Chapter 4:
The Other Side of Emergency – Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich like Us*
The last chapter dealt with the effects of Emergency on the middle classes. This chapter too portrays Emergency but focuses on other aspects. Nayantara Sahgal is the cousin of Mrs. Indira Gandhi so she presents an insider’s approach towards Emergency. Sahgal has the honour of being the first Indian English woman novelist dealing with political themes. She received two prestigious awards for her sixth novel, *Rich like us*, published in 1985. She was awarded Sinclair Prize for Fiction and the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. During Emergency, she resigned from Akademi’s Advisory Board in protest because her suggestion that the Board should pass a resolution to condemn the censorship of press and imprisonment without trial went unheeded. Ironically, the same Akademi honoured her for her novel which attacks Emergency.

Nayantara Sahgal’s works have been evaluated from different perspectives – as a feminist, political writer, writer of social documentaries and an advocate of Gandhian ideologies. She explains that politics is embedded in her “bones and marrow”¹ and in her “emotional and intellectual make-up”² so she cannot be a passive witness to the events having effects on human interests. The long fight for freedom, the high hopes after independence, opportunities thereafter, rise of apathy, pushing the nation under the Emergency rule is depicted in her works. Her characters are governed by individual gains rather than social interests with only a few exceptions.

After independence, the political themes had diversifications. Partition and the disillusionments about the functioning of democracy, the quality of the new leaders and the degradation of moral values in politics were voiced in fiction. One of the most important events in the post-independence Indian political scene was the declaration of Emergency which lasted from June 1975 to March 1977. As Jasbir Jain observes, “*Rich Like Us* offers no easy solutions to mankind problems on the contrary it challenges all known solutions . . . finally *Rich Like Us* is about the complex nature of reality.”³ To expose the negative effects of the contemporary government calls for real courage. *Rich Like Us*, set in 1975, fearlessly presents an account of the harassment caused to people during Emergency. Nayantara Sahgal’s writing of Emergency has a feminist attitude. In the novel, her female characters are strongly portrayed and the effects of Emergency on them are focused upon.

After independence, Nehru saw socialism as the only way to fight back mass poverty. His firm commitment to socialism left an ideological legacy that implied any opening to foreign investment as a “betrayal”⁴ of the national project for India, a “sell-out
While writing about the dictatorship during Emergency, Nayantara Sahgal is criticising the beginning of the capitalist turn in Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s policies and her abusive behaviour in 1975-77, regarding censorship, imprisonment of political leaders and massive sterilisation campaigns.

If we look at the reasons for the declaration of Emergency, one of the primary factors was the verdict of the Allahabad High Court. Raj Narain, who had been defeated in Parliamentary election by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, lodged cases of election fraud and use of state machinery for election purposes by her. On 12th June 1975, Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court found the Prime Minister guilty. The court declared her election null and void and unseated her from the Lok Sabha. This conviction prevented Mrs. Indira Gandhi of “running for or holding any elective office for a period of six years.” Some serious charges such as bribing voters and election malpractices were dropped and she was held responsible for misusing the government machinery and found guilty on charges such as using the state police to build a dais, availing the services of a government officer, Yashpal Kapoor, during the elections and use of electricity from the state electricity department. Strikes in labor and trade unions, student unions and government unions had swept across the country. Protests led by J. P. Narayan, Raj Narain, Satyendra Narayan Sinha and Morarji Desai flooded the streets of Delhi close to the Parliament and the Prime Minister’s residence. The persistent efforts of Raj Narain were praised and it took over four years to finally pass judgment against Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

The Emergency period started overnight. Politicians and newspapers demanded resignation of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and organised a huge demonstration against her on 25th June, 1975. On 26th June, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s elite force arrested the political leaders of the opposition. Hours later, she proclaimed the state of National Emergency which included the suspension of basic civil rights and tight censorship over press. Thousands of students, journalists, lawyers and activists were arrested. As per the 28th and 29th amendments to the Constitution, she excluded herself from impending legal charges, declaring this amendment immune to the Supreme Court review. This is the political background for the novel. Nayantara Sahgal wrote about Mrs. Gandhi’s rule making clear their divergence of views concerning the nation. It is worth quoting the Introduction to Sahgal’s book on Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to settle their divergence in point of view, as Sahgal herself phrases it:

“The essence of Indian politics before her (Mrs. Gandhi’s) time had been
diversity of opinion, Institutes and channels for its expression, and a wholehearted acceptance of the nurture of these diverse strands as essential to the democratic faith and system (...). With Mrs. Gandhi, this atmosphere, along with the political structures it involved, the climate of debate and dissent it had encouraged (...) began to be eroded. A simple formula of for-and-against, either-or replaced it.”

With this backdrop, the novel opens in Dev’s house, where he and his wife are entertaining a foreign guest, Neuman, a collaborator in the proposed Happyola factory and they have money making alliances between them. Neuman has come to India in search of a market and Dev is the Indian collaborator. One can compare Dev and Neuman to Hari Mohan and Somnath in Nayantara Sahgal’s This Time of Morning dealing with the important wings of the nation - the politicians and the bureaucrats, failing at their moral and professional responsibilities. The politicians Hari Mohan and Somanath are corrupt, greedy and unscrupulous. Somnath and Hari Mohan like Dev and Neuman mould the entire political and bureaucratic machinery for the advantage of their business alliance.

Dev and Neuman are waiting for Ravi Kachru, an important bureaucrat, part of “the conveyor belt that had delivered the cash to the Minister of Industry, relatively minor price in terms of big investment and the returns expected from it.” Neuman observes the Indian obsession for imported things. He feels the anonymity of Dev’s house which is without the “echo of things past or things to come.”

Contrast to Dev is Sonali, an IAS officer, who has grown up in an idealistic world. Sonali can be compared to Bharati from R. K. Narayan’s Waiting for the Mahatma. Bharati is a freedom fighter and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. After independence, she is released from jail and she leaves for Noakhali with Gandhi to restore peace in the region as private interests can wait before national concerns. Bharati symbolizes the Gandhian model of love, non-violence and freedom. Bharati can be compared to Sonali, who is working under the dictatorial regime of Emergency and faces problems courageously like Bharati. Both have firm faith in Gandhian ideology. They stick to their principles and suffer in their lives.

Sonali is unable to accommodate herself to the new requirements of Emergency. She rejects the application for the setting up of the imported Happyola drink factory by Dev and Neuman, supported by the Minister of Industry, purely on economic grounds. For the analysis of this novel, the provisions of Emergency and civil service
conditions were found appropriate. Article 309 of the Indian Constitution illustrates the ‘conditions of service’ for the civil servants. It states that demotion is a punishment for the malpractices by bureaucrats. Whereas, Sonali is demoted as she is unable to accommodate herself to the new requirements of Emergency. She is demoted and transferred out of Delhi. She is unable to discard the values she inherited. We find through Sonali that the civil servants knew it was no Emergency but no one dares to protest and if one protests, one gets punished like Sonali under article 309. She suffers multiply as she gets harassed as a bureaucrat, a woman and a common citizen. A civil employee of the Government is guaranteed the protection of fundamental rights in the articles 14, 15, 16, 19 and 20. In her case, fundamental rights are flaunted and denied. Sonali finds herself in the line with other victims – Rose who had accepted her husband’s first marriage, and Mona his second; she is like her great grandmother who had submitted to death in the form of ‘Sati’ unable to withstand social and economic pressures.

Rose tells Neuman about their life in Lahore and her father-in-law’s attitude to business – practical, straightforward and more verbal. He had no need for contacts or contracts. Her husband even when he socialized retained the element of dependability in business deals. There is an implied comparison with Dev’s method of working and the new political control of business deals. People like Ram and his father were getting rare, as if they belonged to extinct species, Rose thinks to herself:

“Human beings. Like there don’t seem to be anymore.”

Ram is not dead but is lying upstairs paralysed after having suffered a stroke. His paralytic condition symbolizes the policy paralysis of the government affairs during Emergency. He is helpless. So was Keshav Ranade, Sonali’s father and Kishori Lal, Nishi’s father, who has to earn a living and support a family of five daughters to overcome his political and intellectual interests.

Dev views Emergency from the point of view of business. The judiciary and legislature have lost their powers due to the provisions of Emergency under article 353 (b) thereby the legislature has no right to make laws. This is beneficial for people like Dev. It is good for his business:

“Just what we needed. The trouble makers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed. The way the country is being run now, with one person giving
the orders and no one being allowed to make a fuss about it in the cabinet or in Parliament, means things can go full steam ahead without delays and weighing pros and cons forever. Strikes are banned.”

Ravi Kachru is intelligent than Dev, shares with Dev indifference to all the moral concerns. Kachru had overnight become “the right hand and the left leg of the Prime Minister and her household.” Only partly because he “was a Kashmiri and next door to being her kith and kin.” He is a good flatterer and has mastered the survivor’s skill. He belongs to a new breed of bureaucrats, who are willing to play the game. His engagement to a distant relative of the Prime Minister is another step in the right direction.

The novel focuses on the female characters and their sufferings centring upon the fate of two upper - class females, Rose and Sonali. Rose struggles to find a sense of home in the Indian society, filled with ancient customs, including Sati and male domination. As Ram’s health deteriorates, she realizes her rights as a wife are in question. Dev schemes to take all Ram’s assets by disposing off Rose. In fear, Rose turns to Sonali, her friend and niece.

To use Sonali’s words in the opening pages, any reader of the novel becomes “obsessed with symbols.” The novel operates simultaneously on two levels, the literal and the figurative or symbolic. At the literal level, the novel is the story of Emergency as seen from the viewpoint of two main characters, Rose and Sonali. The novel is a sustained allegory of modern India, especially of its relationship with Britain. The major characters carry symbolic meanings and their life has impact of politics. Their destinies along with that of the common man are framed by the contemporary politics. The following analysis of major characters will show that:

Rose is that part of Britain which came to India and became a part of it. Her love for India and Ram may be a bit of a mystery; why she puts up with so much abuse from Ram is also not clear. She belongs to the working class and is compassionate. She is the political symbol of the ‘good’ West and liberal values and this is what Indian culture might benefit from. The name ‘Rose’ itself suggests the goodness within the West.

Marcella is clearly aligned with imperialism; her interest in Indian things is a sort of ‘Orientalism.’ She is an upper class English beauty, sophisticated and ageless. She represents the ruling classes. Her affair with Ram symbolises the selling out of Indian
interests by our leaders. She is like the British upper classes turning collaborators of India after independence.

Ram is India trapped between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, India and the West. He is aligned to traditional India (Mona) and Western modernity (Rose). He is a male bigamist, insensitive and an intellectual. He represents aristocracy, morally corrupt, hypocritical oppressor of women and the Indian tradition at its worst. In a sense, he is the real villain of the novel. He does nothing to check Dev’s misbehaviour. Dev’s forging cheques in Ram’s name refers to the misuse of tradition by modern politicians.

Ram’s father, Lalaji is anti-British and a shrewd businessman. He is honest and upright but a real entrepreneur. Lalaji represents the good, uncompromising, older generation and the real Indian tradition in a sense. Rose and Lalaji together build up the fortunes of the family after partition. This means that the new Indian state is built upon the foundations of the real Indian tradition and modernity learnt from the British.

Mona represents traditional and devoted Indian womanhood, a looser and sufferer, a victim and an affectionate mother who spoils Dev. She is never treated as an equal by Ram. She is loyal, devoted, stubborn, religious, irrational and superstitious.

Sonali is a combination of Indian tradition and modernity. She is aware of the evil in traditional Hinduism because of the ‘Sati’ of her great-grandmother. In this reference, one can view Gayatri Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Her well-known argument is that the subaltern cannot speak for him/herself because the structure of colonialism presents the speaking for them. For the colonial woman, it is more impossible because the double bind of colonialism prevents the speaking and patriarchy represses her completely. We find Sonali’s grandmother being a victim of ‘Sati’ during colonialism when the practice of ‘Sati’ was rampant and nobody found anything wrong about it. We find the female characters like Rose, Sonali, Mona and Nishi are persuaded to accept the patriarchy and atrocities of Emergency. They become in a way subaltern where there is double imposition of sufferings first, as women, they are considered inferior and then they suffer the violence of Emergency.

In the modern era, though practicing Sati is a crime, it is practised in various versions. In the novel, we find Rose’s death to be a modern version of Sati. Sonali’s
remaining single points to the deficiency in modern Indian manhood. Ravi’s failure to measure up to her is the failure of the Indian men in general.

Ravi Kachru politically represents the new bureaucrat guided not by norms but practicality. Ravi has been Sonali’s lover at Oxford but has somehow now turned his back on her. He lacks both courage and convictions. He allows to be used by the politicians. Thinks he is in control when he is actually a puppet. He shows an assimilation of the West and an inadequate understanding of India. He belongs to a very old type of the Indian politics, the courtier.

Dev is rich, materialistic and opportunistic; becomes a new entrepreneur and finally a minister, Rose’s killer. He politically represents Sanjay Gandhi and Emergency, the worst of both tradition and modernity. He has violence, greed, selfishness and cruelty. Rose’s killing suggests that he is immoral, doesn’t believe in liberalism, democracy or modernity.

Nishi belongs to the lower middle class and is a child of the Partition. She accepts the lies of Emergency for personal benefit but is betrayed by it in her father’s arrest. Grown up in a lower middle class home, she first tries to secure her future. Her zeal to support Emergency is motivated by self-interest and greed; this shows the apathy of the ruling classes and their willingness to ruin the nation for personal gains. She takes an active interest in sterilization programme, bundling every man in the household into the van that would take them to the vasectomy camp. Through her, Sahgal has shown how a strong – willed woman’s love for her family could make her a pathetic supporter of an unjust social and political system. She herself does not take a stand that may go against the times. She even studiously avoids talking about politics.

Kishori Lal has failed academically and is a small trader but retains ambitions and is stubborn. Nayantara Sahgal presents the painful memories of partition through Kishori Lal. She sees it as an unnecessary trauma, affecting the lives of thousands of people who were displaced, leaving behind the gains of a lifetime and some were killed in riots. Kishori Lal, in his shop, trying to earn a living after having lost his entire possessions back on what became “another country,” on behalf of an unsustainable rivalry that she completely erases from her representation of India. His arrest shows the complete breakdown of law and order during Emergency. He is a victim of police brutality and torture, uses techniques of ‘Satyagraha’ in jail and shows the hidden strengths of the middle class. He can be
compared to the character of Debi in Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* which portrays brutalities of partition. The novelist presents scenes of carnage, rape and bloodshed during Debi’s journey as a Muslim from Kernal to Pakistan. Debi believes in living a life full of ideals and suffers a lot during his journey for he fights for his human rights. Kishori Lal resembles Debi in cherishing his ideals and raising his voice against the injustices levied by Emergency and partition.

The Crippled Beggar is the most important symbol of the novel. He is the living evidence of man’s inhumanity to man. When he asserts his rights, his hands are chopped off by his landlord and he gets no redress from the political leaders. This shows the suppression of the Indian masses by the brute force of ruling classes. He is passive but not stupid. Only Rose befriends him and treats like a human being. He represents the battered Indian masses that have been crippled by the ruling classes. The recurring image of the handless beggar being dragged by society ladies symbolizes the mutilated personal and political freedom. This shows the violation of article 19 which states that the citizens of India have the right to move freely throughout the territory of India. The beggar, who looks “a great bone arch”, “more insect than animal”, and “a monster ant” with “eyes glaring with intelligence,” is the reality many tremble to face. His mutilation does not end his spirit but he remains a fearless fighter for freedom. He represents the survival of humanity in adverse conditions. Ironically, Rose, who warns him to be careful when he goes to the well, is herself pushed into the well while the beggar is the only witness to this brutal act done in the darkness of night. Towards the end of the novel, Sonali arranges for artificial hands for the beggar and he becomes “a confident candidate for a new future with artificial hands” and shows a note of hope and optimism. If there is a new future for the limbless beggar, there is no despair. Nayantara Sahgal is hopeful about man’s potentialities.

Putting all these symbolic interpretations together, we see the abuse of power in the novel. Each and every character becomes a pawn in the hands of either politicians or bureaucrats. India becomes dominated by diseases, poverty, injustice, oppression, religious superstititions, communalism, casteism, bigamy, sati, rape, torture, violation of civil rights, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, greedy and callous socialites, exploitative ruling classes, crushed and defeated masses. The novel does have a ray of hope. Sonali faces the injustices bravely and it symbolizes that the Emergency will end after all. Kachru becomes Ravi again, disillusioned by the excesses of the Emergency. Thus there is a hope for the bureaucracy too.
In the novel, the present is seen through a selective filtering of the memorable past. One is led through the Civil Disobedience Movement, the fierce Quit India Movement, the fall of Singapore, the INA trials. There flits before one’s gaze “a skeletal and fanatic who couldn’t speak his own language, (who) hardly ever wore any but English clothes”18 – the man who singlehandedly brought about the partition of the country. She remembers the movement of a vast army of refugees, their pro-Jana Sangh leanings, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the visionary Nehru and then the equally devoted and dynamic Shastri as Prime Minister. Sahgal recalls the patriotism, selflessness and sacrifices of freedom fighters before partition and contrasts them with selfishness, shamelessness and greed of the contemporary politicians. The Emergency is graphically painted: trade unions crushed, news blacked out, bureaucracy politicized. Delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children, entrepreneurs and others pass through the motions of praising the leader for timely wisdom. There are also woven into the narrative factual bits like the blinding of criminals19 and the raid on Jawaharlal Nehru University.20

The novel is rich in political parallels. ‘The Madam’ in the novel who has brought in the Emergency is Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the son who uses the official power to produce small car project is Sanjay Gandhi. The novel records the developments historically set in motion by them: the family planning and afforestation drives, the move for Japanese collaboration in the small car project etc. However, the novel includes a number of things attributed to nepotism, attempts to foster family rule, Prime Minister’s designs to make herself President and to bring her son to power, violation of all norms in making the Prime Minister’s son an entrepreneur overnight, government-arranged rallies to appreciate the Emergency etc. Jaya Prakash Narayan’s arrest for his anti-government activities under Emergency provisions and his deteriorating health are historically confirmable facts and they are depicted in the novel.

The novel seems to focus on Sonali’s growing understanding that her ideals - in a free India all people are equal, have fundamental human rights and all have access to an unbiased justice system – have little basis in the reality of 1970’s India. Sonali realises that Indian nationalism has not liberated all of India’s people:

“It was too late for my painful shock to mitigate a fearsome tragedy, but not too late for me to wonder when the saga of peaceful change I had been serving from behind my desk had become a saga of another kind, with citizens broken on the wheel for remembering their rights ... They, them, the ruling class on one side, the ruled on the other.
Power had changed hands but what else had changed where he lived? If ever there was an emergency, it was this.”21

The pledge of nationalism to provide liberty and equality for all is a farce, as some privileged people have more liberty and equality than others. The beggar knows this. When Sonali suggests that the laws that protect tenants would have protected him, if he had registered his share cropping arrangements with the land record, he replies,

“It’s the landlord’s raj in my village, record or no record.”22

And when she continues to question him, asking if any political parties had helped to redress the situation, his answer spreads the blame even wider:

“They are all landlords at heart.”23

Who are ‘they?’ Members of political parties or the Indian middle class generally? According to the provisions of the Constitution as mentioned in the first chapter, removal of economic inequality, avoiding centralization of wealth, abolition of Zamindari system, removal of poverty and unemployment are the objectives of socialism mentioned in the Directive Principles. No discrimination can be made on the basis of religion, race, caste, language or sex. One wonders whether all these provisions have really been implemented when one looks at the plight of the crippled beggar.

At one juncture, Sonali thus expresses herself about Emergency:

“You know perfectly well everything is controlled by one and a half people.”24

This is how the ‘son’ is described to have started by:

“Vasectoming the lower classes, blowing up tenements and scattering slum – dwellers to beautify Delhi, setting up youth camps with drop- outs in command, loafers and ruffians who would otherwise have been no more than loafers and ruffians ... Look at the way he’d sprung full – blown, up and doing, into the power structure, while grandpa had to spend years in jail and mummy had doll processions before making it to the executive suite.”25
There are other references in similar vein. Kishori Lal, ruminates thus:

“... suppose Madam’s son had stayed a hijacker of cars and not become leader of Cultural Revolution.”

Influential leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan were arrested for protesting against Emergency so that the resistance to supreme rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi is erased. This is how Kishori Lal reacts to the news of Jaya Prakash Narayan’s being in hospital:

“After they’ve finished with him, he’ll be ready for his grave. Hospital’s where they’d keep him, wouldn’t they? It is more convenient for bumping him off, with all that hospital care around him. They’ll say he was old and ill ...”

Rose imagines:

“She was listening to a doctor – butcher prescribe an appallingly simple prescription for death behind bars, to be followed by two days’ national mourning for an old and misguided freedom fighter, who had regrettably, died of old age in prison ....”

Thus the novel presents a variety of political experiences by various characters.

In the novel there is an uneven division of power between the sexes. In the present patriarchal set-up, man is not merely the master of his own life, he also creates woman’s destiny. With a wife and a newly born infant back home in India, Ram is still free to court Rose in England. When he realizes that he cannot use Rose as a past time, he starts building an “emotional labyrinth” around Rose, “erecting a world around her, drawing her deep into it, the door shutting, Rose inside.” Once he is confident that Rose is in deep love with him, he announces that he has a wife and a son in India. Totally insensitive to Mona’s anguish, he marries Rose, never thinks legal or religious.

Wives for Ram are things to be used and not discarded but kept aside for future needs. Mona is useful as the mother to his son Dev and as manager of the household while Rose is good as a mistress childless wife, showering love and attention on Ram. When Ram meets Marcella, he lightly discards Rose as he had earlier discarded Mona.
Rose endlessly wishes for Mona’s death. Mona takes the drastic step of attempting suicide; constant agony pushes Rose to the verge of madness. Mona is dying of cancer but Ram does not have time even to listen about it. He is too busy to the woes of another woman, Marcella. Ram proudly passes on his legacy to Dev,

“A man has to get his experience somewhere.”

This is Ram’s response to Rose when she informs him about Dev abducting girls from Miranda House and taking them to private rooms at the Ashoka.

Mona at one stage is given a separate flat to live as an “honourably retired wife” and later Rose is made to live separately for five years without even given a reason or an explanation. Ram is selfish enough to keep her available for use at his own convenience.

The details of women’s exploitation in the Indian society are revealed at several levels besides the experience of female protagonists. The words of Sonali’s grandfather, written in 1915, give distressing accounts of murders committed in the name of Sati, including that of his own mother. His sad realization about his mother makes the plight of the woman more realistic:

“She was a good wife, I used to think. But now I believe all wives are good because they have little choice. The nuns in the nunneries are good. Little children in their cradles are good. The Hindu wife is a Hindu wife and can be nothing else. And it is not until we can take the goodness of women less for granted that we shall learn to value it.”

The narrative is full of reminders of injustices and violence done to women, for example, the armless beggar’s account of the atrocities on women committed by police and disappearance of his own wife, who, like many others, must have fell prey to the lust of brick-kiln owners. Nayantara Sahgal points out how politics of Emergency encroaches on the right to life and security of women. The women become pawns at the hands of gender politics. It covers not only the women but the entire society; from limbless beggar to Ravi Kachru, from the young one – time Marxist student to Kishori Lal. The only exception is Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Only she is a dominating and autocratic ruler who rules India with an iron hand. Her administration has ruined the life of individuals.
“Teaching the virtuous life when virtue is in short supply is treason.”34

This is in reference to Jaya Prakash’s speech the night before he was arrested and Emergency launched. The issues highlighted, like the cult of black money, the forty percent over and sixty percent under the table deals, politicians’ cuts, and ‘Sati’ is relevant even today.

“In place of good honest ordinary money and all the nice things it could buy there would be a fearful appetite for it that no amount of it would satisfy.”35

What does the future hold for us, the common man and our children? We have to make choices before we too have to helplessly watch and regret like Kachru,

“Things have slipped out of control. There are no rules and regulations any more. I never realized it would come to this.”36

All the characters reveal the helplessness of the past and the future. Politics rules all spheres of life, ranging from the economic to personal. There was no logic in the happenings in the political world. Fundamental rights, is the privilege of the upper classes and if the lower classes are sacrificed, there is no cause to be unhappy. After all, social justice has to begin from somewhere.

The lawyer and the editor talk about the hereditary principle in politics, not worried about the value of character at all. Dev was successful and exempt from all criticism. He ceases to have negative qualities because he is now Chairman of the New Entrepreneurs. It is the strategic ‘location’ of a man which is valuable. People are not individuals; there were simply two categories: those in power and those out of it.

The story of the Emperor’s new clothes refers to the politics and the Emergency in the novel. There are two references in the novel where the clever weavers dupe Emperor into giving them gold to weave him a suit of golden clothes. Though no one is able to see the clothes, everyone decides to keep quiet and continue with the pretence of seeing what in fact does not exist. These references occur at different places. Sonali thinks of this parallel right at the beginning of the novel:
“We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule ... no one wanted trouble ... to put it charitably, we were being realistic. We knew we were up again power we couldn’t handle, individually or collectively.”

Later on in the novel Rose refers to the story:

“Sounds like the Emperor’s new clothes to me” said Rose. First of all there’s no car, and then you nationalize the one there isn’t. And in these years what you’re saying is there isn’t even a model.”

The Minister’s speech at the Happyola Foundation Ceremony is an excellent example of irony and politics moulded to one’s benefit:

“The Minister spoke in mellifluous Hindi about the Vedas, the undimmed glory of India’s heritage, the high place of selflessness and sacrifice in her tradition and the brightness of the future assured by the Emergency. He would not take much of audience’s time, going back only to 1917 when he had first seen the Mahatma in Champaran, Bihar, organizing the great Champaran Satyagraha among the Indigo workers. The Mahatma had inspired him to shed his profession, the law, and the luxuries of life, to follow, a humble discipline, in his foot – steps. A humble follower of Gandhi was what he still remained though the journey had taken him and the country from Mahatma to Madam. He was but a speck of dust at her feet as he had been of the order.”

In the novel, Mrs. Indira Gandhi is represented as a kind of anti-leader, a leader who claims to serve the needs of the masses but whose policies and decisions actually increase their hardship and lessen their liberty. Mahatma Gandhi is repeatedly venerated in the novel and so becomes the model of selfless middle class leadership. She claimed that Emergency was intended to assist her in alleviating the poverty of the masses and ensuring that the poor could fully participate in the human rights conferred on them by the Indian Constitution. Her efforts merely succeeded in alienating them even more. She was actually seeking gains for herself and her son. Her politics of the poor simply kept the poor at the bottom of power.

Infact the title of the novel is focusing on the richness which is an irony of the Indian society. Mr. Newman almost runs over a beggar, a crippled, skinny looking figure
who according to him was more like an insect than a human being. Inside the stopped car, for the first time, Mr. Newman questions the human price India may be paying ‘to be rich.’ How can India be rich while denying the pressing social problems of poverty, disease and social exclusion it has to handle?

The middle class characters in the novel assume that they can know the truth behind a situation without actually experiencing it or having knowledge of it. For instance, Kishori Lal, packed off to jail by the Emergency powers – encounters a fellow prisoner who delivers a truth about Indian peasants. This boy, a student, tells Kishori Lal that Marx’s theory about the proletariat revolution is useless in India because he tried it and it didn’t work:

“The strategy had been all wrong. You couldn’t start with the peasants. He had, in effect, said over and over again to that village in eastern Bihar, Hey you, friend, brother, comrade, come on, let’s go, and what are we waiting for? And the men had paid not the slightest attention because they were, one and all, starting up at the sky, waiting not for the revolution but for the monsoon. And if I’d hung around there long enough, said the youngster, and the rains had come and gone, then they would have been waiting for the harvest, and after that for the next planting. I would have been hanging around there for the rest of my life.”

Rose represents the working - class and therefore possesses wisdom accompanied by innocence. Hence she is portrayed as lacking the words to describe her feelings or thoughts, lacking proper education and intelligence to make sense of the war, which Ram must explain to her, for ‘(s)he wouldn’t have understood otherwise,’ lacking the sophistication to decorate her room like the rest of Ram’s house, lacking an ‘opinion’ and instead offers her ideas as ‘instinct’ alone.

Rose functions as the mirror of Indian middle-class life. The white working class Cockney eventually becomes the epitome of traditional, middle- class Hindu wifehood; submissive and devoted to her husband, she even acquires the status of, to quote Nayantara Sahgal, “a modern- day suttee.” When Dev finally murders her because she hinders his inheritance and knows too much about his political corruption. She becomes a pawn at the hands of Dev. And later in the novel, when she is trying to explain Ram - Marcella affair and her acceptance of it to Sonali and Ravi, she adds,
“Like I said, it’s the way things have been arranged since time began. There’s some that do the ordering and others that take the orders.”  

This implies that the middle-class superiority and working-class inferiority are part of nature. She is the most critical judge of the novel’s middle-class. Rose’s opinion comes out of a complaint by Leila; a middle-class woman contributes to Emergency by ensuring the sterilisation of her servants. Casually mentioning at a dinner party that she is having a problem controlling her servants, who expect to be allowed to watch her foreign-film videos, Leila justifies her stand on the issue by insisting that the love scenes in the films would be ‘embarrassing’ for the servants to watch: “After all ... they aren’t used to it.”

Rose’s answer to this reveals the limitations of the middle-class individualism:

Rose raised up in her chair. “They’re used to rape, aren’t they, so a bit of love-making on the screen can’t be very ‘ard for them to get used to.”

“Now Mummy, really -” began Nishi.

“Don’t now Mummy me. If you and I get raped the militia is looking for the rascal. But their kind nobody bothers about.”

“I don’t know where you get your information,” said Dev, diverted from the thinness and the flavour of the coming biscuit.

“From them as it ‘appens to ... I can’t see any of it ‘appening to you and me, can you... So wot’s the ‘arm if they see a bit of kissing on the screen? Less embracing than wot they see in real life, I’d say.”

Rose’s disputes reveal individualism as a middle-class privilege suited only to the middle-class lives. At the same time, it tells about the Family Planning Drive as one of the dreadful outcomes of the Emergency. Anyone expecting a third child would not get a ration card, government employed teachers would have to get five people sterilized to retain their jobs; no one due a government house allotment would get it till he produced a
sterilization certificate; and vans had rounded up young and old, married and unmarried for ‘the operation.’

Though the novel opens in the Emergency period, it travels back to more than hundred and fifty years analysing and questioning the political relations and value systems of the past. The Emergency is a review of all that the past has stood for the “battles for freedom fought and all that sacrifices now come to this.”

Nayantara Sahgal’s references to the partition of India, Nehru’s speech in chapter Thirteen in the novel, Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolence and insistence on Truth provide a backdrop to the painful developments during the period of Emergency. The contrast is Dev is glad to have Emergency and says:

“This Emergency is just what we needed. The trouble makers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed. The way the country’s being run now, with one person giving the orders, and no one being allowed to make a fuss about it in the cabinet or in Parliament, means things can go full steam ahead without delays and weighing pros and cons forever. Strikes are banned. It’s going to be very good for business.”

Dev has no mindset for democracy. He believes in feudal law and admires monarchy where one person commands and others obey silently. So he could murder Rose since he was without any moral constraints. Emergency is just an occasion which had ignited the barbarism in people. Emergency meant opportunity and power for a handful of loyalties.

“The Emergency had given all kinds of new twists nothing so much as one of the two – bit dictatorship we had loftily looked down upon.”

The sincere officers and civil servants had become virtually “like cherry stones on a plate, not like people.” They were forced to indulge in corrupt practices just to please a handful of politicians. The portrayal of the upper strata of society who are as usual indifferent and insensitive to the upheavals around is noteworthy.

Sonali speaks about the attitude of the civil services towards the Emergency:

“We knew this was no Emergency. If it had been the priorities would have
been quite different. We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule. And we were involved in a conspiracy of silence, which is why we were careful not to do more than say hello when we passed each other in the building and not to talk about our work after hours, which made after-hours sessions very silent indeed. No one wanted trouble. As long as it didn’t touch us, we played along, pretending the Empress’ new clothes were beautiful. To put it charitably, we were being realistic."  

However, the period of illness gives Sonali the time to clarify her thoughts and on recovery she resigns from her job. It is her way of asserting her value-system and her ideals. Sonali now understands what her father had meant when reacting to the imposition of the Emergency, he had warned her that:

“... history would now be revised and rewritten. All dictatorships meddled with history.”

Emergency was turning dictatorial where history was revised rapidly. People were afraid of confronting a power they didn’t know how to handle. For example, Dev’s bank manager, when informed of the forgeries, had looked scared and refused to take action. He had told Sonali:

“... I am a small man, you will forgive me but these are not normal times, I think you should go to someone higher up.”

The bank manager was at least honest about his position whereas, the intellectuals were silent to protect their position of privilege and betrayed India. Nayantara Sahgal refers to them as Professors, Lawyers, Doctors, Editors – their names are unimportant as almost entire class had collaborated with the government to play with democracy. Censorship immobilized the press and covered the country with stillness for nobody knew what was going on. Criticism, oral or written, of the government was forbidden. Radio and television were censored and used to promote herself and her party and twist happenings in India. A single news agency, ‘Samachar,’ fed the press with official handouts. Editors were thrown out of their jobs and replaced by flatterers. Censorship had been most highly effective instrument during Emergency keeping people ignorant about an event in another town or even half mile away in their own town. Several jailbreaks, major news items in ordinary times were not permitted to be reported at all. News travelled by grapevine. More than five people could not assemble without special
permission. Permission was freely given to ‘spontaneous demonstrations’ in support of the Prime Minister.

During Emergency, bureaucracy too suffered. People were wondering about Civil Services:

“Where had the tradition we were trying to build gone wrong? The distinction between politics and the service had become so badly blurred over the last few years it had all but disappeared. The two sides were hopelessly mixed, with politicians meddling in administration and favourites like Kachru, the prime example, playing politics as if his life depended on it.”

Notice how the speech of the Minister of Industry implies the contrast of what he says and proves his hypocrisy, insincerity and distance from the people:

“A humble follower of Gandhi was what he still remained though the journey had taken him and the country from Mahatma to Madam. He was but a speck of dust at her feet ... and God and Madam willing, he would continue in the cabinet till the day he died. But a word about emergency so tenderly portrayed in song as he arrived. Now that it had ended bonded labour and brought other social evils to an end a new era of opportunity and plenty awaited the weaker sections. The Minister’s gaze wondered over the audience. When he looked around him, he said, he saw people much better fed and better dressed than ever before. His travels around the country confirmed this. But let it not be forgotten that the weak and the poor, the oppressed, the repressed and the suppressed were the first concern of the government.”

In this reference, Marguerite Alexander’s opinion is right that that political rhetoric is a form of fiction which is effective because it is received as a reality. There are descriptions of the various effects of Emergency and politics on the characters in the novel. Nishi observes:

“And then the Emergency was so popular. You could tell by the delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children and so on and so forth who went everyday to congratulate the Prime Minister for declaring it. They were stopped at the gate and searched and directed to waiting rooms after being sorted out by an official inside. The general public were taken to the lawn; people like herself were shown into an oval anteroom.”
Delegations of traders, teachers, students, workers, writers, businessmen and trade unionists were ordered to appear at the Prime Minister’s residence to congratulate her on the Emergency and offer support to her “Twenty Point Program.” Huge posters hailing her leadership, along with pictures of her in every shop window, burgeoned overnight.

Kishori Lal has his own set of sufferings waiting at the arrival of Emergency. The policemen had attacked and wrecked his shop, pulled things apart because he didn’t put a price tag on every item. He criticises Mrs. Indira Gandhi and says he never sold anything with a price tag since 1948. When Nishi advises him to congratulate the Prime Minister, he is irritated and says:

“For clapping a whole lot of people into jail? They nearly clapped me into jail for not having prices marked on items. They don’t need a good reason. Just quick march off to jail. If that’s a matter of congratulations, you need your head examined.” He continued, “They’ve got so happy jails, there’re ten prisoners in cells where one used to be, stinking clogged toilets and not a drop of water.”

Nishi said, “But the television had announced about prisoners being well – treated.”

He replied, “They said on television JP’s a raving conspirator. They need their heads examined. Of course I know. With the entire Sanskrit department of the University in jail, word trickles out.”

Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police were freely used against common citizens. After the political opposition, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s main target was universities both in the Capital and the country’s most prestigious institutions were subjected to searches and arrests. Nearly, the whole Sanskrit department of Delhi University was in jail, a warning to those who had Jan Sangh (Right) affiliations or sympathies.

About Jaya Prakash Narayan Kishori Lal says,

“After they’ve finished with him, he’ll be ready for his grave. Hospital’s where they’d keep him, wouldn’t they? It’s more convenient for bumping him off, with all that
hospital care around him. They’ll say he was old and ill ... then they’ll slip him out of the
back way dead as a doornail. With this lot in power it’s happened once too often already,
even before your precious Emergency ... They can’t stand the sight of anyone so clean,
makes them look even more disgusting then they are.”

Nishi wants her father to accompany the group of businessmen and argues
with him,

“This group of businessmen is going to get together and make suggestions to
the PM about business policies, how to deal with workers and become more like Taiwan
and Singapore and set up new industries and lots of other things that could be of concern
to you.”

Her father adamantly says that firstly stop ruining the business that is already
set up. She suggests that Dev would provide money and her father should buy car agency
of Madam’s son. He irritably replies that he doesn’t want to be an agent for a non – existent
car and says,

“Who will provide the car? Or will Dev pull it out of a hat?”

Neel’s lawyer friend who was an editor observed and justified Mrs. Indira
Gandhi:

“What was wrong with a son succeeding his mother in this particular
Republic? And which mother anywhere in the world wouldn’t move heaven and earth for
her son? Especially when he’s shown such organisational talent. You had to start
somewhere and Madam’s son had vasectomising the lower classes, blowing up tenements
and scattering slum – dwellers to beautify Delhi, setting up youth camps with drop – outs
in command, loafers and ruffians who would otherwise have been no more than loafers
and ruffians. With his ill – wishers out of the way now, a patriotic hand spun, hand –
woven car, every nut and bolt of it made in India, would soon be on the road...”

The mother and son had made him Chief Editor after dismissing his
predecessor who had reported that the car had fallen into a ditch during trials and never
been heard of since. Sanjay Gandhi had failed to produce an indigenous car for which he
had been granted an exclusive government licence in 1970, generous support from
industrial backers and 290 acres of requisitioned land – and whose failure had become one of the now buried scandals of her regime – was projected as a “youth leader,” a proof that the Congress was not committed to any particular ideology, only to progress.

He was projected as Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s political heir, setting the dynastic seal on her dictatorship and answered the curiosity of who would succeed her. The Congress was reduced to Mrs. Gandhi’s personal possession and India a classic example of Asian dictatorship. She had used Emergency to end all constitutional challenges to her personal rule and to cripple the challenging institutions. This was done through the amending of the Constitution in favour of the dictatorial regime.

Nayantara Sahgal realistically portrays Emergency and the cult of family rule, casteism, elitism, black money and various immoral practices. Without exaggeration, she brings out the implications of the events like nationalization of banks, private car manufacturing and fizzy drink collaboration, the elite hijackers club, vasectomy, slum – clearance, youth camps, overzealous chief ministers and policemen enforcing Emergency, committed judiciary etc. She uses images, symbols, irony, paradox and humour to highlight Emergency.

There are two different narrative techniques being used alternately and two main figures for narration, Sonali and Rose. They relate despite the differences of age, upbringing and nationalities. However, there are also other narrators and narratives that contribute to erase official history. Firstly, there is the play by a young postgraduate, arrested during Emergency because of his Marxist leanings and former Naxalite connections. The boy’s leg has been fractured in the beating given to him in the lock-up and he is in great pain. He tells Kishori Lal of a play that he has written about Emergency. He describes the play as surrealistic and narrates its gist:

“First of all the dictator’s chariot arrives. (t)he chariot turns into a car and then into a jet plane and through all this the dictator is arriving and he steps down to trumpets and fanfare and all the rest, and then instead of a big Heil so – and – so going up, there’s this loud taped laughter, a huge barrage of it, that’s all, then silence. Next he / she – and by the way one half is a she – this is not a sexist play – tells about what he / she is going to do for the people. Politicians are such bullshitters and this one start bullshitting. And after every few sentences when he / she stops for applause, there’s this loud hilarious Ha! Ha! Ha! Instead. And soon you have everyone bloated with laughter because every time he/ she
says, “I shall banish poverty” or “Watch me remove disparities”, there’s this colossal raucous cackle.”

The second narrative is a small manuscript written by Sonali’s grandfather in 1915. It is a record of the practice of ‘Sati’ in India during the nineteenth century. It catalogues six cases of ‘Sati’ reported after its abolition in 1829 and concludes with a very painful account of his mother’s involuntary death as a ‘Sati.’ The importance of this narrative is that it is the only document that tells the tale of a woman murdered to deprive her of her husband’s money. The official version of her husband’s relatives had been that like a noble Hindu wife “she had sacrificed herself ... on the altar of sati.”

The third narrative is by Sonali. It records the brutal murder of Rose for money. The official version provided by Dev is that Rose had fallen into an unused well when she had gone for a walk after dinner in an absolutely dark state. Unable to accept their version, Sonali hunts for truth about her death and reconstructs it carefully in her narrative because as she says,

“Here in this (Dev’s) house the revision of history had begun and there would be no end to the lies.”

Significantly, the novel concludes with Sonali studying the history of seventeenth century Indian art as a way of retaining her inner harmony during the period of Emergency. This could be interpreted as escapism from reality since during Emergency everyone was trying to escape from the truth that it was no Emergency at all but a fake demonstration of Emergency. Everybody has the freedom to find peace and even Emergency has not trampled this right. Sonali finds it in ancient art, Nishi in flattering the Prime Minister and supporting her husband, Rose in helping the limbless beggar. System has not crushed the spirit of the people. Sonali is an epitome of hope in the novel who symbolizes that a good change is at hand. The Emergency is a deadening world of censorship and newsless newspaper. Sonali is taken aback by the situation,

“What a bare month of censorship can do, exactly the opposite of what I would have expected of a news black out ... What you don’t have you stop missing after a while.”

She is stunned by what is happening around her and fails to react in anyway. Ravi is to replace her. Authoritarian governments rest themselves on the support and
silence of the Civil Services. She had been humiliated. It was as if the whole nation had surrendered:

“In an hour or so since the radio had told us about the declaration of an Emergency, our voices had automatically sunk to whispers. In Nazi Germany ... people used to muffle their telephones with blankets as a precaution against listening devices, but now technology was far, far beyond such precautions. For good or evil we were dwarfed and midgeted by it.”

Politics had surpassed morality. There is no distinction between good and evil or between right and wrong. Everything is determined by the side you are on. Just as Sonali is thrown out by the system, Rose finds herself facing the possibility of being homeless. Sonali consults a lawyer regarding this situation but there is no legal provision against the new ethics. There is no one to appeal to. Sonali also realises her total isolation from the others:

“There was an arctic waste between us, a loveless no- man’s land. What I saw across it was Kith and Kin arrayed against me. There was no rock – solid basis for fraternity here, blood tie or no blood tie.”

Sonali is afraid that the whole nation may be overtaken by cowardice.

Ravi who has enthusiastically joined the band of political crooks realises that he is trapped within it. With the realisation on Ravi’s part that supporting Emergency is unfair, he falls from power. Though Rose is killed silently, individual resistance surfaces. Sonali helps the beggar to safety. Kishori Lal refuses to leave the young communist boy in jail; people begin to make an effort to revive personal dignity. The picture is not totally bleak. Some of the characters are making an effort to change the situation and find feasible solutions to the problems.

The question which is asked over and over again regarding Emergency is what has gone wrong? Several answers come: men are cowards, economic divisions are won and the upper classes have betrayed the country and the civil services have succumbed to political pressures. Sahgal explores the different aspects of the political structure which like an octopus has spread its tentacles everywhere in family relationships, business concerns, idealism or friendships.
Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s lust for power can be compared to that of Summer Singh in Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow*. The novel shows the farce of big business with the far-reaching politics in the figures of Som and Summer Singh. The old kind of dedicated Oil Minister, Sardar Sahib, is replaced by the flaunting figure of a radical leader, Summer Singh. He desired to destroy all the last vestiges of Mahatma Gandhi and wants to rebuild politics through exploitation. Mrs. Indira Gandhi is analogous to Summer Singh, who under Emergency had uprooted the very foundations of democracy and had thrown off the Gandhian ideals of non-violence.

Nayantara Sahgal’s vision of life, “where the mind is without fear,” emerges clearly and advocates for individual freedom. She is trying to induce the individual to exercise his will power, resist the domination of politicians. The novel demonstrates her faith in the potentialities of the individual.

The novelist shows that the clamping of Emergency is not a sudden development that took place overnight. It is the culmination of degradation of moral values that had set in among the politicians, civil servants and people at large after Independence. In a corrupt nation of body politic and the individual human soul – what is the fate of those who resist it while the majority reconciles to it? This is precisely explored by Nayantara Sahgal in the novel.

Sonali’s problem is how to cope up with the hypocrisy, red-tape and corruption that have crept into the Indian Administrative Service. Her decision to resign from the Civil Service is her refusal to compromise with dictatorship. Sonali says:

“When the Constitution becomes null and void by the act of a dictator, and the armour of a modern state confronts you, ‘Satyagraha’ is the only way to keep your self – respect.”

Infact, an editor, a typical representative of the Press of the Emergency, says in the novel,

“Madam had in good faith thought it her constitutional duty to override the Constitution,” and a lawyer gives his professional opinion,

“That the Constitution would have to be drastically amended, if not re-written,
to give Madam powers to fight disruptive forces and crush the vested interests she was battling against since infancy.”

Nayantara Sahgal represents India as an independent state, struggling for its definition as a socialist, modern democracy. Dev represents the new order politician and the older order politician is represented in Jaya Prakash Narayan himself. The opposition between the old and the new order is also seen in the bureaucrats. Sahgal knows that India is governed by politicians and bureaucrats. These are the two tiers of our political and administrative ruling class. A degeneration of our polity would occur only when the rot sets into both these tiers. We have several images of the old-style ICS officer. He is portrayed as a plodder, an obeyer of rules and regulations. As opposed to this the new type of bureaucrat, best exemplified by Ravi Kachru, is ignorant and opportunistic.

All is not lost though; the new generation of bureaucrats also contains Sonali. Sonali’s resignation from the IAS implies that there is no place for an honest and law-abiding officer in the new regime. Even Ravi Kachru at the end is a disillusioned man thrown out of favour only because he has pleaded for Rose.

When we confront Emergency in the novel, it appears civilisation has progressed only in matters of brutality. One is compelled to believe that strong temptations for wealth and power can make even an angel of liberty turn into a demon killing humanity and makes pawns of people. It exploits the life of common man in every area reducing them to puppets.

The novel offers no easy solutions to mankind’s problems, on the contrary it challenges all known solutions. Just as there are no solutions, there is no one to blame. In the story of “The Emperor and his New Clothes,” one doesn’t really know whether the Emperor, the weavers, or the people are to blame. Reality is avoided by all of them. Nayantara Sahgal leaves the reader wondering if India is getting into a sort of colonized state, exploited for the advantage of a few. As a form of resistance, she promotes individual responsibility in asserting Indian independence.

The novel ends on an unambiguous note of optimism, reminding Sonali that she is young and alive, with her own century stretched out before her waiting to be lived. Such an approach to the past and the present highlights the fact that the spirit of India is too powerful to be overwhelmed by trials like Emergency and it will arise like phoenix to
discover its richness and legacy.

Thus this chapter throws light on the bleak side of the upper classes during Emergency. The next chapter deals with Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* which has a diasporic approach and concentrates on the effects of Emergency on the lower classes in Mumbai and rural India.
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