Chapter I

Introduction

Indian literature in English like all the other new literatures of the world in English, has been the outcome of a national ferment and upsurge which brought about by the impact of the colonial rule, manifested itself as much in the cultural as in the socio-political life of the country. It began, in fact, in the political pamphlets, appeals and minutes written by nineteenth century pioneers like Raja Rammohan Roy and grew in the hands of the poets, novelists, orators and essayists who came in later. Apart from the fact that even creative writers like Lal Behari Day, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sri Aurobindo, Romesh Chander Dutt and Malabari Behramji of the yester-years and writers like Anand, K.S. Venkatramani, Bharathi Sarabai and Rao of the more recent years were themselves champions of the nationalist cause and spokesmen of the national culture. There have been great leaders and statesmen, who, by choosing English as their medium of communication for spreading the nationalist cause, turned out to be creative writers of extraordinary calibre. Political urgency, reformistic motivation, journalistic-impulse and creative imagination seem to have criss-crossed in the speeches and writings of leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru and created patterns of writing which carried with them an unmistakable literary quality. Jawaharlal Nehru, who belongs to this class of personalities, who have made a powerful impact on the consciousness of the educated classes, has also made an impact on Indian thought in general and Indian
literatures in particular which, even if it has been less direct and obvious than that of Mahatma Gandhi, has been deeper and more permanent.

Indian Literature in English has gained immense popularity and recognition in the last two decades of the twentieth-century. From Rao to Salman Rushdie, the fictional writers have concentrated on changing social patterns, transformations of values and on the individual's predicament in a society in transition. One can perceive the uniqueness of Indian Literature in English from the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his work The Indian Writing in English:

What makes Indo-Anglican literature an Indian literature and not just a ramshackle outhouse of English literature is the quality of its 'Indianness' in the choice of its subjects, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organization of material and in the creative use of language. (234)

With the rise of the middle class in social and political power, the modern age has become the age of the novel. It was in Bengal that a literary renaissance first manifested itself, but almost immediately afterwards its traces could be seen in Madras, Bombay and other parts of India. The first Indian English novel was written by, the literary dictator of the age, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. It was titled Raj Mohan's Wife (1864). Bankim was the master of the romantic as well as the historical novel. Commenting on the rise of Indian novel in English, Sumita Ashri in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala as a Novelist: A Post-Colonial Study feels:
The genesis of novel writing in India is a very complex phenomenon, as it 
was conceived, nurtured, sustained and finally delivered, because of and 
through a number of socio-economic and psycho-political considerations 
and conditions. The rise of the novel in India like England was not purely 
a literary phenomenon; rather it was the product of a multipronged 
interaction of a wide spectrum of socio-economic and psycho-spiritual 
forces operative within the society and devoted to the fulfilment of social 
needs. Hence, it was associated with social, political and economic 
conditions, which led the writers to analyze and express this spectrum of 
social reality, comparable to the dynamics of society, with its attendant 
forces. So, the appearance of the novel as a literary form in nineteenth 
century India, as it did in eighteenth century England, synchronized with 
all the consequent political and social reorientations, which followed. 
Also, its rise was one aspect of the dawn of what may be called the 
modern era in Indian Literature—an era, which was ushered in by a fast 
changing social order. (1)

The entire history of Indian fiction in English can be conveniently divided under four 
phases:

1. the first phase (1830-80) may be termed as 'The Phase of Imitation' which 
   includes Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Rajmohan's Wife (1864), One 
   Thousand and One Nights by S.B. Bannerjee, Toru Dutt’s Bianca and 
   Romesh Chander Dutt’s The Slave Girls of Agra and The Lake of Palms.
2. The second phase called 'Indianization' saw the works of Toru Dutt.

3. The third phase began with the advent of the new century and saw increase in Indianization.

4. The fourth phase commenced with post-independent India with the publication of K.S. Venkatamani’s *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932), Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960).

Post-independence Indian English fiction has retained the momentum the novel had gained during the Gandhian age on the hands of Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-88) with his *So Many Hungers* (1997) and *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954); followed by Manohar Malgonkar (1913- ) with his novels like *The Princes* (1963) and *Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and also by Kushwant Singh (1918- ) who is known for his novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959). The novelists of the 1960s and 1970s are Arun Joshi (1939- ) and Chaman Nahal (1927- ). Joshi is sensitively alive to the human predicament in the modern times where the absence of values and faith has defrauded human beings as is reflected in his *The Foreigner* and *The Last Labyrinth*. The novels of Chaman Nahal *My True Faces* (1973), Azadi (1975) and *The English Queens* (1979) work out the universal theme of understanding, the relevance of love and feelings in social action as well as human life in the form of legend and philosophy. The novelists like Vikram Seth (1952- ) and Amitav Ghosh (1965- ) with their novels like *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *A Suitable Boy* (1993),

The early masters in Indian English novel endeavoured to adhere to tradition and consciously wrote on various themes pertaining to social change, social justice, freedom, non-violence and so on. The Indian novelists in English in the Post-Independence period, particularly those of 1980s and 1990s, have shed off their preceding counterparts’ obsession with idealism, trouble and tribulations. The literary outputs of this period have projected their own native reality to restore the identity and roots that have been lost. The post-Colonial Indian English fiction has witnessed at least three generations of Indian novelists in English. The first generation consists of mainly the prominent figures like Anand, R.K. Narayan and Rao. The second generation comprises of writers like Kushwant Singh, Shashi Desphande, Bhabani Battacharya, Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and many other writers who developed the fictional writing. The third generation of writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy produced exemplary literary products that took the fame of Indo-English Literature to the international level. Among the practitioners of the novel in India Anand, R.K. Narayan and Rao are prominent. William Walsh in Indian Writing in English called them "The Big Three". According to him, "If Anand is the novelist as reformer, and Narayan the novelist as moral analyst, Rao is the novelist as a metaphysical poet". (31) Anand represents the realistic and the socio-cultural reformatory attitude. Rao is more concerned with the complex philosophical implications of Indian culture. His fiction is a balanced communication of the realities of Indian life and complexities of
Indian philosophical thought and orthodoxy. Anand and Rao represent two different aspects of Indian life. But R.K. Narayan occupies a place between these polarizes, for in R.K. Narayan's fiction the brilliant mixing of the reality of Indian life along with the traditional, religious preoccupations is brought out.

For Anand, the major concern was the lower strata of Indian Society. He projected a realistic picture of the suffering and the neglect of the lower classes of society. Untouchable (1935) has been hailed as a compact classic. Anand maintains the unities - all the events that he described take place in a single day. The novel Untouchable, which is about caste difference, was followed by Coolie (1936) that deals with class difference. The novel is about the lower class and poverty, and the countless poor who suffer indignities at the hands of the rich. The novel offers a poignant picture of that large class of servants and coolies who all share perhaps the same fate as Munoo the hero of the novel suffers. The novel is a powerful indictment of a universal human tragedy where the week, the poor and the innocent are always oppressed. Both novels are "a plea for down trodden, the poor, and the outcast, who face economic hardship and emotional humiliations in a rigid social structure" (Singh, Ram Sewak 127). His Two Leaves and A Bud (1937) brings out the exploiter and the exploited. In this novel, Anand portrays the helplessness, the injustice and the applying condition in which the coolies in a tea estate live. Among Anand's other works are the Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1941), The Sword and the Sickle (1942), The Big Heart (1945), Seven Summers (1951), The Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953), The Old Woman and The Cow (1960), The Road (1961), The Death of The Hero (1964),
Morning Face (1968), Confession of a Lover (1976), and The Bubble (1984). In Anand's novels, there is a reformist ideal. Anand gains importance as a novelist of reform rather than an artist. He is one who believes that literature must serve society and solve their problems and guide them.

R.K. Narayan is one of the greatest of Indian novelists in English. He comes from the South Indian Hindu middle class family. He is different from the contemporary socio-political issues and produced the South Indian middle class life in his fiction. He created an imaginary small town named Malgudi and described middle class life in that Malgudi town in almost all his works. Malgudi is a town that millions of English readers have flocked to since 1935. Just as in the novel, so also in the short stories, the setting is provided by Malgudi for R.K. Narayan. According to Srinivasa Iyengar, Malgudi is Narayan's 'Casterbridge'; but the inhabitants of Malgudi, although they may have their recognizable local trappings, are essentially human, and hence, have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense, 'Malgudi' is everywhere (Iyengar, K.R.S. 360). Narayan produced four novels before independence - Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938) and The English Teacher (1946). His other works are The Financial Expert (1952), The Guide (1958), Man Eater of Malgudi (1961), Waiting for Mahatma (1955), and The Vendor of Sweets, and The Painter of Signs (1876). His other four novels to his credit are - A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), Talkative Man (1986), The World of Nagaraj (1980) and Grandmother's Tale (1992). In each of his works, Narayan presents the slice of life, as he sees it, with perfect sincerity and truthfulness. His one single aim is to amuse and entertain his readers by presenting
before them life's little frontiers, realistically and vividly. His humour often mingles with pathos.

Rao on the other hand has been more concerned with the Indian psyche and deals with the philosophical paradoxes of Indian life. His first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is an excellent portrayal of the Indian village with that name. The novel presents the impact of Gandhian on a larger scale and the abolition of untouchability. In his lifetime, he wrote five novels only. His novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963, as the title itself suggests, deals with the problem of illusion and reality. The hero of the novel, the practical researcher is endowed with an inherent philosophical bent of mind. The novel constantly traverses from illusion to reality. *The Cat and the Shakespeare* (1965) again deals with the problem of resolving modernity with traditional belief. His other novels are *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chess Master and His Moves* (1988). In his novels, Rao probes into the philosophic and mythic world of India. His works are to a great extent concerned with the purely abstract and philosophical thinking. His style is highly metaphysical.

During the period of the Big Three, Anand, R.K. Narayan and Rao, other writers also wrote a considerable number of novels. The tradition of social realism in Indian English fiction, originated by Anand, went on flourishing during the nineteen fifties and after through Bhattacharya, Malgonkar and Singh. But Sudhin Ghosh, and Anantanarayan have individual variation and the fiction of B. Rajan is the combined effect of realism and fantasy. Bhattacharya's fiction is remarkable for its social purpose. The theme of his novels is the exploitation of the political and economical life of Indians.
The novels also take the Quit India Movement and the Bengal famine as their background. According to Srinivasa Iyengar, “So Many Hungrers is no doubt an impeachment of man's inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings trapped in a unique tragic predicament.” (414). His other novels are Music for Mohini (1952), He Who Rides the Tiger (1954), A Goddess Named Gold (1960), and Shadow from Ladakh (1966). In A Dream in Hawali (1978) he writes about the theme of the East- West encounter. Bhattacharya's contribution to socio-political themes in Indian English fiction is noteworthy.

Malgonakar is one of the well known Indian English novelists of the modern era. He started his career with publication of Distant Drum in 1960. He is undoubtedly an artist of the first place. His major concern seems to be the role of history in individual and social life in India. Distant Drum is a documentary of army life during the changing period from the last years of the British rule to the starting years of the Congress rule. The source of his second novel's title Combat of Shadows (1962) is Bhagavad Gita. His third novel The Princess (1963) is also a political novel. The setting of A Bend in the Ganges (1964) is Indo-Pak partition. The Devil's Wind (1972) is a story about the great revolt of 1857. His other novels are Bandicoot Run (1982), The Garland Keepers (1987) and Cactus Country (1992).

In the novels of the Indian English women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, one can discover that Indian women have remained more chained to their circumstances than liberated, more tradition – bound than modern and more restricted and confined than liberated. They feel
restlessness, uneasiness, and a kind of turbulence. They are all in a state of unsettlement seeking something which always deceives them. They suffer at various levels. Arundhati Chatterji in “Different Facets of the Indian woman in Nayantara Sahgal and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala” says:

projecting the socio-political themes, these women novelists have also portrayed human poverty, hunger and suffering of the villagers. In all, they have turned their attention to the individuals, especially the women, as the victims of conflict between the rural and the urban, the East and the West, the tradition and the modernity, the spiritual and the material. Their portraits are very original and convincing not only because of the fact that they themselves are Indians, rooted deep in Indian traditions and convictions, but also because of the fact that being women, their feelings and experiences are much more authentic. They have a deeper insight into female psychology. (104-5)

They uniformly portray women in a society and how she is exploited by the conventions of a patriarchal society. So that only commenting on the contribution of women writers to Indian English fiction, Anita Singh in “Stairway to the Stars : Women Writers in Contemporary Indian English Fiction” says:

1. They celebrate their defence of norms and boundaries and expose its constructed nature.
2. They vocalize their experiences and thereby delegitimise the culture of silence.

3. They question deep structures of sexual politics.

4. They aim to create a resistance discourse.

5. They deconstruct myths that demonize women.

6. Their writings flaunt a valourization of their bodies. This ‘woman speak’ inserts the hidden narrative of women's sexuality into the typology of culture.

7. They recognize the radical interconnectedness of beings. They are alert to an ecological consciousness which underlines their writings.

8. These writers are questioning every aspect of social order-the pillars of community-marriage, motherhood, control of sexuality and moribund traditions.

9. They distrust history and point out the exclusion of women from it. They call for a revisionist history-a history from below-where their voice is not under erasure.

10. As women in Diaspora, they express their pangs of uprootedness. Intersections of gender / race / class / dislocation / inform their writing.
11. Their works register important shifts in the ways of seeing, showing, saying and even not saying. Their writing seems to draw on Indian women as representation of independent thought and action—the stultifying cultural mores notwithstanding. (105-6)

An important feature of this period was the growth of Indian women novelists writing in English. Their appearance added a new dimension to Indian English novel. It is only after India gained freedom that they have begun enriching Indian English fiction. Among them "the best and the most neglected is Mrs. Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, the most gifted is Kamala Markandaya, the most courageous is Nayantara Sahgal and the newest is Anita Desai". (Asnani Shyam. M.50)

Among the women writers mentioned above, Sahgal’s novels read like commentaries on the political and social turmoil that India has been facing since independence. Her concern for the women, who are caught in the dilemma of liberty and individuality and protection of marriage as an institution, is understandable. She has shown an admirable understanding of the problems and the predicaments of the women. In fact, her marital status has perhaps enabled her to participate in events and also to establish an emotional relationship which may not have been possible otherwise. Similarly, Sahgal’s writing about contemporary India reflects the changing social conditions through her characters and their aspirations and conflicts. Most of her major women characters are married. It is within marriage that they seek self-expression and fulfillment as individuals. Personal relationships reflect both the changing social conditions and the conflicts of the individual mind. In the portrayal of these
relationships, Sahgal does not display any contempt or superiority. Her use of irony is also gentle and kind. She reveals a great deal of understanding and tolerance of opposing views.

Sahgal was born on May 10, 1927 in Allahabad to Vijaya Lakshmi and Ranjit Sitaram Pandit. She is the second of their third daughters and the child of a rich heritage. Her parents and a number of relatives, including her mother’s brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, were actively engaged in India’s struggle for freedom. Politics entered the life of the Pandit girls very early. They learnt to accept many unusual happenings. The visits of the Police, the imprisonments of their parents, the hectic political activity followed by long periods of silence – all were accepted as ordinary events. There were periods of unhappiness, during the enforced separation from their parents. Sahgal recollects how she cried in secret for “crying over much matters was not allowed by our self-imposed family code” (PCC 16). The presence of an older generation gave them courage and strength and the family in Anand Bhawan provided them with a sense of security. Sahgal remembers the order-loving presence of Nanima and the story-telling sessions of their widowed great-aunt Bibima. She also remembers the childhood games shared with her mother’s sister. Their uncle Nehru was not only an uncontested hero but also a boisterous playmate, who spent times with them singing old songs and organising new games. All around them political and moral ideas were discussed and formulated and the girls were a part of it. Jasbir Jain in Nayantara Sahgal says: “If it was Nehru’s idealism which has influenced her political stance, it is her own father’s sentences and courage which had influenced her moral stance” (12). Her father has never allowed the inhibiting
forces of the society to enter his family life. He used to explain the complexities of contemporary political life and its values. She resembles him both in looks and temperament and has inherited from him her love for scholarship and a sense of history. As the daughter of Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, a Sanskrit scholar and lawyer, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (Nehru's sister), and living largely in and around Anand Bhawan in Allahabad, there was no escaping this influence. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she writes about this and says “With us the growth of political awareness was a gradual and unconscious process and the most important influence on our lives” (14). One of the first memories Sahgal records is a reference to childhood, yet she does not recall a joyful moment, but the particular occasion that gives the title to the book:

One day, when I was about three years old, we had chocolate cake for tea ... While we were at tea, a group of policemen arrived at the house. When Lekha asked why they had come, Mummie explained that they had come to take Papu to prison, but that it was nothing to worry about, that he wanted to go.... We ate our chocolate cake, and in our infant minds prison became in some mysterious way associated with chocolate cake. (16-17)

Her mother has also narrated this incident in her autobiography *The Scope of Happiness* (1979) and revealed that the event was no happy co-incidence, but a carefully planned occurrence to lessen the impact of separation on the children. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit writes "I was the only unhappy person in that small gathering, tense with the strain of keeping-up appearances in front of the police and joining in the gaiety of the "tea-party" (93). Perhaps, no member of the Nehru family could easily share off the mixed reactions
of pain, suffering, separation and torture that went simultaneously with the aura and the pride of being at the nerve centre of the Indian struggle for independence.

Sahgal too describes beautifully the memories of those eventful years and what the political upheaval meant to the various inmates of Anand Bhawan and Swaraj Bhawan - the home of the Nehrus. Amidst the various and frequent incidents of jail going, there emerges a loving family portrait of the Indian joint family system. The mixing and intermingling of grandparents, parents, grandchildren and loyal servants reflect close human ties and remain one of the most nostalgic memories consistently found in all Sahgal’s novels. These permanent impressions on Sahgal are formed by her unforgettable associations in childhood - especially those with her grandmother and grandaunt, lovingly called Nanima and Bibima. Whereas Nanima was the strict disciplinarian, Bibima created in her and her sisters the love for God and stories. Recounting those early days, Sahgal details:

All afternoon she / Bibima / told us stories from her endless store, and we were held enthralled in an atmosphere of princes and princesses and animals who lived and spoke like human beings. In this way we learnt not only fairy tales but the colourful stories of our epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and other classics. (PCC 35)

Further, she writes: “she made the Hindu approach to life a reality for us; not through words, for she was not a learned woman, but through her own extreme simplicity, her deep religiousness and her tranquil calm faith in the goodness of God” (38).
Unfortunately, for Sahgal, both Nanima and Bibima died within twenty-four hours of each other, and Sahgal suffered her "First irrepairable loss." (39) But even in death Bibima had a lesson to teach, as Sahgal poignantly narrates:

perhaps it was a good thing that my earliest loss should have been of someone I so dearly loved, because I quickly learnt that she was not lost to me. To this day her memory revives the charmed hours of childhood and the belief that goodness prevails and that the world goes on because of it.

(39)

These, then, may be considered to be the first practical lessons in learning and upholding moral and ethical values. Later, these same lessons in love, tolerance, compassion, courage, fearlessness and peace were reinforced by the powerful influences of her parents, Gandhi and Nehru. The most important thing is that the lessons in these human values were taught to impressionable children, not through words but through deeds.

Looking back on the early years of childhood, Sahgal recalls with wonder and amazement the tremendous courage that her parents must have possessed in taking the decision to send them to America for studies even in those days. Unable to understand it, even as an adult, she observes in Cake:

Some things will always remain a mystery to me. One of these is the perpetually baffling question how Mummie and Papu had the courage to send us to America in 1943 ... I have grown up since then, married and had children of my own; yet the older I grow the less able I am to answer
that question. I am quite certain that I could never send my children away from home so confidently and fearlessly in such circumstances. Perhaps it is because I have not had the training in courage and discipline that my parents had. (1)

But she also knew that her father would have been much happier following his literary pursuits. Moreover, Sahgal had all along nurtured the idea that someday when he would be freer, she would learn Sanskrit from him. (Sahgal, “Testament of an Indo-Anglian Writer” 18). These longings however remained unfulfilled because of Ranjit Pandit's untimely death. Returning home from America, to an independent India, Sahgal could not but feel sorry that her father did not have the time to pursue his literary tastes. Mournfully, she writes:

It was ironic that he had to go, my gallant, laughter loving father, to whom life was adventure, a day to day challenge which he accepted with enthusiasm, His was not the dreary world of politics and prisons to which he had chosen to be confined ... He should have been free and untrammeled, left to think and write creatively, to fulfill his vast talent for living. An independent India could deservedly have flaunted his scholarly genius ... but subject India had chosen him to serve among martyrs ... (169)

It was indeed a strange and unconventional way in which Sahgal's parents had demonstrated fearlessness to their two teenage daughters. Even by modern standards, it
seems almost unbelievable to allow two young girls to travel aboard a troop-ship, unescorted, in the midst of the Second World War. Yet, the impact of such experiences can never be forgotten, and it can rightly be considered to be one of the conscious processes, which strengthened Sahgal's belief in courage and freedom. The lessons of fearlessness are amply reflected in her novels. Her characters openly defy the established and traditional norms of society if they are convinced of their actions.

Sahgal’s family was an aristocratic family. She inherited the love of literature from her father, sense of dignity and decency from her Mamu (Nehru) and mother, the spirit of freedom and patriotism and political values from Gandhi. She grew into a young maid of liberal values without a taint of snobbery, luxury and pride. She ignored the differences of caste and creed, colour and race, poverty and prosperity, and sex.

When Sahgal was sent to a convent for formal schooling, she found the existence an unsatisfactory one and was conscious of the values of her home and her school. Later, when the sisters were sent to Woodstock, a co-educational institution managed by American missionaries at Mussoorie, she found the atmosphere more congenial and free. The curbs on the political activities of students in India were responsible for the decision of their parents to send Tara and Lekha to America for higher studies. When their parents were in jail, the two sisters sailed unescorted for America on a troopship on May 14, 1943. Education in America was a widening experience but in substance it was the continuation of the lesson in independence and courage that they learnt at home in India. Her father died in 1944. It was felt by Sahgal only on her return to India in 1947. At that time, her mother was in Russia as India’s ambassodar. Later, she married Gautam Sahgal
and became Nayantara Sahgal. Later, Sahgal came to realise that their worlds were not only different but ill-matched. Jasbir Jain in *Nayantara Sahgal* is of the view that “The realisation that it was a world of her own choice would have been of little help for every effort at adjustment was in some way a self-denial and a denial of freedom” (16). Kusum’s unhappiness in *A Time to Be Happy* (1958) reflects her own and the coming together of Sanad and Kusum is a projection of her own desires. In *This Time of Morning* (1965) Rashmi feels smothered in her marriage to Dilip and in the end they are separated. Her *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) are emotional autobiographies. Saroj, who fails to get through to Inder, and Mara, who wonders “why the man you had met at a party and married eight years earlier had not after all, been your destination” (SC 99), voice Sahgal’s feelings.

If the political aspect of her life was moulded by Gandhi-Nehru ethics, her moral life was shaped by the quick strength and gentleness of her father, who not only extended his warm love to her daughters but also treated them as his companions. He illuminated their understanding on the complex political issues and values. Sahgal in “This Time of Fulfilment” admits:

I was conscious of being continually stretched in mind and spirit of being encouraged to be venturesome of doing the daring rather than ... playing safe, and I was keenly aware of the joy of being myself, like every other person – a unique human being. (15)
However, the sudden death of her father in 1944 gave her a traumatic shock and his absence in the world could fully be felt. Only after her return to India in 1947, the future appeared bleak to her with disappointment and looked grey and gloomy to her. India was not India without him. She, at that time, developed a thought of marrying a Professor of History but felt in love with a young man working in a British firm. In *From Fear Set Free* she relates: “I stole a tentative look at him out of the corner of my eyes and my history professor wavered like a reflection in a water” (20). It was Gautam Sahgal who had a world far removed from her world – a world unknown to Gandhi and Gandhian values. She observes in *Free* : “What was more, this was an Indian to whom Gandhi was just a name and freedom for his country an event that had deprived him of his home and a part of his inheritance” (21). In her marriage to Gautam Sahgal, she had to adjust herself. She admits:

> From the smallest detail to the over all picture, it would be strange. I would shift from a world where men wore Gandhi caps and Indian clothes made of hand-spun cloth to that European suits and ties, from orange juice to the cock-tail circuit, from an outlook that considered these things natural to one that was baffled by them, from the atmosphere of a political crusade to one of commerce. For the first time, I was to participate in a pattern of life bequeathed to us by nearly two hundred years of British contact and rule. (58)

And as a result, she developed a feeling of alienation and neglect which involved her emotionally. Her hard endeavours to adapt herself to such an environment yielded
nothing but unease and restlessness. She had, eventually, the inevitable divorce in 1967. Commenting on the influence of divorce, Kavita Dubey in *Power Politics and Women Empowerment in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal: A Critical Assessment* writes:

> It is owing to this agonising personal experience that the woman's quest for self becomes a recurrent theme in her novels. Kusum's chagrin in *A Time To Be Happy* echoes her own and the coming together of Kusum and Sanad projects her own desires. *This Time of Morning* pictures Rashmi's disappointment and distress in marriage that ends in divorce. So is the case with her later heroines in *Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow*. Nayantara Sahgal makes a frank confession in “This Time of Fulfilment” that the men and women created by her project her own emotional life. Her heroines reflect the creator’s feelings and raise the question of the woman's struggle for space in the male-dominated world. (15)

Then she felt in love with E.N. Rai, an I.C.S. officer as she happened to have a mental compatibility between her and him. On her second marriage, she observed that life was to be lived more meaningfully than any other things.

Her divorce created a necessity for a change of attitude in her writing and she took to both fiction and journalism and established her reputation both as a journalist and a political columnist. Commenting on the environmental influences in shaping a woman to
be a writer, Kavita Dubey in *Power Politics and Women Empowerment in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal: A Critical Assessment* says:

Nowhere else does the impact of heredity and environment appear to be so illuminating as in the writings of Nayantara Sahgal, the eminent Indian English novelist and political columnist. They amply shed light on the dialectical inter-relationship between the creative psyche and socio-political transformation which took place during the plastic years of her childhood. It is because of this that the themes such as those of identity, human relations and beliefs and practices engage her creative imagination and assume great importance for her. While mirroring the spirit of her time, her writings have trans-temporal and transspatial appeal as they uphold certain values of universal significance like Gandhian non-violence, humility, human dignity, self denial and purity of means, still of great relevance in the today's world, threatened by the nuclear weapons, supremacy of money over man, the contentious question of the woman's right and racial and religious hatred. (8)

Sahgal inherited her love of language and literature from her father, whom she called ‘Papu’. Sahgal remembers her father:

To me he was the handsomest, the most lovable, kind and understanding person. I knew, the human being nearest my heart, and the one whose opinions I most respected. Towards him I felt an inexplicable closeness
since childhood, as though in some way my happiness and unhappiness
were deeply bound up with this. (PCC 12)

Sahgal wants to be free in both political and personal life. As an Indian, she shares the
common Indian sensibility of Indo-Anglian writers like Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan,
Markandaya, Desai and so on. She is neither a traditionalist nor a modernist. She is an
individualist. Lakshmi Sinha in *Nayantara Sahgal’s Novels : A Critical Study* says:

This is more so, because Nayantara Sahgal is a unique product of family
heritage, traditional Indian upbringing, powerful political and literary
influences, and American education, where she also encountered the
contagious influence of the Russian author, Viladimir Nabokov. Added to
this is the historical significance of the period in which she was born-
namely the Gandhian era which saw the birth of a new and independent
India. (2)

Sahgal includes her personal experiences in her novels. They are both the strength and
weakness of her as a novelist. She also makes use of her knowledge of history with the
two major identical themes – politics and man-woman relationships.

Sahgal, with a long literary career, occupies an important place in the history of
the novel in English in India. She has cultivated fearlessness in expressing her opinions
through her characters. Her characters are often entrapped in trying situations but being
honest to themselves they emerge victoriously and morally upright, taking revolutionary
stand. Harin Majithia in *The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal : A Prismatic View* says:
Sahgal's novels can be roughly viewed in two halves: the first five arise out of 'situations' more than characters, while the later three deviate from their counter-parts, in being strongly character oriented. Out of these characters, one that emerges conspicuously is the emancipated woman, one who harbours adequate courage to walk out of her suffocating and 'infra dig' circumstances. She is the liberated woman who is virtuous, moral, up-right, self-respecting, though she appears to be anti-establishment. She asserts her right as a human being and as an individual who can endure to a limit and not beyond that. It is out of this spirit that Simrit, Sonali, and Bhushan's mother take shape. (20)

Sahgal is one of the eminent women writers of Indian writing in English. She is also a journalist and has distinguished herself as a political columnist. She has written fiction and non-fiction. She has the privilege of being the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru and living in close touch with Mahatma Gandhi. Jasbir Jain in Nayantara Sahgal says that “she has the unique distinction of being the only political novelist on the Indo-English literary scene” (9).

Sahgal has been active on the literary scene both as a creative writer and as a political columnist. She is the only writer who combines journalism and creative writing. She is the only political novelist on the Indo-English literary scene. Her works have a strong realistic base and reflect not only her personal values but also the changing values of the society. Sahgal stresses the need for morality in political life deriving her beliefs as she does from Gandhian values. Her work ranges from factual and emotional
autobiography to fictionalized autobiography. In *Prison and Chocolate Cake* she writes:

Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity – a different kind of political maturity from any the world had seen before based on an ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace.

(15)

“Sahgal, when she takes up any feministic themes, she does not deal with only the questions of marriage, divorce, sexuality, and women’s equality with man but also cultural, religious and social environment in which a woman lives as well as the question of love, hatred and jealousy and certain other human emotions and values” (Dubey, *Power Politics* 2). Besides, further Dubey relates “she also dwells on the significance of essential humanism, the question of freedom, the growth of individuality, the quest for self-fulfillment, the impact of religion on man’s life, various human values and the antithesis between idealism and pragmatism, illusion and reality” (2). However, Dubey observes that the major thematic concerns are three:

1. Politics of the time
2. The woman’s urge to self-fulfillment
3. A vision of balance and harmony between the apparently opposing forces. (3)

Sahgal’s characters openly defy the established and traditional norms of society. Saroj in *Chandigarh* leaves behind her husband and is ready to make a new beginning with
Vishal Dubey without much worry about the reactions of the society. She feels happy in her decision because it is the result of her own convictions. Along with boldness and self-awareness, Sahgal never fails to endow her women characters with a sense of beauty and femininity. She imbibes the aesthetic sense from her mother about whom she says:

We had always associated our mother with the ordered beauty of home. We were used to see her early in the morning on the Veranda, where she would be down on her knees among freshly cut roses, arranging them with care in the vases. (PCC 35)

**Happy** discusses the theme of East-West encounter, but it is also a subtle comment on the new and old educational and industrial policies of the government. Sanad's dilemma in a new independent India is the result of the wrong kind of education, he has received. Similarly, the big industrial mills of Saharanpur are contrasted with the spinning wheel of Gandhi and the products of the cottage industries.

The challenge is as much for the people to recognize their own needs, as for the government to formulate new and correct policies. The situation is similar to what Bhabhani Bhattacharya has projected in **Shadow from Ladakh** (1966) between the symbolic conflict in Gandhigram and Steel town.

**Morning** is a fictional enactment of the changing patterns of the corridors of power against the backdrop of a few years leading to it. It portrays the steady decline of Gandhi and Gandhism in the Indian political system, but finally Gandhism reasserts itself and, there are indications that a bright morning signifies a good day. In this novel,
Sahgal has portrayed a realistic and powerful character in Kalyan Sinha, who believes that Gandhi has emasculated the country. As Srinivasa Iyengar has given a balanced judgment of the novel: "This Time of Morning is written with much greater ease and sophistication than its predecessor, and it can certainly claim to ‘be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English.’” (473)

Female characters such as Saroj and Mara are portrayed as challenging hegemonic expectations for women's behaviour in Chandigarh, Sahgal's third novel. The novel opens as Vishal Dubey, an up-and-coming civil servant, accepts a posting to Chandigarh, a city that has served as the capital of both the Punjab and the Haryana since the division of the Punjab in 1966. As Vishal travels to Chandigarh to begin his assignment, he experiences flashbacks to the partition. The narrative establishes analogies between the self-serving motivations behind the sectarian violence of partition, the political conflict between Punjabi- and Hindi-speaking communities in the two states, and the imposition of one individual's will on another, especially as this concerns male dominance in the domestic sphere. One of the key examples of this latter situation is the marriage of Saroj and Inder. Inder is portrayed as dissatisfied with Saroj as a wife and mother for failing to live up to middle-class patriarchal conventions of conduct and he is jealous of her premarital sexual relationship with another man.

Shadow concentrates more on the personal life of its main female character Simrit, but again her story is presented against the political scene in New Delhi. The new brand of young, selfish and unscrupulous politician is represented by Sumer Singh, who achieves success in politics with the help of these qualities. He has not known the hard
days of the Freedom Struggle and symbolically, therefore, has no links with Gandhi. The portrayal is realistic and an indication of the difficult times to come. Oil exploration and the disturbing inclination of India’s foreign policy towards the Soviet Union from the former non-alignment position become the focus of attention.

**A Situation in New Delhi** (1977) is about the gloomy atmosphere consequent to the void created by the death of Nehru and it concludes with a suggestion that a Leftist revolution is in the offing. It is the portrayal of the city torn apart by the failure of political leadership and violent student unrest. It would not be wrong to state that the entire book is a tribute to Nehru. His ideas and aspirations have been forgotten in the absence of leadership. Political chaos has caused frustration among the educated youth and there is violence in the University campus. The youth have started taking the law into their own hands, to shock the general people out of apathy. It is a tragic and realistic account of the inefficiency of the government and the loss of young lives. The students are restless and peace has no meaning for them. Only violence can attract the attention of those who matter, and the most brilliant students become Naxalites. The action is seen through the eyes of Michael Calvert who revisits India after the death of its charismatic leader, Shivraj. Politically the decline is total, even Parliament cannot ensure justice in such a situation and disillusionment is evident in the intelligentsia.

**Rich Like Us** (1986) can be considered a record of the anguish of an intellectual artist at the disintegration of values that led to the declaration of Emergency in India. This novel was awarded the American Sinclair Award in 1986 and the Indian Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987. The novel is set against the Emergency imposed by Indira
Gandhi in 1975. It's fearlessly presented account of the harassment caused to all sections of people during the period of National Emergency traces the nation's journey from servility through independence to emergency and dramatizes a variety of conflicts faced by the individual in a transitional society.

**Plans for Departure** (1987), which has won the Eurasian Regional Award in the Commonwealth Fiction prize, registers an important stage in her growth as a novelist. It takes the readers back to the colonial past and presents a picture of the subcontinent poised for revolution in the backdrop of the world on the edge of war against the year 1914. It is the story of Anna Hansen, a Danish girl, who postpones her marriage to an English diplomat, Nicholas, because of her desire for self-realisation.

**Mistaken Identity** (1988) begins with its narrator, Bhushan Singh returning to India in 1929 after a long trip abroad only to be rebuffed by an old lover, Sylla. On a train journey to visit his family home, he is mistakenly arrested for conspiracy against the British colonial administration and thrown in jail to await his trial. The narrative explores obvious parallels between women's lives under patriarchy and the colonization of India by Britain as Bhushan's extended incarceration gives him time to reflect on his identity as an Indian and his mother's difficult experience of living in purdah. In fact, it is a graphic document of the twilight years of the Raj in India and may well serve as a reference point to many events and actions of the freedom movement. The theme of identity develops a unique blend of its modern western sense with unmistakable historical and cultural ambivalence of the Indian tradition.
Lesser Breeds (2003) calls upon people to re-look at non-violence once again, specially in the face of American decision to go to war. This book borrows literally from the British Raj in India. Philosophy is the only solution to India's manifold problems. Sahgal traces the history of India's freedom struggle through the Nehru-Gandhi dichotomy, working primarily through the consciousness of the bastard child, Nurullah (literally, the light of Allah) born of a rape. Learner and tutor both, he is an observer-participant as well as an explorer for alternative modes of knowledge in a world controlled by the imperial masters.

Sahgal’s novels are set against the socio-political backdrop of Indian struggle for freedom. They deal with woman’s quest for freedom, for her identity, and for man-woman relationship. They also deal with East-west encounter and preoccupation with Hindus and Hinduism. Lakshmi Sinha in “Nayantara Sahgal’s Sextet : From A Time to Be Happy to Rich Like Us” is of the opinion that “Sahgal’s literary world […] in a broad sense can be termed ‘personalised fiction’. History, politics, autobiography, and personalities intermingle in the novels of Sahgal” (42). Her novels are a microcosm of life. Commenting on the quality of her novels, Shyam M. Asnani in “The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” makes a bold statement:

Permissive in outlook, she stands for the new humanism and a new morality, according to which a woman is not to be taken a mere toy, an object of lust, and momentary pleasure, but man’s equal and honoured partner, in word and deed, as against the inhuman, traditional postures,
‘old, impossible ideas’, ‘taboos’ and prejudices which were getting obsolete must be cast aside like old, worn out and torn clothes. (37-38)

Sahgal’s first novel Happy is reposed in a small town Sharanpur in Utter Pradesh, flourishing on a British owned textile industry. A few affluent Indians, as the narrator’s family, lived there. The town poised a symbol of Indian culture remote from English influences, except for the local club whose membership was confined to the British. Sanad, the young protagonist, an officer in the firm, wished to resign for reasons that seemed impractical to his family. His marriage to an Indian girl was also a failure one.

In the second novel, Morning, Rakesh, a junior officer in the External Affairs Ministry, serves as the mouthpiece of the novelist. Kalyan Sinha, a minister without portfolio firmly believed that in a country like India group activities could attain far superior results than individual efforts. He had a tough opponent in Kailash, a Gandhian. Kalyan being better placed and being a confident of the Prime Minister, could make profitable use of his privileged position and avenge the poor childhood he had. He gains serenity of mind only after losing his official power.

Sahgal’s third novel, Chandigarh deals with a city passing through political turmoil and of involvements of government officials. Importance of peace for the progress of the country is projected by Vishal Dubey, a young IAS officer. He is deputed by the centre to establish tranquility in violent hit Chandigarh. Chief Ministers of Haryana and Punjab are exposed in their respective capacities. The private worlds of the
characters coalesce with their political nexus. A wretched victim of an unhappy marriage, Vishal finally finds in Saroj an understanding companion.

**Shadow** is yet another attempt by Sahgal to portray the sufferings of a woman. Simrit, a freelance journalist, encounters herself face to face with a maladjusted marriage with a rich but insensitive businessman Som. Their children also face the same problem. The dramatic experience of a divorce leaves Simrit an altogether altered woman to face life all alone. However, she gets the help of Raj, whom she idolized for his courage of conviction, in making decisions. The succor extended by Raj and their marriage in due course reveals the writer’s faith in the institution of marriage. “The novel perorates with the liberation of India but with the holocaust of partition on her back, coinciding with the liberated woman, Simrit” (Majithia 28). However, Rajeshwar Mittapalli in “Myth as Macro-Structure : A Reading of Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* and Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow*” affirms that **Shadow** “centres on the traumatic post-divorce experience of a middle-aged woman, Simrit” (124).

**Situation** explores the dilemma through which India passes in educational field and is ultimately victimized by political uncertainty. During post-independence period, Devi, the Education Minister, was disgruntled with the way the government machinery functioned. Michael Calvert, an English journalist and Devi’s friend, was also deeply moved by the sufferings of India. New leaders were without a sense of direction. Glimpses of crime and deteriorating standard on university campus are gripping. The misguided new generation is represented by Devi’s son, Rishad, a terrorist. There is also
a duty conscious academician like the Vice-Chancellor, Usman, who decides to work for the welfare of the students after resigning from his post of Vice-Chancellor.

**Rich** once again focuses the problems of India. Sonali, an IAS Officer, finds herself in the cramping working conditions and corruption. The parallel story of an English woman, Rose, married to an Indian, delineates the marked difference between the culture of the occident and the orient. Life for Rose in India is enervating and unfortunately she pays a heavy price by her ruthless murder. Commenting on **Rich** Subhash Chander in “Feminism in Nayantara Sahgal’s **Rich Like Us**” writes:

Sahgal presents in her novel **Rich Like Us** the problems that the contemporary women face in society and in their struggle towards self-realization. She not only deals with the questions of marriage, sexuality and woman’s equality with man but also raises the question of love, hatred, jealousy and certain other human emotions and values. Moreover, she also presents an antithesis between idealism and pragmatism, illusion and reality. (80)

**Departure** picks up India against the year 1914. Anna Hansen, a young Danish intrepid maiden on her visit to India passes through a variety of experiences in the capacity of being a Secretary to Sir Nitin Basu, a scientist. The frustrating experience of a well meaning priest in trying to build a church in the remote Himalayan pocket Himapur, voices the writer’s discontent. Here, Sahgal deftly portrays the suffocating conditions under which a sensible English magistrate should work. The political situations in 1920s
India were precarious for British officials. Due to the breaking out of the First World War, Anna was compelled to return to England but her love for India continued to live through her grand-daughter Gayatri.

Identity is set against 1932-1988. Sahgal shifts her scene of action to Vijaygarh, a small princely state. Bhushan, a young prince, is mistakenly imprisoned on political charges. Bhushan’s love to a Muslim girl also makes riots in the state. Eventually, the protagonist marries another Muslim; while his mother, the queen of Vijaygarh, departs from the palace with her Muslim lover, being dissatisfied with her first marriage.

Sahgal’s Breed is about Nurullah, an English teacher, who comes to the city of Akbarabad. He lives with a non-violent family of Bhai (Nikhil), his widowed mother (ammaji), and daughter, Shaan, aged six. He is responsible for correcting Shaan’s education. Shaan displays strength and purpose when her father is taken away by the police for his nationalist activities. Shaan becomes hysterical. She leaves for America but returns after her father’s execution and later stands for election to the country’s first parliament and makes her triumphant way in politics.

Sahgal’s Breeds re-examines the non-violent independence struggle in India from the points of view of several individuals involved in the national movement. The title is taken from Rudyard Kipling’s “Recessional”, part of which is quoted as an epigraph to the novel. Though the novel primarily deals with India’s struggles, the phrase ‘lesser breeds’ is used ironically to refer to non-western peoples, who have been continuously
victimized by imperialism. The novel also deals with the broader themes of racism and discrimination.

The first section of the novel “Company Bagh” is set in the imaginary city of Akbarabad. In it, a young school teacher, Nirullah, becomes drawn into the circle of Nehruvian figure, Nikhil, usually known as Bhai, embraced on a personal reconstruction of such matters as faith, sexuality and identity, during the years 1932 to 1942. The narration is in third person but told from Nurullah’s perspective. The second part “An Island called America” takes place in the United States during World War II and deals primarily with the experiences of Bhai daughter, Shan, as she attends university in America. This section is narrated both from her point of view and from those of the Americans whose lives intersect with less such as Leda, her host, and Otta, Shan’s lover. Anna Guttman in “Secularism as Syncretism in Nayantara Sahgal’s Lesser Breeds” says: “This section stresses the otherness of American culture, as seen from the outside, and reverses the conventional gaze of anthropology (in which the anthropologist is typically a westerner and his object of inquiry is allegedly more primitive, non-western society), in order to deconstruct many of the values and assumptions underlying western culture, and its perceived difference from the East” (47-8). The final and shortest section, “Trade winds” takes place in Switzerland in 1966, where Nurullah has travelled to meet E. Knath, an old friend from his nationalist days, and now an Indian ambassador. The two reminisce and discuss politics, particularly trade and the arms race in the postcolonial world, issues which highlight the fact that the threat of imperialism did not end with the attainment of Indian independence. Anna Guttman suggests further that
As the narrative structure suggests, the text is overtly engaged both in reading political history and in dealing with broad political themes. Here, as in Sahgal’s previous books, the political and personal are closely intertwined, with cultural and ideological encounters often figured as relationships between lovers or family members: the Indian Shan and her German lover Otto, the American Leda and her Japanese lover Kamei, the southern white American Florence Burns and her African–American lover, Ezra, to name just a few. (48)

In fact, Breeds chronicles recent Indian history but with a difference: the Nehru figure dies before independence is ever attained, executed by the Raj, who wrongly blame him when his followers despair of the efficacy of non-violent action and wreck a train to draw attention to their cause. It is his daughter, Shan who leads the nation to independence, and who like Nehru, refuses to become a pawn in the neo-imperial disputes of the cold war.

Sahgal is often called / labelled as a feminist like Atwood, but she is not a feminist like Atwood or others. Her concern is with the problems of woman. She focuses on love, marriage, marital disharmony, and so on. In that case, as one calls Atwood a feminist, she may be called a womanist as her concern is with women and their problems. Based on it, Jasbir Jain in “Nayantara Sahgal” is of the opinion that:

There is another seam in her work which has not been sufficiently tapped. Seen primarily as a feminist, it remains to define her feminism as rooted in
the larger framework of human rights, of personal freedom and right to the body. Placed within domesticity her early heroines gradually move on to wider spaces, areas of competition and face problems of survival and this movement blurs the boundaries between the home and the world, rather than submit to the separation between them. The self is always in question as the individual struggles with the imposition of roles which traditional convention thrust on him. (116)

However, commenting on feminism in the novels of Sahgal, Subhash Chander in “Feminism in Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich Like Us” says:

Nayantara Sahgal’s progress as a novelist, however, bears testimony to the fact that she has been moving towards a definite feminist position, so that the women’s experience do not merely provide data but are actually organized in such a way that they become an exercise in raising consciousness and a critique of society with its unequal gender roles and the power distribution involved in them. (79)

Jasbir Jain in “Nayantara Sahgal” also admits that: “There is a strong feminist thrust in all her writing. Placed within the context of the writing of the fifties and sixties, she displays a highly developed consciousness of the gendered nature of morality and social structures” (121). Any how, Sahgal has to address the patriarchal society, a husband – centred world, where women have no independent identities. The relationship takes on the form of a prey and predator. It is because Sahgal’s women largely belong to the
opulent class. They are deeply and sensitively alive to women’s predicament in a patriarchal society. So in Sahgal, the struggle is for abolishing gender discrimination and seeking reciprocity, mutuality, and harmony in life. Julie Scott in “Female Autonomy: Linking the Public and Private Worlds in *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity*” admits:

Nayantara Sahgal frequently gives voice in her fiction to the recusant female who is constrained by her traditional role as daughter, wife, or mother. She also explores the premise that political freedom has limited value without social and personal emancipation by combining a political and historical framework in her novels *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity*. And while Sahgal is circumspect about challenging institutions such as law, religion, and marriage, which help define one’s place in society, she does challenge the way society uses these institutions to silence its female half. (125)

In a sense, her novels can be read as texts of resistance to the social conditions of their production and reception. The subordinate role of women within the institution of marriage is challenged. However, Jasbir Jain in “Nayantara Sahgal” observes:

Sahgal’s work needs to be placed simultaneously in several different traditions for it has an inbuilt multiplicity. There is first the tradition of the national political discourse; second, that of Indian writing in English; third, of women’s writing in India, and fourth of the fictional tradition as
developed in the west. It also need to be placed amongst the category of work which is part of a decolonizing process and generically it projects a new kind of biographical history of the nation which has its own structures. (115)

Three of her earlier works, *Morning, Chandigarh*, and *Shadow* are autobiographical. They build on her own emotional experiences and conflicts. They are also political as they capture the political happenings and environment of the newly independent India, the changing face of bureaucracy, and the shifting value structures and loyalties. *Delhi* marks a break with autobiography and concerns itself with the nature of power and political governance. It captures the unrest prevalent in India during the 1960s and 1970s because of economic disparities and inequalities and the non-involvement of the upper classes in nation-building activities. The later three novels, *Rich, Departure,* and *Identity* move away from immediate political events. *Rich* begins with the national Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and moves back through the histories of Rose and Sonali to the nineteenth century. *Departure* is concerned with the years 1912 to 1988 and *Identity* is with 1929-1932. Commenting on the later novels of Sahgal in the vein of female autonomy, Julie Scott in “Female Autonomy : Linking the Public and the Private Worlds in *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity*” says:

> In these later novels Sahgal also shifts her focus from Hindu women to European women who reside in India in *Plans for Departure*, and to Muslim women in *Mistaken Identity* to illustrate that while differences in social position, race, religion, and customs may separate her female
characters, they are all linked by the measures they take to attain autonomy. In *Plans for Departure* Anna Hansen, Sir Nitin Basu’s Danish assistant, Lulu Croft, the wife of a missionary, and Stella Brewster, the ex-wife of the District Magistrate are all prepared to challenge the boundaries of containment set up by either actual or impending marriages. Although their attempts sometimes fail, even tragically, as with Lucy Croft’s fatal accident, the novel reaffirms Sahgal’s positive message that women can take steps to transform their own lives, and that with courage and determination they can challenge the patriarchal codes which constrict them. (127)

Sahgal passionately devotes herself to writing enriched with the first-hand knowledge of politics and the intense personal experiences of divorce and remarriage. Indu Swami in “The Woman Question in the Selected Novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy” observes: “Sahgal touches many feminist issues like love, marriage, childbirth, abortion etc in her novel […]. Sahgal very vividly deals with the question of bigamy which entrails suffering and sacrifices for the co-wives. Sahgal also highlights the fact that not only love, even marriage has no power to bind man to the woman” (20).

For centuries, women have been exploited by men in a patriarchal society. They are also victimized by them. The continuing trend of exploitation of woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system. Woman began to have an urge for freedom and emancipation from the age-old shackles of slavery by men. The awareness of the need for liberation from the shackles of marital bondage has been felt by women in
the India of Post-independence era. Neena Arora in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* says that “Sahgal’s women (like Sahgal herself) largely hail from the affluent class and do not experience much discrimination in educational or political fields and also do not aspire for financial independence” (6). Sahgal does not deal with the plight of widows in Indian society. She is as much concerned about the emancipation of women. She differs from other writers that she advocates / voices inner freedom for her women and demands recognition as equals, by men at home and in society. Sahgal does not want marriage to provide only financial and social security for a woman, but also love, companionship, and understanding.

Critical responses to Sahgal's work have been sustained and wide-ranging. They can be divided into roughly two categories: nationalist and liberal humanist, and feminist and postcolonial. In the first group, Sahgal's writing has been assessed through a liberal humanist lens from which assumptions about what counts as morality and authentic Indianness ’ circulate fairly uncritically. In this context, critics have tended to laud Sahgal's novels for championing nonviolence over violence, perceived her stories about women's lives as attempting to achieve a balance between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, and subsumed her feminist politics under a more benign label of ‘humanism’. Much of the early criticism of Sahgal 's work falls into this first category. More recent criticism, influenced by the emergence of feminist, post-structuralist, and postcolonial theory within the academy, has cast a more critical eye on several aspects of her oeuvre: the relationship between the form and content, the relationship between the public and private realms in the lives of the characters, its view of the ongoing impact of colonialism
and neocolonialism in the Indian social context, and the implications of Sahgal's elite bourgeois background for her view of Indian society.

Jasbir Jain in *Nayantara Sahgal* (1978) talks about Sahgal as a political novelist. Ralph J. Crane’s book on Sahgal under the title *Nayantara Sahgal’s India : Passion, Politics, and History* (1990) is a collection of critical essays on Sahgal’s works. Neena Arora has made a comparative study of Sahgal and Doris Lessing under the title *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing : A Feminist Study in Comparison* (1991). This book seeks to interpret Sahgal’s and Lessing’s works from a feminist point of view. Hilda Pontes’s book *Nayantara Sahgal* (1995) is an annotated Bibliography on the novelist. Manmohan Bhatnagar in *The Fiction of Nayantara Sahgal* (1996) also takes on the political theme in Sahgal’s works along with an examination of the fettering faith in Hinduism and a Gandhian perspective. Harin Majithia in *The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal : A Prismatic View* (2000) traces the history of modern Indian novel in English and the major themes of Sahgal along with her art of characterization. A study of the critical works of Sahgal shows that many of them reveal similar narrative and thematic concerns. There is no particular full-length study available to study women’s role and their problems and voices in full length. The present research on Sahgal is a critical study; wherein the researcher has made attempts to read, study, criticize, and illuminate the relative merits of Sahgal as a novelist as she shares perceptions related to woman. The female characters of Sahgal are studied against the background of family and society as her women characters present different concepts and challenge the traditional roles of women. Her fiction is often organized thematically around images of both cultural and
individual issues, as they seek to portray the entrapment of women in patriarchy and of
men and women in suffocating social and cultural imprisonment. She has wider
humanitarian concerns. Her fiction provides a comprehensive view / review of the
problems women confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights
and fundamental freedom. Her basic premise is women in an antagonistic, male
chauvinistic, and sexist society. Hers is a preoccupation with examining the question of
women’s place in society vis-à-vis the patriarchal structures of dominion and power.