Chapter V

Sum-up

Sahgal's novels are meaningful as chronicles of a larger narrative. Her novels are microcosm of life itself, the life which she keenly perceived around her. Her major themes include East-West encounter, feminism, social consciousness and political happenings. Sahgal's struggling characters put up a strong fight against the heavy odds, but do not succumb to the circumstances. She staunchly believes that the growth of individual consciousness which should culminate in self-identity is possible only in candid expression of one's feelings, in communication done in free atmosphere. It is as A.V. Krishna Rao points out: "Every major character in the novel strives towards realization of freedom as a basic human value." ("Historical" 146)

Sahgal does not give her women characters images such as wage-earners or career women but mainly as married women – as wives, daughters and mothers. It is in these roles or images, they wish to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals and to be accepted as equals. All this is a pre-requisite for life to have some meaning for them and the man-woman relationship to be a fulfilling one. Vishal feels outraged that men treat women as possessions, who belong to them by contract or by blood. For men, women’s role in a society is sexual and their job procreation. They are dependents and not individuals. Vishal thinks of them as “the subdued sex creatures not get emerged from the chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self-expression had not yet begun” (SC 189).
The images given to women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. In one hand, she is given the image 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, they are fighting for issues such as dowry, female infanticide, sex, selective abortions, health, domestic violence, malnutrition, sexual exploitation, molestation, rape and even murder.

Sahgal discusses the problem of the image of selfhood in all her novels. In her first novel, Happy, she deals with seven women characters - the narrator's mother, Ammaji, Lakshmi, Devaki, Maya, Kusum and Prabha. Except Kusum's marriage, the marriages of all the other characters are arranged ones in the traditional way. The narrator's mother and Govinda's mother Ammaji get the image of women who belong to the generation of orthodoxy. But both of them differ in their opinions. The narrator's mother has accepted her role in total and has not questioned its injustice, whereas Ammaji is unable to accept her husband's domineering attitude, because she is a woman of strong nerve. Her marital life is not happy because her husband believes in the superiority of the dominant role of the male. He cannot appreciate the idea of a woman being individualistic. Lakshmi is given a role of a woman of mild temperament. She is very much devoted to her family. Her marriage with Govind Narayan is successful, with perfect understanding between them. Devaki, like her
mother-in-law, Lakshmi, adjusts very easily to the circumstances of her life. Maya, the wife of Harish, is a conventional woman in her role. She comes from a traditional family, yet she tries to be modern. Maya and Harish are poles apart in their nature and personalities. She leads relatively a conventional Indian way of life. She does not hanker after the roles / images which women are normally expected to do. She is not interested in silk sarees, parties, expensive jewellery and material well-being. She wants something more than these - some kind of response and a recognition of her existence. She is very individualistic in her thinking like Harish's mother. She is patriotic, and completely Indian in her attitudes. She gets disgusted with the artificial life of her husband and shares her mental agony with the narrator. The narrator tries to console her and does not make her break the bonds of marriage. She tries to adjust with her husband since she does not dare to step out of the social structure. Finally, she wants to involve herself in the rehabilitation of the refugees from Pakistan for real happiness. But her decision irks the family. They feel that a woman of respectable family, working out in the villages is unthinkable. Maya feels that a woman should not be confined to her household duties. Thus, the gradual growth of individual freedom takes its roots from Maya. She leads the role of a liberated and emancipated woman.

Kusum's marriage to Sanad is half-way between the two worlds of orthodoxy and freedom. For Sanad, Kusum has the image and role of a debonair maiden. The marriage with Sanad makes Kusum feel vaguely uncertain about her marital relationship. But, it is Kusum, who changes the mind of Sanad. Though they are
unhappy in the early days of their marriage, they are able to overcome their difficulties. Sanad overcomes his sense of alienation and feels happy in the company of Kusum.

Sahgal’s *Morning* presents the image of the young women who desire freedom outside the marriage. Nita and Rashmi are the products of changed social conditions. They have seen a total new world and have new ideas. Their tastes are modern and their attitudes are very flexible. Rashmi, the only daughter of Kailas and Mira, is unhappy with her husband, Dalip, and comes back to her parental house for ever. Later, she develops a friendly relation with Neil Berensen, the architect of Peace Institute, and tries to seek comfort in his presence. But this comfort lasts for short time and soon she feels unhappy. Her unhappiness is due to the indifference of society to human values. Her separation from her husband re-kindles Rakesh's personal interest in her which may mean the beginning of a new and mature relationship on the emotional plane. There is also a promise of the revival of friendship between Rakesh and Rashmi. Thus, Rashmi finds her own way of giving importance to her individual freedom and decides to have a good relationship with Rakesh. Nita Narang, a young girl, a newspaper columnist, is attracted by the personality of Kalyan Sinha and loves him. She does not stop her visits to Kalyan though she is engaged to another man. She finds peace in the presence of Kalyan and changes the stone – heartedness of Kalyan.

Simrit in *Shadow* get the role of a scholarly woman but she chooses a wrong husband, who does not appreciate her ideals. She suffers very much and feels lonely even if she is in the presence of her husband, Som. She tries to adjust with her husband
but her efforts become futile and is not able to voice her aspirations and longings in life. She is an independent woman. She wants her husband to share her mind and feelings. She likes her husband to share her life both as a husband and as a friend. She advocates a relationship higher than the physical between a husband and a wife. She is also attracted to her robust and unrefined husband and finds her life miserable. She walks away from the life of Som courageously with her books and children to lead a happy life. Later, she seeks warmth and affection in the friendship of Raj. Her mental peace is restored as Raj gives her a new lease of life.

In *Happy* and *Morning* arranged marriages offer a little scope to individual relations. *Morning* reflects the discontent of Nita’s life and Rashmi’s relationship with Neil. Nita, after having fasted freedom, is repelled by the idea of an arranged marriage. But, with Kalyan Sinha, sex comes naturally to her, not because he loves her but because she has unconsciously allowed herself to love and admire him and turn to him in her desperation at being hedged in by conventions. Rashmi, whose marriage with Dilip, has been an unhappy one also turns to Nail Berensen - a comparative stranger-for comfort and reawakening of emotions. Rashmi’s divorce and her relationship with Neil are not tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity but an inner need for communication and involvement which remains unsatisfied. It is not the case for Uma Mitra. For her, sex has become an escape for her own self and the pattern of her limited life. It is in a way a kind of revenge on her husband, Arjun, who fails to understand the need for exuberance and vivacity. She, in her restless wilderness, flirts from man to man, while Leela Dubey in *Chandigarh* is totally non-committal-both
towards her husband Vishal and her lover Hari. She is “dedicated to the cult of conformity, to observing forms that his most intense please had not been able to penetrate” (SC 214). There are also other adulterous relationships. Gauri makes no emotional demand on Dubey. There is also Mara, who is attracted by Inder’s aggressive attitude and turns to him to get the best of both the worlds- the softness of Jit and the hardness of Inder. Jasbir Jain in “The Aesthetics of Morality Sexual Relations in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” relates: “If in the Jit-Mara relationship, Jit is left with a feeling of inadequacy, in the Saroj-Inder relationship it is Saroj who is punished for a pre-marital lapse. Inder applies a different moral standard to Saroj’s behaviour who is guilty not of infidelity but of having had a relationship before her marriage, a relationship which Inder feels has sullied her and has completely devalued her as a possession” (44). Saroj is not really guilty. She is not dishonest. She had told Inder about it before their marriage. Saroj’s voice is mutilated and strangled. She wants to communicate with him and finds it difficult to do so as their relationship is one of silences and pretences. Sahgal writes: “we must talk, but what about, she wondered nervously. Which after all these years, were the safe, unguarded topics between them, those without consequences? She searched her mind for a neutral subject that would keep the ground level between them” (91). However, she feels safe in her role as a wife. She ruminates:

On this I can walk safely and nothing will go wrong. On such grounds men and women build shelters and bring children to birth and grow old in the comfort that they will live in the future generation. Perhaps the
rest—the most of longing for all that remains unanswered—lies outside the cycle. Saroj knew that she couldn’t tear away the blinds between herself and Inder or take him her thoughts. In the labour of living together there had never been that intimacy between them. Perhaps, she thought desolately, it was not meant to matter. (92)

Mara is able to hold Inder for a whole. She is bold and passionate. Inder responds to her in a way he has never been able to do to Saroj. Simrit in Shadow, like Saroj, finds herself shut out of Som’s world. She feels uprooted and abandoned in a husband—centred/dominated world.

In the fictional depiction of her women attempting to free themselves from repressive relationships, Sahgal is more direct in her feminist sympathies. She makes a systematic and sustained effort to demolish the deeply ignored attitudes regarding women, before indicating ways in which a new image can be formulated. A great deal has been said about Sahgal's feminist stance in her fiction. In the novels of Sahgal, 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. Her feminist concern is quite obvious and her fighter spirit is quite vocal in her fiction. The fictional world of Sahgal from Happy to Identity shows her deep concern regarding the state of women in the parochial society. Sex outside marriage gives a subordinate position to women and always treats them as second-rate citizens. A women's whole existence is seen in relation to the service she can render to a man. The subordination of woman begins
even before her marriage when she is groomed by her parents, and ironically more often by mothers who are orthodox in their thinking, to grow into an attractive commodity that can have many uses for her husband in future. Sahgal portrays the suffering and agony of women, which results from uneven power-division in marriage, privileging one sex all the time and marginalizing the other. In her novels, women decide to live on their own to fulfill the needs of their own self. Though divorce laws have made it easier now for women to take off the yoke of an unhappy marriage, yet it does not put an end to the woman's problems. After obtaining divorce, she still has to struggle on various levels in the patriarchal set up. A single woman is not accepted by the society as a healthy, sane and normal person. She is seen abnormal or deficient and looked upon with suspicion. In the search for self-realization, she has to bear hardships on the economic level as well as carry burden of bringing up the family. This does not allow her to pursue life properly and often she does not have a very paying job. Rather, she has heavier responsibilities because children are often left with mothers to be taken care of. Sahgal's women object not to wifehood or motherhood, but to restrictions traditionally accompanying these roles.

Sahgal’s women characters indulge in premarital sex but it is not in defiance of conventional morality or the sacred institution of marriage. Nita in Morning gets involved with Kalyan and gets sex with him before her marriage. It is an attempt to fulfil her inner desire for love and communication. Saroj in Chandigarh has premarital sex out of curiosity and the result of a hunger for experience – sexual experience. Uma and Rashmi in Morning, Devi in Delhi, Mara and Gauri in Chandigarh have sex with
those to whom they are not legally married. Uma’s husband, Arjun, ignores her compulsive and emotional urges. This breaks her and she starts drinking and moving along with any one who takes notice of her. On the occasion of the party given by Rani of Mirpur, a South African finds her sexually provoking; so “she let his hands taken hers, slide up her arm, go round her waist. Her headache receded lightly and she felt relief in his skill and deftness... it was complete in itself and needed the explanation” (TM 109). Sahgal, herself, comments on Uma: “Uma was a woman with appetites, that her husband couldn’t satisfy, so she indulged them elsewhere. Men do it, and there’s no comment” (Arora, Nayantara 93). Devi in Delhi has sex with Usman and Michael. It is temporary and lacks significance. It is as Jasbir Jain in Nayantara Sahgal explains:

Sex under these circumstances is only a release from her emotional tensions and an act of renewal. Her relationship with the men in her life is far too limited by her need for self-recognition to become meaningful relationship. She uses the man in her life for her personal survival. (62)

Mara’s extra-marital affairs are a result of her quest for a person who suits her temperament, a person who can exercise power over her. She is willing to start her life anew with Jeet. Gauri also has extra-marital love affair with Dubey to satisfy her physical longing. Jasbir Jain in Nayantara Sahgal says: “Gauri’s friendship with Dubey is based on sex and the urgency of a momentary need – she makes no emotional demands on him” (46). Sex, whether in marriage or out of marriage, for Rashmi, Saroj
and Simrit is an exploration of something deeper than the mere physical. Rashmi feels sex with her husband does not evoke any emotion in her. She finds sex with Neil Brensen a satisfying one because she can communicate with him. Sahgal relates regarding Saroj.

Saroj knew she could not tear away the blinds between herself and Inder or take him her thoughts. In the labour of living together there had never been that intimacy between them. Perhaps, she thought desolately, it was not meant it to matter. (SC 94)

Saroj’s sex with Vishal Dubey is not as interesting and satisfying as Leela’s with Vishal Dubey. Sahgal writes:

He had wanted the woman and won her, and forever afterwards had tried to reach the person in her, the one talk to when a day’s work was done, the friend with whom one could be naked in spirit and to whom one could give the whole of oneself” (SC 71)

On the other hand, unlike Leela and Vishal Dubey, Simrit cannot have any deeper involvement with Som. Sahgal concretises:

They had got on easily on the surface, and that had created a game of its own in which intensity, depth and devotion were never brought into play at all. Nor was partnership, Som, the rougher element, had led. (DS 64)
To Simrit, sex with Som becomes meaningless as it is fell an automation. “Sex was no more just sex than food was just food” (DS 90). There are a few women who are neither so happy as Mira, Gargi and Pinky, nor so unhappy as Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit but who stand midway between the two. One may include women like Kusum of Happy, Mara of Chandigarh, and Nadira of Delhi.

If Saroj’s marriage fails due to lack of understanding and communion, Simrit’s marital life comes to a halt because of incompatibility. They have many questions in common. They try their level rest to adjust, compromise and strengthen the relationship with their husbands. They want to be good wives but not at the cost of their individuality. They realize their inner struggle, yearning and suffocation of being a woman. They long for self-expression and freedom to live as individuals without the bonds of marriage. K.Meera Bai in “Husband-Wife Alienation in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal and Amita Desai” observes that “These woman reflect the creator’s for individual freedom and her firm belief that the bond of marriage is to be cemented with mutual trust, respect and consideration” (171). Nita in Morning revolts against arranged marriage, which does not take into account body and its desires. Rashmi in Morning also attacks mis-matched marriage. She thinks that a marriage “can be happy, too with the right ingredients” (TM 141). Saroj in Chandigarh suffers a great deal because of the duplicitous and calous attitude of Inder. She revolts against Inder only. Simrit in Shadow feels “as if large pieces of her had been cut out with scissors, with an icy wind blowing through the gaps” (DS 16). Her sufferings and agonies are no tirades against the institution of marriage. Maya in Happy also does not want to break
marriage ties, through she is not willing to submit to the pressures of the marriage. Kusum of Happy, Rashmi of Morning, Saroj of Chandigarh, Sonali of Rich, Simrit of Shadow, Skinny Jaipal of Delhi, undergo a kind of metamorphosis – transformation. These women have a mind and will of their own. They are attracted by things deeper than those visible on the surface. Moreover, they are bold and have no inhibitions in breaking away from the established norms of traditional Hindu society – it means marriage. Sahgal’s heroines are seen rebelling against established social inequalities and life’s ambivalence. Kavita Dubey in Power Politics and Women Empowerment in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal : A Critical Assessment comments that “Nayantara Sahgal may have nothing to do with the western type of militant sexual politics, but her novels do render a living picture of the disadvantaged, miserable and suppressed life of a woman, as a child, as a young woman, as an old woman in a male dominated patriarchal society in India” (46-7).

The women who have strong and well-developed characters defy both conventionality and modernity and are able to overcome their liminality. Women like Devika and Lalita in Happy are not modern in the real sense. They have merely adapted the facade of modernity without any corresponding change in their viewpoint. Uma Mitra and Leela Dubey are not truly liberated. They merely conform to a different pattern of behaviour. It is women like Saroj and Simrit, who are not able to conform to any pattern and are possessed by a searing need to be honest with their own selves and those around them. Nita moves towards self-awareness through uncertainty and bewilderment Rashmi moves towards it through suffering and self-questioning. Pixie
in *Shadow* moves towards self-awareness. Pixie is a working woman without the security of an affluent family background. When she decides to terminate her relationship with Sumer Singh, she has to weigh it against her need for a job and a roof over her head. She is particularly vulnerable to the power which men like Sumer Singh wield. Her decision to break away / stay away is thus an act of unusual courage fulfilling a real need for self-realization.

Sahgal is deeply interested in the need for freedom for women to become aware of themselves as individuals. Society has normally denied them their freedom. The process towards selfhood, started by Kusum in *Happy*, is consciously realized by Saroj and Simrit. The process has been a painful and a slow one for women as they have had to overcome not only social opinion and orthodoxy but also personal hesitation and reluctance. The concept of freedom goes beyond the merely social or economic context to become more real in an emotional and a physical relationship. On the one hand, Sahgal is profoundly aware of the perils of democracy, on the other, she fully realizes the dangers that lie before the individual in quest of self-fulfillment. The orthodox society, conventional morality, fears and superstitions, prejudices and the privileges of the privileged ones and inequality before law and so on lure her women characters. Most individuals in the novels of Sahgal suffer because of social prejudices, prejudicial conventions, superstitions and baseless fears. Mira in *Morning* cannot understand why her daughter should even think of divorce. Because of her orthodox attitude, she makes herself as well as her daughter suffer. Mona in *Rich* and Prabha in *Happy* are not happy in their marriage but they lack courage. Madhu in *Delhi* commits suicide
because she carries the stigma of rape for no fault of hers. There is a deep social and religious prejudice against divorce. Simrit in Shadow is a divorcee and has to work against all odds in quest of her identity which is usually denied to women in the society. Bhushan Singh in Identity can not marry Razia, the girl he is in love with, because of deep religious prejudices.

Sahgal’s fiction also focuses attention on Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Almost in all her novels, Sahgal has gone deep into the female psyche. In novel after novel after novel, she explores the nature and scope of the trauma of womenfolk. She is able to go deep into the psyche of her female characters and study them with sympathy and understanding. As a woman novelist, she recognizes that her primary obligation is that of advocating the emancipation of women. In her novels, she vividly describes how woman is exploited even during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships, the loneliness of living alone and private terrors. Sahgal's women characters suffer because they refuse to submerge their individuality and cling to their personal identity at all costs. She 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 a life of their own way. In novel after novel. Sahgal gives expression to humanistic values, according to which a woman is not to be taken as sex object and glamour girl but as an individual in her own
right. She depicts her women struggling to retain her selfhood and to breathe freely in the suffocating environs of loveless marriages. Having personally experienced the trauma of a failed marriage, she exhibits the dilemma of women trapped between traditional assumptions regarding womanhood and the stirrings of individuality very sharply and skilfully. She highlights a clearly feminist function in her scathing exposure of the hollowness of man-woman relationships based on socially predetermined patterns of gender inequality. She delineates marriage without emotional involvement, love without respect and sex without passion as the causes for unfulfilling marriages in her novels. 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. They are 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. Sahgal, in all her novels exhibits a sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of the human mind and society. As Jasbir Jain in *Nayantara Sahgal* observes: "in almost every novel, Nayantara Sahgal has a central woman character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs" (145). The emotional world of woman is explored and analyzed with admirable insight and sympathetic perception. In her fictional depiction of women attempting to free themselves from repressive relationships, 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, 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.
Sahgal tries to portray the sensibility of a woman: how a woman looks 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 stand 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 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 Sahgal's novels. Almost in all her novels taken for the study, 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 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. In most of her novels, 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 Sahgal 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.

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 a life of 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 are shown to indulge in social or religious activities. For example, Maya in Happy is a woman who tries to submerge her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in social work and religion. 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 want 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" (TH 125). Maya's childlessness is a symbol, not a cause of her unhappiness. Maya is a silent victim at the altar of marriage. Even though Sahgal’s women characters typify Indian persona, S. Varalakshmi in “The Individual and the Nation : A Study of Nayantara Sahgal’s Work vis-a-vis the Canadian Women Writers” says:

Nevertheless, not all Sahgal’s women characters, in their attempts to break away from the mould, typify the Indian persona. In fact, they emerge quite often as universal characters. Mother in Mistaken Identity is a middle-aged rani who leaves her ‘zenana’ to live with her Muslim lover Yusuf. In portraying this spirited woman Sahgal evidently wants to convey that conscious efforts to liberate themselves must be made by women. No one is going to make it easy for them. No male-dominated society in the world will ever from its woman on to its own volition (95)
Sahgal’s women Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit and Bhushan's mother the senior Ranee stand for the emerging women of India who refuse to remain silent and submissive like conventional ‘Pativratas' in marriage. It is true that all these women endeavour to escape the shackles of hapless marriages and prefer to live with their lovers who can provide them with understanding, love and warmth of companionship and help them start life afresh. Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing : A Feminist Study in Comparison* says :

Sahgal’s women depend on some help to escape oppression and exploitation which in their cases is usually provided by a man - a friend or father who often helps them to come out of the miserable relationship or give them moral strength to smash the taboos and assert their identity to live a meaningful life (102).

Malhotra in *Bridges of Literature* also insists on the idea of Neena Arora where Malhotra states : “If Nayantara's women characters have any passion, it is the longing to be free, freedom from all restraints in word and deed, being their monomania. One and all they want to be fully alive and themselves .... No taboos or inhibitions! (224). It is also observed Alladi Uma in “Suppressed Vitality : Woman behind the Veil” that :

“Truly for Nayantara Sahgal the woman’s ability to achieve freedom is through her capacity to express and consummate her sexual desires” (189). Shyam Asnani in “New Morality in the Modern Indo-English Novel : A Study of Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal” also makes a comment that :
The female protagonist’s struggle for freedom derives directly from the novelists personal experience. The study of the deathly struggle that accompanies the attempts of an Indian woman to liberate herself from the moral and social pressures that combine with economic dependence to exercise a crippling power over-middle-class woman is marked with intense indignation as well as sensitivity and compassion. (113-4)

Sahgal in her works asserts individual freedom. Sahgal portrays the estrangement between man and woman with brutal frankness and in realistic terms. She carefully avoids to be sentimental, nor does she evade facing the situations and destinies. She describes the role of sex in the relationship between man 'and woman - the description of which is considered a taboo for the woman writes - with dispassionate honesty. Sahgal, in their search for self-expression and freedom do not turn them asexual instead they transform sex into a multi-dimensional relationship.

Sahgal clearly points out that the conflict between the husband and the wife during the pre-Independent era in India was not a grim one as the woman of the period had respect for the traditional mould cast on her by the patriarchal society. Even Mona in Rich who also belongs to the same period patiently tolerates the cruelty and arrogance of her husband as she firmly believes that there is no alternative to endurance. But when the achievement of political freedom to the country has given the needed impetus to the struggle for emancipation of woman, women began to exercise their individuality and independence. Rashmi in Morning Saroj in Chandigarh and
Simrit in Shadow cannot adjust with their husbands as they want to have a democratical set-up that is based on love and commitment in the family. But Rishad in Morning, Inder in Chandigarh and Som in Shadow are not prepared to treat the woman as equal to the man as they are not different from the inhuman politicians who always exploit the situation for their own interests. They have different codes of behaviour for man and woman and according to them what is not wrong with the man can be wrong with the woman. Sahgal strongly believes that the emancipation for a woman is possible only with the aid of a powerful, courageous and sincere man. Rakesh in Morning, Vishal Chandigarh, Raj in Shadow, Nicholas in Departure and Yusuf in Identity not only encourage the women protagonists of the respective novels to struggle for emancipation but also ready to come to their rescue whenever they are in troubles.

Sahgal does not present woman either as an angel or as an ascetic but she depicts her as a simple human being of flesh and blood. It clearly shows that Sahgal is aware of that sex plays an important role in the relationship between man and woman. But she believes that the feeling behind the act is to be taken for consideration rather than the mere physical act. She clearly understands that sexual relationships may be based on male-domination or a feeling of equality. The attitude which governs the approach to sex goes a long way towards establishing its morality or immorality. Sex in or outside marriage is not an unrelated or self-contained act. It is to be viewed with reference to a situation and an attitude and no single rule can help to judge it.
In **Happy** Maya can only alienate from her husband and live her life alone though she can not think of a divorce. In **Morning** Rashmi courageously walks out on her husband when she finds out that there is incompatibility between herself and her husband. In **Chandigarh** Saroj, the mother of two children and at present pregnant with the third child, leaves her husband when she realises that he belongs to the 'he-man school' and openly declares her war against the double standards of the patriarchal system. In **Shadow**, Simrit, the divorcee, continues the same battle for freedom. She is bold enough to obtain a divorce though she knows it pretty well that the connection with her husband continues through her children. She withstands the emotional trauma even when she finds out that her son has inclination towards her husband's world. 'The Narrator' in **Happy** cannot come to the rescue of Maya whereas in the other three novels, there is a man more or less waiting in the wings to fill the gap left by the husband. Sahgal has a firm belief that the struggle in the modem times is not between the man and woman, but between liberalism and orthodoxy. Devi in **Delhi** and Sonali in **Rich** do not depend upon men. The very fact that they achieve what they want to achieve without the help of the man shows that they are liberated women. The middle-aged Rani of Vijayagarh in **Identity** who is the mother of a son, Bhusan Singh, who is also married, further widens the scope of a virtuous woman when she walks out on her husband when she finds out that a woman has to take bold steps if she is really interested in emancipation. Commenting on marriage and its morality among the women characters of Sahgal, Neena Arora in **Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing : A Feminist Study in Comparison** concludes:
Sahgal’s marital morality as revealed in her works is based on honesty, mutual trust, consideration, understanding and freedom. She assails selfishness, pretence, self-centredness which result in schism and subsequently in marital breakdown. Traditionally, her women are taught to stay acquiescent, subdued, silent, and suffering, but like Saroj, Rashmi or Simrit, they show signs of awakening, reject the stereotype and speak out the truth. They have lived half of their life as submissive and conforming persons; henceforth, they are going to be subversive and ‘free’ beings. (85)

As a whole, the body of Saghal's fiction portrays the struggle of woman in various roles of her life - as a daughter, lover, wife and widow - with the patriarchal tradition-oriented society and points out that it is through the struggle that they develop and mature. Neena Arora in Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison observes that “young women in Sahgal’s fictional world are the helpless victims of the taboo-ridden, conventional society. Instead of asserting themselves or fighting against the odds, some of them easily accept the role traditionally offered to them, while some other opt for death as the ultimate solution to the mundane man made problems” (49). Sahgal in all her novels points out the radical statement against marriage inspite of portraying the constraints of marriage, miseries of marriage, the subtle subversion of the patriarchal system and so on. Sahgal never portrays women as prostitutes or widows on the socially spurned for defying the traditional norms of Indian womanhood. Sahgal’s women indulge in extra-marital relations. They never
suffer ostracism. They do not have a guilt complex. They relate their sexual acts to the feeling behind the act. Considering women’s position in the novels of Sahgal, J. Samuel Kirubahar and R.Meena in “Theme of Marital Dissonance in Nayantara Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow” conclude:

Sahgal highly resents the culturally constructed norms, where a woman is always someone's daughter, someone’s wife, or someone's mother which make women subjects of men with traditional feminine virtues and graces. Sahgal condemns such attitudes which value women as ‘property’ and discourage individuality in them. Women are discouraged from showing aggressive modes of behaviour, and instead feminine virtues of grace, modesty and self-effacement are frequently demanded from them. (14)

In summing up, it is better to quote the words of Susheela P. Rajendra, in “A Journey towards Freedom, from Fear : A Study of the Feminine Sensibility in Nayantara Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow” where she says : “Sahgal tried to portray the sensibility of women : 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 an appendage to some male life” (231). It is to be concluded that

- Sahgal’s women voice their life’s frustrations and failures.
- Sahgal’s women are rather slow in realizing their needs and then asserting their individuality.
Sahgal’s women assume different roles as lady-loves, mistresses, adulterous beauties, sexual vagrants, seductresses, wives, second-wives, mothers, grandmothers and so on.

Sahgal’s women, like their creator, hesitate for long before taking the final bold decisive step.

Sahgal’s women, though well-educated, are largely housewives only.

Even after divorce, Sahgal’s women feel rather different and depend more on others to help them get out of their problems.

Sahgal’s women even take time to get over the idea of divorce - some of them again become dependent on men.

Further studies can be made on Sahgal based on comparison of her women characters with those other women characters created by women novelists. Sahgal can be compared to Margaret Laurence where Saroj of Chandigarh can be compared to the characters of Hagar and Stacey. Sahgal also invites comparison with Jane Austen and C.P. Snow. She can also be compared to Doris Lessing. Her novel Departure invites creditable comparison with Kamala Markandaya’s The Golden Honey Comb and with even Mulk Raj Anand’s trilogy, namely, The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle. It can also be compared to Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust, Bharati Mukherjee’s The Holder of the World.