when pregnant, have an almost ecstatic fascination with the new life growing in them. They are life-affirming and loving. The husbands, on the other hand, seem to be incapable of love. They have a kink in their characters which substitute domination for love. Likewise, the women are not materialistic, basically. They value comfort and prosperity but not above emotional and spiritual fulfillment. What happens to Simrit is illustrative. As Som gets richer and richer, he also becomes more beastly, corrupt, and uncaring. He is noticeably dehumanized. Som's wealth comes from making weapons of mass destruction; the violence which he seems to abet in the outside world also returns to destroy his own family life. Inder, too, beats Saroj in the earlier novel. Simrit nearly goes mad in such an atmosphere of material greed and inhumanity.

If one word or category were used to sum up the whole gamut of traditional values which the women endorse, it would be love. In *Passion for India* Sahgal implies that the goal of human relationships is “true everlasting love, real give and take, a love that transcends misunderstanding” (Sahgal, *Passion* 84). The kind of love that Sahgal seems to describe is what the religious traditions of the world emphasize; it is a set of values which the machine age of modernity is wont to destroy or suppress.

In brief, the women represent love, charity, compassion, kindness, altruism, and a preference for the emotional over the material. The husbands are selfish, cruel, violent, possessive, and materialistic. The contrast is so old as to be seen in religious terms. The values that the women embody are essentially the core of the ethical and moral code of most religions. The women are religious and traditional at least. That is,
they believe that nonviolence and compassion and sharing will solve the problems of
the world. The men are greedy, materialistic, and violent and therefore represent the
unpalatable underbelly of capitalism and modernity. Their actions, multiplied a
million fold, by implication result in wars and poverty.

The values of the heroines are thus essentially conservative. As Saroj says,
they involve a courage which consists in "not throwing things away, but holding on . .
and never giving up" (Storm 92). This tradition of cultivating virtue is basically
idealistic-humanistic in that it refuses to accord primacy to the material. The
prevailing ideology in Sahgal's works thus retains the core of religious values from
Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, plus a selective acceptance of essentially
bourgeois values from modernity. Essentially, this synthesis consists of the
humanistic and spiritual heritage which comes from tradition combined with
reformative or heterodox Hinduism and Western liberalism. From the latter, ideas and
values like individuality, freedom, and the quest for happiness are accepted. Overall,
Sahgal's writing reflects what may be called liberal Gandhism.

The significant fact about Sahgal is not her ideological position, which is
liberal bourgeois, but the hardships and trials through which she has sustained this
position. That is what makes for its continuing viability and authenticity of times.
Ultimately, it is a judicious mixture of tradition and modernity which constitutes the
underlying value system of Sahgal's novels. And at the crux of such a synthesis is
usually a female protagonist, the crisis in whose life reflects the crisis in
contemporary India. Freedom is not just political freedom. It is essentially a personal
and individual freedom, the freedom that was exactly what Gandhi preached. An
individual could develop only in a fearless secure milieu and become fearless himself.
Sahgal’s message is adequately perceptible in all her six novels discussed in the study. Impact of Mahatma was natural on her work as she had grown up in the halo that surrounded him. In the distracted whirlpool in which India finds herself today Gandhi is as relevant as he was during the British Raj. Love, Truth and ahimsa are cardinal requirements of man for peace and progress. Gandhi has been accepted as a world leader and his teaching cannot be categorized as closed dogma, Indian novelists in English have attempted to raise Gandhi to the level of Messiah, but Sahgal has retained the real, practical, not the mythical Gandhi in her novels. Though Gandhi has been a favorite personality with Indo-English novelists, but none of them have portrayed him in continuity as Sahgal has done in her novels from Alpha to Omega.

Gandhi had derived inspiration from several sources, such as Tolstoy, Ralph Thoreau, Thomas Carlyle, and the Gita but Satyagraha as a practical weapon to solve certain problems was his original idea. India on the threshold of twenty-first century required it as an alternative to elitism and industrialism. Austerity, equity and justice are time tested goals that can save the country from total destruction. This is the overall idea one gets from Sahgal’s novels. Thus Gandhian ideals, search for one’s identity and communication between individuals are the prime concerns Nayantara Sahgal in her poignant novels.