Chapter V

The Wind(fall) of Change

It was useless talking to mother about change. No one could have set out on the journeys she did if she hadn’t believed her own world was going to stay securely in place till the end of time.

(Sahgal, Mistaken Identity)

To awaken to history was to cease to live instinctively. It was to begin to see oneself and one’s group the way the outside world saw one; and it was to know a kind of rage. India was now full of this rage.

(Naipaul, India: A Million Mutinies Now)

As Sahgal demystifies the vast labyrinth of the 20th century Indian politics within its historical framework, the subtle as well as the visible attendant change, spill out of the crevices of her formidable fictional structure, calling attention to the directions new India had taken. More often than not, these changes are symptomatic of the ubiquitous malicious growth in the body politic and social fabric of an emerging nation. These changes, registered in the political vision, economic policy, cultural practices, religious predilections, scientific cross-over and personal space of the Indians, get reflected in the keen penetrative fiction of Sahgal. Well-endowed as she is with the homegrown legacy of thought, sharp political insight, historical scholarship, personal experience and critical reflections, the writer probes these changes for the deep implications they hold for India and the world. Being an eye-witness to the panoramic sequence of events of almost a whole century, Sahgal consciously harnessed her creativity to the realities of the present, in a crystal clear prose rather than meandering in a mushy maze of linguistic dexterity. This artistic pragmatism brings, along with pleasures of reading her compelling fiction, a windfall of productive ideas to guide
humanity. The author portrays the change dispassionately in all its rawness and deplores the
debris of dreams crushed to make way for some of it. The literary vigil on these paradigms of
change is thought-provoking for it is tempered with rationality not suffused in radicalism, and
her influence on the positive shift in the mindset of Indians is immense.

As India seems to have lived out its post-colonial phase and is face to face with
immense possibilities in the 21st century, reflecting on the nuances of change and
understanding the process of this change in the writings of Sahgal helps to analyze its
ramifications on the future. Searching for answers to some pertinent questions helps draw out
the message of wisdom from her *oeuvre*, which India urgently needs to pause and listen to, on
its much-hyped road to glory. How much of this change leads to the progress of the nation
and mankind at large? Which trends of political thought have brought succor to the
*wretched* of the land and which cults have clashed with far-sighted welfare of citizens?
Which lessons from history are to be emulated in spirit and which are the ones which warn
against a self-replay? Is organized religion gaining strength as an ennobling force or as a
disabling frenzy? How far has the Indian woman reached on her road to emancipation? Is the
multinational economy gobbling up the local markets in the name of *modernization*? Or,
are the retrogressive forces holding back progress by playing the ethnicity/race card? Is
healthy tradition getting eroded by the onslaught of mindless *modernity*? Is globalization
the Frankenstein let loose to bring about a cultural colonization? And most importantly, have
post-colonial regimes lived up to the high ideals of anti-colonialism or are they a touched-up
face of colonialism?

Some of the well-known postcolonial literary figures have dealt with issues that can
be bracketed with the passionate concerns of Sahgal. Their momentous world of imagination
and opinion set alongside her creative corpus helps in arriving at a meaningful analysis that
sieves out the ideas and observations that could stand humanity in a better stead.
A juxtaposition of some of the overlapping or contrasting ideas of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Jawaharlal Nehru, V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Shashi Tharoor with those of Sahgal’s, brings out the commonalities as well as disparities in their positions, styles and world views. Sahgal’s literary consistency, temperance and ethics stand vindicated and celebrated in the midst of the ideological world of these major coeval litterateurs.

**Fanon and Sahgal**

Frantz Fanon, African psychiatrist and radical existentialist thinker, in his classic testimony *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), while inspiring the anti-colonial revolutions in the Third World countries, also warned against the moral ennui and intellectual laziness of the bourgeoisie in the young independent nations, for they are likely to fill the vacuum created by zealous struggle for freedom with the "confusion of neo-liberal universalism". Blaming the pitfalls of these fledgling democracies on the "willful narcissism" of the under-developed middle class, Fanon psycho-analyses the collective sub consciousness of the bourgeoisie to accurately pin-point their affliction: "Its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be a part of the racket. The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry; and it is only too true that the greed of the settlers has hardly left them any other choice" (120). In this masterly discourse, Fanon, eloquently predicts the ills that would grind down the decolonized Third World nations as a result of the inexperience, mimicry, greed and spiritual barrenness of the bourgeoisie. Although Fanon primarily theorizes keeping in mind the realities of the African nations, the political trends that have emerged in India, kept in check in the Nehruvian era, back the veracity of his statements rather forcefully; his ideas are a hope to control the moral morass of the political class. The concept of national consciousness, the collective hope of the highly mobilized inchoate democracies, in the hands of the self-centred bourgeoisie, becomes
an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been, for it belies the optimism of the masses. It is amazing how accurate this young revolutionary thinker was in his unabashed socialistic blasting of the privileged class - post-colonial history has unfolded itself replete with all the pathologies he had forecast. In the on-going imperialistic scenario, he had prophesied the role of a middleman for the under-developed middle-class, if they dithered in displaying moral courage to lead their respective nations:

The national middle class discovers its historic mission; that of an intermediary. Seen through its eyes, the mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism. (122)

As portrayed in the writings of Sahgal, in the case of India it may be said to the credit of Jawaharlal Nehru and his contemporaries that they passed the test of heroic leadership laid down by Fanon; they withstood all national and international pressure to carve out its sound semi-socialistic economy and unique foreign policy. Thereafter the fall began. Dipesh Chakrabarty, understanding post-colonial to be a historical process that is necessarily clumsy, complicated, and inherently incomplete, too, writes that the end of the Nehruvian era may be said to mark a watershed in the course of [modern Indian] history (3), and not the year 1947. Failing to meet the challenges of a budding economy the middle class succumbed to its traditional role which was stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois (Fanon 121), and cowardly ushered in a self-serving despotism in 1975. Considering the marked variations of the federal set-up and the partially industrialized economy of India from the Latin-American and African nations, the angry treatise of Fanon, applies to the Indian situation only in bits and pieces on aspects of ethnicity and tradition, but his words ring
astoundingly true on the behavioral patterns of the new guards of national dignity and sovereignty.

One of the burning issues in India, highlighted by Sahgal in *Rich Like Us*, is that of the ill-gotten wealth of its corrupt citizens sitting comfortably in the foreign banks, and a current demand by the leaders of civil society to get it back to India to eradicate the poverty of the masses this drain of wealth is hardly any different from the bleeding dry of the Indian resources by the colonial masters. The obnoxious hoarding of the ill-procured wealth by the rising middle class, portrayed by Sahgal as blindly in the grip of vulgar materialism, corroborates the truth of Fanon’s observation that the bourgeoisie does not hesitate to invest in foreign banks the profit that it makes out of its native soil. The buying of fancy cars, building mansions and the loud display of other acquisitions, says Fanon, have been justly described by economists as characterizing an under-developed bourgeoisie (124). The exposition of the morally barren, crass and hypocritical wealthy segment from close quarters is an important contribution of the writer to the sociological formulations of post-colonial India.

The bourgeoisie surrounds the lower classes with a chauvinistic tenderness in keeping with the new awareness of national dignity and undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all controls the economy and thus, the leadership of the country (Fanon 121-123). The current happenings in the corridors of power with the UPA facing a tirade of allegations of scams one after the other, has cast aspersions on the incumbent PM, who is otherwise an apostle of honesty and integrity. His situation has an uncanny resemblance to the changes Fanon predicted could take place when society at large becomes distrustful of its ruling middle class:

In spite of his frequently honest conduct and his sincere declarations, the leader as seen objectively is the fierce defender of these interests today;
combined of, the national bourgeoisie and the ex-colonial companies. He therefore knowingly becomes an aider and abettor of the bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure. (134)

Going by the crux of their respective thoughts Sahgal and Fanon appear to be on oppositional ends on the issue of violence, but the perception undergoes a change on a closer look at the evolution of Sahgal’s growth as a novelist in her later works. Fanon’s views on violence, elaborated in the essay “Concerning Violence” have sometimes been misinterpreted on account of out of context readings and inept translations and used for justifying irrational violence, although Fanon’s passionate call to arms was meant strictly for the dehumanized humanity in the African-Asian countries. Fanon reasoned that the natives who were no more than beasts for the colonizers need not observe the pseudo-ethical principles of the so called civilized world. A gradual change in the stance of Sahgal from an ardent advocate of non-violence in the initial stage of her writing, to a proponent of situation based retaliation in arms by the wronged fragments of humanity, is an assertion of a complete non-tolerance of injustice and dehumanization in the new era of awakening, be it within the nation or without. The peace-loving protagonist of Mistaken Identity, when questioned on his rejoicing on the victory of Kemal Pasha of Turkey against the British in the strategic battle of Afium Quarahisar, echoes the sentiments of Fanon through Sahgal: “Ordinarily, I wasn’t rhapsodic about wholesale slaughter, [but] this had been an epic one” (132).

While India’s freedom was worked out by a mix of strategies including non-violence, as Sahgal underpins in Lesser Breeds, Fanon was more forthright in his vision of armed revolution as the only remedy for his enslaved brethren. In his power-packed prose, Fanon presents the “whole material and moral universe” of the colonizers crumbling down into bits and pieces as “the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler that the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin; and it
must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner (35). While Fanon asserts forcefully that the native now knows he is not an animal; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen his weapons with which he will secure his victory (33), Sahgal’s lexicon on the issue is not as explicit, bold and definitely not as arousing as his.

**Said and Sahgal**

There is a striking affinity between the Sahgalian and Saidian thought process, especially in the understanding of the pivotal role played by politics in human experience, and in their situation-based, eclectic approach to the tradition of ideas for the betterment of mankind. At their own levels of engagement both writers drew heavily from their lives, religiously lived out their beliefs, signifying the engagement of ideas to reality; both strove to harness the knowledge of power in the service of humanity with a just secular thrust.

Speaking truth to power is no panglossian idealism; it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one and then intelligently representing it wrote Said in *Representations of the Intellectual* (75), and Sahgal has amply exemplified it.

Sahgal’s entire perspective of change gets enlightened when studied in the light of the critical concepts and deep humanism of Edward Said. A closer look, a little later, at Edgar Knox in Sahgal’s epic text, *Lesser Breeds*, instantiates a kind of Saidian energy unintentionally informing her writing in abundance. Sahgal shares the intellectual abhorrence of gloating defensive nationalism and his aversion to partisanship, exclusivity and over-valorization of identity. It is Said’s balancing of various critical thoughts in the larger interest of the universal principles of justice and equality that makes his pragmatic philosophy more embraceable, and also traceable in writers like Sahgal. A brief survey of the growth of the Saidian thought follows to bring out the striking similarity in the approach of the two writers to culture, politics, history, activism, journalism and academics.
Going by the profuse and diverse reception of *Orientalism*, it is now an established fact in the academic circles that Edward Said—im spite of all the paradoxes, has been a liberating text for thinkers. Said unveiled *Orientalism* as a tool of imperialistic domination, a political strategy for colonial expansion that arbitrarily formulated the *European* perspective as a norm from which the Orient deviates. The book has evoked immense academic debate; Robert Young, interpreting *Orientalism* as *West* own internal dislocation writes: "The problem of *Orientalism* is that without a concept of an inner dissension Said is constantly led simply to condemn *Orientalism* projections of dissonance on to external geographical or racial differences (White Mythologies 180). Said has rebutted the charges and has appealed against reading *Orientalism* as a *kynecdoche*, a miniature symbol, of the entire West (*Orientalism* 331). It must be conceded that the legacy of Said will remain in essence with mankind forever, for *Orientalism* as a critical concept, now, broadly connotes any false assumption or belief constructed to capture collective cultural imagination. It actually symbolizes a cover up for hegemonic political intentions of imperialistic forces anywhere, anytime in the world and the thinkers in every era must remain vigilant to the manufacturing of falsehoods used as cultural tools of tyranny and abuse.

Said remained constantly engaged with the issue of the role of the intellectual/literary critic in the present scenario and views the *abdication* of the social involvement by those in a position to know or do better as one of the contemporary forms of *la trahison des clercs* (*The treason of the intellectuals*; Williams xiv). Said elaborates critical discourse *The World, the Text and the Critic* cautions against the politics of intellectual indifference to social and historical reality and the self-imposed confinement of critics in the supra-transcendental abstractions of esoteric aesthetics. In their individual efforts Said and Sahgal have risen above the glorification of academic specialization and gone on, meaningfully and purposefully, to make a difference in the world around, by keeping a vigilant eye on power.
While the breadth of Said’s reading is amazing and he acknowledges with gratitude the influence of Marx, Derrida, Foucault, Fanon and other great thinkers, he is quite univocal about his areas of difference with them. While Said has acknowledged the perceptive brilliance of Foucault’s analysis of how power propagates itself through non-coercive cultural beliefs which invoke negligible skepticism or immediate opposition due to their subtlety, he warns against taking Foucault as the final word on the function of an intellectual in society and with a valid reason. The concreteness or “worldliness” of Said’s visionary argument is almost antithetical to the esoteric abstractions of the Foucauldian pessimism. Foucault is doubtful of the need or even the presence of an intellectual in society; Said envisages a role of purpose and commitment for an academic from the margins of power. It is Said’s anti-essentialism which helps him synthesize the post-structuralist Derridean and the Foucauldian structures of thought. He gains from both - the oppositional reading of texts as well as Foucault’s eye-opening accounts of the ineluctable, discursive nature of power.

The conflict in Sahgal’s fiction is born out of the contrast between the two Indias that she has closely observed - the anti-colonial and the post-colonial in the former, politics became glorious history, and in the latter, the on-going history did not rise above politics. In his essay “Swift’s Tory Anarchy” Said writes, “A modern writer writes during the loss of a tradition (The World 65).” What Said is suggesting is that the creative urge transforms into a restorative labor with the push of the tension that builds up in the writer’s mind between the lost heritage and the prevalent institutions of permutation to which he/she may have to confine. Sahgal’s literary corpus reflects the betrayal of the hopes of a new nation in late post-colonial India by the multifarious complex operation of neo-colonial forces and aims at awakening the national consciousness to the perils in some of the changing situations.

Among other areas of rapprochement Sahgal shares with Said is her refusal as an intellectual to limit herself to narrow specialization, authority, systematicity and obligatory
closure - she does not restrict herself to the specifics of a particular ideology. Said set great value to the playfulness of ideas; he strives to harness them urgently to bring about a positive change in human relations and wholeheartedly abhors the reductionism of ideas and confinement to a particular critical theory merely to prove a point. Even the critical ambivalence towards Sahgal can be better understood in terms of filiation and affiliation as explained by Said:

Thus if a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority - involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict - the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms - such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of life, whereas affiliation belongs to culture and society. (The World 20)

Said draws attention to the notion within various fields of creativity of the declining importance of the original human subject vis-à-vis the transhuman rules and theories that accompany the transformation of naturally filiative into systematically affiliative relationships (20). Affiliation for all critical purposes is re-presentation, for, it surreptitiously duplicates the hierarchical structures and relationships of the dominant ideology to which the writer subscribes. Instead of complacently narrowing down to merely legitimizing the affiliations of the writer, it is for the critic to recognize the difference between instinctual filiation and social affiliation, and show how the affiliation sometimes reproduces filiation and sometimes makes its own forms (24).

The changing picture of India that Sahgal presents is a manifestation of the interplay of filiation and affiliation in her imagination rather than a complete transformation to an affiliative consciousness that is reserved for the hegemonic social and cultural order. What
Sahgal has in common with the concerns of Said is the commitment to humanitarianism. Seeped in the usefulness of the beliefs of secularism, egalitarianism, debate, justice and learning Sahgal acknowledges with reverence the wholesome condition of her filiative connections. In her creativity and her reality, the writer abides by the values that were bequeathed to her by virtue of natural filiation and upbringing. The strands of affiliation - class, religion, politics, culture, profession - are adhered to; the writer does not make a pretense of disassociating from any of these; rather than shunning the dominant structure of her reality Sahgal hammers it with wit, humour and irony. Its façade of happiness, genuineness, morality, gender equality, and lasting value is mordantly deconstructed and the privileged class is pricked awake to take up the responsibilities it has shamelessly abdicated.

Yes, Sahgal works within her social sphere, has stuck to the realistic grain of her thoughts, does not camouflage her clear purpose in the metaphysics of complexity, and does not make an artistic display of the poverty-ridden fellow countrymen to envisage change. Change must trickle down from the center of power with the enforcement of right policy, as Gayatri, the young protagonist, understands in Plans for Departure that "changing the world was an exhausting business. Revolution had no off-season." (142). Sahgal holds up the literary mirror for the politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, aristocracy, colonizers, leaders, teachers, also policy-makers, and socialites to see their true selves, to introspect and then go on with the business of life with a sense of commitment to society. Religion, in a country where the voices for the Hindu-Rashtra are asserting the religious identity of the majority in the post-colonial situation, as an example of affiliation will help in understanding the writer's position on the hegemonic group categorizations that pervade her life. Sahgal by birth belonged to the highest echelon of Hinduism; she was born a Brahmin. Self-explanatory statements from her memoirs and novels are in order:
Religion, to me, has always been inseparable from the idea of service. We must be fit for the company of men before we seek the company of God. (Prison and Chocolate Cake 184)

But like other originally purposeful measures [stringent widowhood rules] had become the sterile symbols of a section of Hindu society that had remained intellectually static for far too long. (From Fear Set Free 12)

We've got this superb intellectual heritage [Brahminism] supporting feeble issues like the preservation of cows, and we don't seem to be able to climb out of the stagnation onto the high road where the fresh air blows. (Storm in Chandigarh 13)

A contagious disease is spreading through the vitals of the system. The Hindus particularly were a frighteningly bored lot. What else could they be when nothing new had entered their mental orbit for hundreds of years?...a Hindu can kill without a qualm so long as he stays detached from the action. Isn't that what the battle of Kurukshetra is all about?...This Trimurti business, three faces to every action will be the ruin of this country and what passes for modernity among them. Deep down this misguided woman believes her blood is purer than somebody else's because of the accident of her caste. Could ignorance, or is it ignorance, go much further? (A Situation in New Delhi 79)

So I cannot believe in Hinduism, whatever Hinduism might be. Not because of such evils as sati, but because evil is not explained. (Rich Like Us 170)

She would never scale the ramparts and survey the ramifications that Hinduism had become. There was no going back to the simplicity of the nut. (Plans for Departure 52)
There were Hindu and Muslim politicians whom a kindergarten babe, or even a clever cat or dog would recognize as a Hindu or a Muslim from miles away. It was impossible not to, they were so careful not to be mistaken for each other. (Mistaken Identity 118)

It is clear from these pithy quotes, that the analysis of the dominant religion of the nation, which Sahgal also professes, in her texts is dispassionate and incisive. This habit of speaking truth to power extends variously to the political elite, bourgeoisie, self-assured patriarchs and the like. The writer does not close her eyes to the follies of the elite, does not shun it as a subject of literary scrutiny; presents her experience of life in its rawness as Naipaul rightly stated that fiction often carries an unconscious echo of the creator's predicament (519). There is no conspiratorial silence, it is all laid out to pick and reject, understand and assimilate.

It is the angst at the larger human predicament in their voices that establishes the critical synchronization between Said and Sahgal. The affinity between the Saidian and Sahgalian thought covers in it ambit the involved role of an intellectual in society, literary interventions into politics, focus on historical moorings, political commentary from the margins, literary pragmatism and an eclectic approach to ideologies. While Said's paradoxical identity (as a Christian Arab, born in Jerusalem, settled in New York) his seminal critical renderings, his outspokenness on international affairs have made him an irrepressible cultural/political/literary critic, Sahgal has limited herself to enshrining the Indian predicament in fiction. Renderings of ideas as profound as Said's get reflected in the entire corpus of the author's work but the point is easily driven home by picking just one of her novels. The focus is on Lesser Breeds.

Once there was a woman called Katharina who was labeled Shrew because of her independent unbowed spirit. A man called Petruchio made her captive and broke her spirit.
She had to start calling the sun the moon because he said so. That is what happens when Petruchios rule the roost. Anything goes\(123\). This analogy of the bombardment of Abyssinia by the forces of Mussolini with the Shakespearean comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*, by Shan’s tutor Nurullah in the novel is an attempt at using a Western comical paradigm to bring out the poignancy in the ruin of the native Eastern cultures by the colonizers. It must be mentioned that one of the most controversial speeches on misogyny is mouthed by the brainwashed heroine of the play. The manipulation and arbitrary construction of the cultures of the colonized nations is, as is well-known, also the central argument in *Culture and Imperialism* as Said writes, "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them\(xiii\)."

Assigned the task of de-colonizing Shan’s mind, much before Independence, Nurullah, a literature teacher, has a feeling of "suffocating confinement wherever he turned for knowledge since all knowledge was Europe ordained\(118\) and he wonders "what scant and threadbare treatment Europe’s textbooks must be giving to the likes of us\(118\)." Such echoes of Said’s revelation fill up the reflective space of the novel.

Given her knowledge of world affairs, Sahgal places the epic saga of Indian colonization, freedom and neo-colonization within the larger context of global Western imperialism as Edgar, the American journalist laments in the novel, "what a slaughter house we\(180\) are making of the world\(180\)." On a closer look, Edgar’s intellectual support to the struggling colonized world, his skepticism of American capitalism, his criticism of America’s West-Asian policy, the Vietnam war, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, his self-reflexive approach as an American, bear a striking resemblance to Said’s vocal stance on these very historical issues of importance. Edgar is the American voice of sanity that gets lost in the din of the cultural gibberish of the West, in the noise of the declarations of racial purity
and the cacophony of the imperialist nonsense of the West. He intervenes in Iran to improve global peace, "the year Iran decided to nationalize her oil and the British Government threatened unforeseeable consequences if Iran failed to negotiate a settlement." (346), albeit without much success. The third and final section of the novel, "Trade Winds," carries an epigram, a quote from New York Times Special Report on the CIA in Iran: "The 1953[American] coup has its roots in a British showdown with Iran, restive under decades of near colonial British domination. The prize was Iran's oil field." (357). On the death of the septuagenarian Iranian, Prime minister, Mossadeq, jailed, tortured, given excessive cancer treatment radiation, Edgar Knox had a theory that "no one who opposes the Companies stays healthy." Narrating the sequence of the US-British coup that overthrew Mossadeq, Nurrulah reveals to the research scholar, Pete Ryder: "He [Edgar] was with them [Iranians], one of them. To him as to them, foreign armies in Asia spelled empire again...he had already predicted the West would stop at nothing to ensure a westward flow of oil." (348). The reader has to merely substitute Palestine with Iran and a lot of the Saidian energy radiates from the fictionalized character of Knox.

As disclosed by the anthropologist David Price, Edward Said was kept under FBI surveillance since 1971, when all he did, without endorsing any particular ideology, was bridge the gap between the East and the West with his dual heritage. In the novel, Knox is labeled a "communist" by the Senate Committee for Internal Security, for his criticism of the misjudgments of the American government and to Ryder's question at the end of the novel, "Who do you think he was?" Nurrullah replies, "A lover of Mankind. And of jazz." (348). That Said, like Knox, was a skilled concert pianist whose critical renderings, too, are symphonically exemplified with parallels drawn from music, is no small coincidence.

The trade winds are so monitored that they continue to blow laden towards the West; an eyewash breeze keeps the head of the struggling Afro-Asian countries above the water.
Sahgal, with subtlety, raises questions on the farcical bonhomie of the West with India and the other developing nations, especially regarding the economic space it was willing to provide the resurgent efforts of India. Shan, the young protégé of Nurullah, the Commerce minister of India, proposes an Asian Doctrine of trade in New York in 1966 which was received as a proposal of anarchy by the experts. An unfriendly analyst called it a hemispheric policy that looked hostile to the West and would disrupt time-honored patterns of commerce worldwide and the minister’s brilliant reply left the critics spellbound: your wisdom we have turned to for an autonomous hemisphere. We are putting our words to your music. We are so disappointed you are reacting like the mighty Metternich did to your Monroe Doctrine (363). The West smelt trouble. On her way back, after the conference, her flight crashed on the Alps in Italy and there were no survivors and cryptic realization dawns on Nurullah, But why would there be? When had the god of trade not exacted the blood of human sacrifice? - the forms of imperialistic elimination of obstacles to their sway seem to have undergone a change. The novel, the last in Sahgal’s oeuvre, ends with a heart-rending sad prescience, as Nurullah, who hadn’t recovered from the warning dealt to the fresh wind of the new order reflects: The roughest chapter of trade is about to begin. Oil and allied treasure will exact a more terrifying price than pepper, gold and nutmeg, or teak and diamonds ever did. Asia, and who knows Africa, will be the battlefields of war immemorial (369). Said and Sahgal have both fathomed with a humanitarian insight the arduousness, turmoil, vulnerability and futility of the labors of the decolonized/recolonized world and seek to avert the repetition of a history of power imbalance.

**Nehru and Sahgal**

In the euphoric condition of freedom and patriotism, Fanon issued a blunt, psychoanalytically researched, warning against the pitfalls of national consciousness to the people of the under-developed world. Sahgal, Rushdie, Naipaul, Guha, Tharoor and the other
writers who evoke the post-colonial political predicament have tried in their own ways to provide literary cushions of thoughts and ideas to these “pitfalls.” Sahgal, especially, has remained incessantly engaged with the unfolding drama of post-colonial politics; her political commentary is vocal about injustice, her fiction takes the call with stirring nonchalance and poky sarcasm. Her fictional canvass is coloured with all hues, it is not an assemblage of black and grey, but includes colours of hope and joy; rather the black too is given a twist of “black humour” and presented with brevity and wit.

The midnight dream of 1947, pushed down by self-seekers to become a nightmare, has been rescued from time to time by its heroic citizens - optimism and despair, celebration and censure, what went before and the yet to come, are the combined charm ingredients of her works. Primarily, in its role of vigilante, the fiction traces the decadence of politics from a vehicle of public service to a means of self-aggrandizement in the present times; it narrates the saga of the metamorphosis of the visionary Indian statesman to a pompous, self-pushing megalomaniac who has lost his moral compass, over a period of about sixty years. Yet it does not read you down to a cynical pit. From all walks of life, as of now or in history, Sahgal picks the heroes who have strengthened a sub-continental sized country and prevented it from getting divided on lines of caste, religion, region and community and cheers a democracy where the electoral franchise was assertive enough to rout out a swollen-headed dictator.

With the decline and fall of the European empires in Asia and Africa, there was a seismic shift in the global power centers; the fight for political supremacy in the aftermath of the Second World War led to the Cold War between the emerging superpowers and the inexperienced decolonized world stood puzzled at the crossroads of foreign policy. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who endeavored to harness the fluidity in this changing scenario to establish peace and stability in the world - his policy of non-alignment offered an option to the Third World countries to hold their own by abstaining from taking sides and to remain
focused on mammoth task of nation building. Sahgal has focused on the visionary insight of Nehru in empowering world peace as opposed to the diabolical designs of the mighty powers in her recent book, *Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing a Savage World*.

Assessing the uncertainty and insecurity in the politically volatile situation, Nehru strove to channel change towards the growth and progress of the under-developed world. Keeping in view the diversity and disparity of the nation, Nehru adopted for India a centrist position, neither to the right nor to the left, which his domestic as well as foreign policy were in complete consonance with each other leading to India’s economic as well as political stability in the new era of freedom. The new government in India did not see life in politics in the either-or terms laid down by the superpowers. For Nehru, either-or was an absurdity implying that the human brain was too tiny to accommodate two ideas and draw on the best of both (21), writes Sahgal of the Nehruvian thought that greatly shaped her own.

With this book Sahgal seems to have fulfilled a promise, lurching in the deep recesses of her mind that she made to herself - to pen down a tribute to the rare enlightening historical presence in her life. Almost as a genetic compulsion, this unique ode in prose is honestly well-researched, substantially precise and draws from well treasured memory, memoir, correspondence and historical perceptions. Its relevance to a nation in a state of confusion, replete with the hubris of an emerging superpower, needs no emphasis. First and foremost, the recall of the virtuoso performance of Nehru on the world stage as well as in the native lanes, invokes a nostalgia for selfless leadership and astute statesmanship which is almost non-existent or non-emergent in the murky political atmosphere all around. In its detail, this account, as Inder Malhotra has rightly assessed, is about Nehru’s yeoman service to the cause of world peace, emancipation of Afro-Asian countries, and rejection of the notion that newly independent nations must join one of the two power blocs and his memorable contribution to promoting peace and ending a series of wars such as those in Korea,
Indochina and Westasia - in its over-arching theme it laments the leadership vacuum in the nation. The present Anna Hazare imbroglio having bloated into a frightening confrontation between the forces of civil society and the representatives of parliamentary democracy bears a testimony to the void in political leadership in the country.

Secondly, the underlying adulation for the subject, which in other circumstances is both inevitable and excusable, is in this mellow, well-researched narrative, an effort to keep the inspirational institution of Nehru alive so that India's imagination in these changing times is guided by the wisdom, dynamism, realism and dedication of this great leader as Sahgal reflects, "Ideas have no life of their own. Something has to be done about them or they languish for centuries with no impact on the living." (82). Of course, in the final analysis this extended essay scientifically chronicles the foreign policy of Prime Minister, Nehru, in the seventeen years of his tenure as his own Foreign Minister, with the exception of Kashmir, which at hindsight remains a complex problem even today. Tempered with the author's personal impressions, observations and perceptions, the narrative draws the much-needed attention towards the lessons from the stable formative history of modern India to help understand its role in the rapidly changing international space.

Naipaul and Sahgal

A sense of dystopia that pervades most of Sahgal's novels set in post-colonial times, notably, *Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi* and *Rich Like Us*, is corroborated by the writings of all notable thinkers who intellectually committed themselves to the India-in-transition experience in their own typical manner. It picked up with a rage in the post-Nehruvian era. The idea can be instantiated by analyzing the posture of Sahgal vis-à-vis V.S. Naipaul in relation to the significant benchmarks of change - the minority upsurge and the gender issue - and the Emergency.
The ramifications of minority issues in literature through political and cultural discourse have gained high visibility under the revelatory illumination shed by the power-related critical percepts of Michael Foucault and Edward Said. The Punjab problem, a typical case of the rising democratic aspirations of the minorities, messed up by the number games of electoral politics, has been probed by Nayantara Sahgal and V.S. Naipaul in their well acclaimed literary texts. The murky politics behind the demand and concession of the state of Punjab on lingual basis in 1966 handled by Sahgal in *Storm in Chandigarh*, and the concomitant disillusionment leading to a communal rage in the 80’s visited by Naipaul in a section of *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, signify the sensitivity of ethnic political issues and how they impinge upon the national discourse.

The demand for re-structuring the boundaries of provinces on a lingual basis rocked the foundations of the newly formed Indian nation, which had just been divided on the basis of religion in 1947. As the Indian government, yielding to public pressure, reorganized the states in the 1950s on the basis of language, the demand for the state of Punjab with a Punjabi speaking majority by the Akali Dal was in perfect consonance with the prevalent spirit of ethnicity. But it became a problematic category of its own for it brought along with the claims of language, a background of the pre-independence history of the religious aspirations of the politically conscious Sikh minority. Understanding the bifurcation of the state on the lingual basis as a victory of parochial politics, Sahgal forewarns against fuelling-up the combustible communal ideology and retrogressing to fundamental religiosity by the political leadership of the state in *Storm in Chandigarh*.

Gyan Singh, the chief minister of truncated Punjab, the central character in the novel, comes across as a conniving merchant, selling dreams of political identity to fulfill his political ambitions, well-timed to coincide with the resettlement of the post-colonial territorial mélange. The vision of a Sikh Utopia in the mind-space of the bruised and
piqued Sikh masses, was resuscitated post-partition with the demand for Punjabi Suba. Gyan Singh is grateful to the stroke of good luck when the language issue had blended in his mind with his religion. But how could it ever have been otherwise? (145). It contained enough propagandist possibilities to swing the collective radar of the masses in favour of division, leading to the further mutilation of whatever remained of a once geographically organic Punjab. Likewise, he continued basking in the windfall of narrow divisive politics convincing the masses with the audacity of an inverted genius blazoning an equally fantastic legend (122). His appeal was a blend of truth and imagination with the lure of a revival of a practically twice-truncated vanished Punjab to its past glory as a land of five rivers. Dubey, a senior bureaucrat, is quick to realize the scale of the political aspirations of the CM and makes the following assessment: Gyan had stepped onto the heights below which lay a kingdom. A sense of imminent peril gripped him. It was Delhi, not Gyan, that needed warning if India was to stay united (76).

Sahgal’s deep insight into political issues and sharp analysis of history makes her novel almost prophetic in its analysis of the provincial side of the story. Her perception of motives behind the hocus-pocus raised for public consumption by politicos is fairly discerning. In 1981, when the religio-political forces in Punjab turned increasingly secessionist rather than secular, the Sahgalian insight was echoed by the political scientist Paul Wallace in Political Dynamics of Punjab as he wrote, language, religion and regionalism combined into a potentially explosive context (2), and this led to unprecedented happenings in the Hindu-Sikh chapter of Indian history. It has been analysed in chapter iv how the entwinement of minority aspirations with political degeneration has been highlighted by Sahgal but only from the provincial end - the unfair skepticism and political intrigues of the central government escape the writer critical interrogation.
In a major section of his book Naipaul picks up the strands of the Punjab imbroglio where Sahgal had left them in her prescient text. India: A Million Mutinies Now, is an incisive questioning of Sikhs with diverse mindsets that brings to the fore some pertinent human compulsions and monumental political blunders committed in the case of Punjab. An eerie sense of the wayward historical push, the reader gets from following Naipaul, through the by-lanes and village-lanes, on the highways and in the metros, is somewhat akin to the awareness aroused after traversing the vast terrain of Sahgal’s fiction. The realistic quotient in the work of both the contemporary writers, owing to their strong literary connection with non-fictional writing, is strikingly high. Most of the telling symbols of mental and material change in modern India, which have spawned innumerable contradictions in politics and society, have remained their intellectual concerns.

This stirring revelatory account of Naipaul is interspersed with the befitting historical detail in an appealing turn of phrase; the bygone connections, real or mythical, are brought into the narrative to blend with the present-day lived-out realities of the populace. A kind of sub-genre in itself - a travelogue-cum-historiography with raw incisive interviews and current micro-biographies - it bears the stamp of the trademark critical acumen and sardonic wit of the Nobel-prize-winning writer. Also remarkable is this relentless collection of anecdote and impression, for its verbatim recording of the author’s talks with the painstakingly selected bearers of the “million mutinies” contained within the idea of India; it also opened a vista of new possibilities in journalistic historiography for writers involved with this ages old civilization. The account of each witness in the book is countered with many an alternative tale, keeping the narrative open to multiple interpretations; the extremely subtle and gently suggestive authorial comments push the account to becoming an unprecedented historical/literary force within diasporic writing.
While Sahgal structured her prescient novel on the (mis)handling of the grave political issue in the higher echelons of power, Naipaul traveled in 1990 to the live playground of terror, Mehta Chowk in Amritsar, to a small farmhouse, where a militant group had just killed two older sons of a family along with the mother, father, grandmother and a cousin. He traverses the state to meet an IAS officer who resigned in protest against the discrimination against the Sikhs, a college lecturer turned a fundamentalist, correspondents, intellectuals, farmers, businessmen for eye witness accounts of a situation, far too complex to be simplistically explained.

Naipaul questions, a reporter, Dalip, about the disturbed look on the faces of the militant leader, Bhindranwale and his followers, and quotes his reply to psychoanalyze the frustration all around: a minority fear, the persecution complex, the death wish. It's a new religion (479). The creation of the Bhindranwala phenomenon or the minority complex is paradigmatic of the sly moves of the Congress government in the democratic game of numbers in the post-Nehruvian era. Bhindranwale's rise and fall was symptomatic of leaders of diabolic cults. He was promoted by Giani Zail Singh in a bid to contain Akali influence wrote Chandan Mitra in the recent anniversary issue of the India Today voicing the sentiments of most historians of the present day.

Dipanker Gupta analyses the minority complex theory to implicate the whole nation in the emergence of the minority consciousness amongst the Sikhs: None of the demands made by the Akalis were ethnic or communal. They were straightforward regional and secular issues. The Congress insisted on communalizing these demands by raising the bogey of Sikh separatism. This immediately struck a responsive chord in Hindu hearts uneasy with forebodings of another partition (Economic and Political Weekly). Unveiling the hideous role played by the national media especially the Times of India and Hindustan Times Patwant
Singh writes, "Instead of investigating the political failure of those in power, the media while seemingly critical of the communal passions building up, in effect, fanned them." (17)

The Punjab problem was symptomatic of many more mutinies simmering under the uneasy quiet in India politically pressing for expansiveness and inventiveness in the nationalistic discourse. Naipaul perceived in the retaliatory mood of the postcolonial renaissance, an aggressive re-connection of communities with their pre-colonial histories: "Every group thought itself unique in its awakening; and every group sought to separate its rage from the rage of other groups." (420). Naipaul regrets the inability of the Sikh religion to revitalize itself in the changing times to surge forward; he laments the stagnation, and much worse, the turning back of the clock, for the brave enterprising group, already hit by the exodus of 1947:

To most people what happened in Punjab was a pure tragedy, and not easy to understand. From the outside, it seemed that the Sikhs had brought this tragedy on themselves, manufacturing grievances out of their great success in independent India. It was as if there was some intellectual or emotional flaw in the community, as if in their fast, unbroken rise over the last century there had developed a lack of balance between their material achievement and their internal life, so that, though in one way adventurous and forward looking, in another they remained close to their tribal country origins. (424)

This reductionist view is contradictory to the opinion of most Sikh scholars of the present times; for example, Gerald Barrier appreciates the effort to buttress claims of Sikhism being a major world religion as he comments: "A sense of being a minority has helped shape cultural and social debate, created factions and political alliances that help network Sikhs into larger groups and parties." (20). Therefore, Naipaul's observations of the Sikhs remain psychoanalytical, superficial and somewhat aloof as he evades the issue of the deceitful,
meddlesome, bad politics unleashed by the centre that boomeranged to consume the Prime Minister of the country as well as thousands of Sikhs in a horrendous carnage in 1984. In an in-depth analysis of the unfortunate link between electoral politics and the rise of communalism in India, Rajni Kothari traces the planed destabilization of the Akali Dal in Punjab by the central government, to the phenomenon of ethnicization of politics in his search for answers to the pertinent question of how the twins of a single community – Hindus and Sikhs - could be made to feel alien to each other, how a basically democratic struggle for autonomy and justice within a federal set-up was communalized and came to be looked upon as anti-national (Punjab: The Fatal Miscalculation, 78). The retrogression to religious parochialism began with the subtle communalization of the 1951 and 1961 census by the Punjabi Hindus at the behest of visionless power-mongers.

The complex imbroglio of socio-religio-political events is not easy to unravel but it can be said that the bleeding wounds from the Partition, unethical politics, a pastoral disquiet, historical nostalgia, a general intellectual wilderness, manufactured opinion, implanted fundamentalism and the subsequent yearning for a religious utopia may have been the sparks which lit up the mindless inferno of terrorism. The comparative fairness in the centre’s dispensation of provincial affairs within the democratic federal set-up has restfully contained it all.

Trying to come to grips with the concept of India, Naipaul dissects the eventful and the mundane, the expressed and the unconscious, inevitably comparing a whole lot to his previous visits of 1962 and 1975, to give a unique insider-outsider view of how the country had been re-made. Nothing escapes his benign scrutiny - population, markets, education, religion, ritual, politics, places, cuisine, attire, gestures, speech and much more. Sahgal’s fiction grounded in the very same reality - with some variations in perception and level of inclusivity conveys a similar sense of assertion, friction, declining ethics, growth and
possibilities. Her pragmatics is critical of the religious, sectarian, regional and national excesses committed under the patronage of shameful politics. In the wake of his fresh discovery of the throbbing mutinies Naipaul seems to celebrate the re-connection of communities with their pre-colonial histories, envisions a fatalistic beauty in the recalcitrance around and thus, sums up the story of the mind of India:

The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty, it had come as a disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies. And - the strange irony - the mutinies were not to be wished away. They were part of the beginning for a new way for many millions, part of India’s growth, part of its restoration. (518)

The gender issue is central to any investigation of the perforation of political power to social empowerment of women. In keeping with the transition that followed the feminist movement the world over, India too saw a sudden upsurge in the physical mobility of the feminine gender. Its bruised psyche had already been embalmed in the pre-independence era, by Gandhi’s inclusion of women in the monumental fight for freedom. While the Indian woman got her due without much struggle in the public domain, her private space remained crowded with tenacious orthodoxies extremely difficult to erode. It was an area, Naipaul explored quite consciously - he met editors of various women’s magazines in Bombay and seems to prescribe to the views of a stalwart iconoclast Vishwa Nath, editor of the Woman’s Era in 1989, who thought that family is the hinge of civilization [It] should be strengthened not destroyed (418). Tracing the formula of success of this best-selling magazine to the personality of its patriarchal editor, Naipaul observes:

Woman’s Era was an expression now of a purely Indian social order much lower down, offering instruction and reassurance, and a subtle transformation
of the hard real world, to the women just emerging, women whose lives were a
tissue of ritual and given relationships, and didn’t want to rebel or dream. (419)

The woman in Sahgal’s fiction evolves with every successive novel and, keeping pace
with the writer’s own gradually deepening liberal feministic vision, dreams and finally even
rebels. The linguistic division of Punjab in Storm in Chandigarh becomes for the writer, a
metaphor for the breaking up of her marriage in 1967, and the controversial status of
Chandigarh is an embodiment of the humiliating financial divorce settlement thrust on her. It
was the first novel to be published after her marital separation. The central female character
in the novel, Saroj, and Simrit, the protagonist in The Day in Shadow (1971), bear out roles
with unmistakable similarities to Sahgal’s own life with her husband, Gautam Sahgal – the
fact is corroborated by her autobiographies. The firm female lead in A Situation in New
Delhi, Devi, has shades of Vijay Laxmi Pandit’s traits. Henceforth, with the denouement of
personal grief more or less complete Sahgal advances towards a creative vision for Indian
womanhood. In her mellow historical texts Rich Like Us, Plans for Departure, Mistaken
Identity and Lesser Breeds, the author digs out skeletons of shameful cultural practices in
the 19th and 20th century India - ritualistic female foeticide, witch-hunting of pregnant child
mothers, sati, polygamy and purdah, to say the least. The gory detail, does not scandalize the
reader but emphasizes the tough road trodden by the women for generations to become a
Sonali, the brilliant IAS officer in Rich Like Us.

Contrary to the mild suggestion of Naipaul, Sahgal does not feed her fictional women
on the ideology of sacrifice in the name of family. Never regaling overtly in the strength,
capabilities and achievements of a woman, Sahgal admits to a harmonious relationship with
man, as the essence of the fulfillment of womanhood - a bonding based on equality and love.
The blissful marriage of Anna Hansen, a Danish lady with her English husband, Nicholas in
Plans for Departure, is befittingly consummated through a political metaphor as her grand-
daughter, Gayatri, summons up this image of her: Anna and Nicholas in a newspaper picture the day he won his election to the parliament, another later when she won hers and they became the only couple to sit on opposite sides of the House, living their triumphant parallel lives. This unconscious echo of the writer is her true sentiment on feminism. The high point of feminist liberalism, the break-free moment of her corpus, is the eloping away of Mother in Mistaken Identity, after having tirelessly performed her duties as a mother and one of the three wives of the Raja for decades, with a man who understood her pain from her son's well-chilled narrative in jail. In a rare cathartic moment, the writer finally releases her woman to a new hope and happiness.

It must be mentioned that Naipaul's work, India: A Wounded Civilization, unlike the counter-narratives of the other authors mentioned here, is not remonstrative of the political crisis of 1975 and refers to it as the great peace of the Emergency. Unlike Sahgal, Rushdie, Tharoor and Roy, he refers to the excesses of the times as the hysteria of the opposition man and advocating the view that the time had come to move from rule by majority to rule by unanimity writes:

The needs of 1975 were worldly and difficult. India wasn't to be cleansed again; it was (as Mrs. Gandhi intuited) to be cleaned up and got going; it was to be seen to be offering worldly opportunities. The very fierceness of the Emergency answered the public mood, assuaged old frustrations. (128)

Naipaul is also critical of the Gandhian leadership of the movement and writes: Gandhi swept through India but left it without an ideology. He awakened the holy land; his mahatmahood returned it to archaism; he made his worshippers vain. It is noteworthy that while Sahgal's approach is political and consistent, Naipaul is psychoanalytical and contradictory as he makes a complete about-turn in his next book on India. Strong statements of censure: New postures of India turn out to be a matter of words alone.
conquered people intellectually parasitic on other civilizations Ï(121), Ïthe EmergencyÈ dramatizes India’s creative incapacity, its intellectual depletion, its defencelessness, the inadequacy of every Indian’s idea of India Ï(121), ÏIndians seemed to have gone wrong Ï(127), that run through almost every page of India: A Wounded Civilization (1977) are completely missing in India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990).

In times when most writing, that is being churned out, is of an ephemeral quality, and most writers either sit on the fence or take refuge in imaginative fantasy and ambiguous symbolism, the engagement of thinkers like Naipaul and Sahgal with grave political dilemmas endows their aesthetics with substance and merit. Trying to know India with a purpose of connecting with his ancestral roots makes Naipaul a slightly detached observer, who has never lived or may not ever live in India, but, in Sahgal, an active participant in its birth, growth, its sunlit as well as cloudy days, its political spasms and social upheavals, the emotive level of commitment is higher. As a result, the approach of Naipaul is clinically objective and at times philosophical, while Sahgal takes into accounts the cultural propensities and political idiosyncrasies to portray a more nuanced picture of Indian society. In a speech at the Sahitya Akademi in 2007, Sahgal has clearly enunciated the difference that is bound to stay between home-grown stories and diasporic writing: ÏThe daily business of living in India makes for its own kind of writing. Those who live here are joined by the gut to the nitty gritty of this particular social and political environmentsÈ The ultimate battles for a new world are fought on one’s own soil, and part of the battle is putting it into words.

While Sahgal, without feigning a renunciation from the comfortable circumstances of her birth, transmutes through her wit and ideas, the virtues and vices of the human race, in India and abroad, as they impinge on her experience, Naipaul makes the effort to fearlessly travel the extra mile to reach fertile grounds, wherein he sows his ideas to produce valuable literary fruit. He captures the heterogeneity of India in its full vigour, takes note of the
arguments made by the dissenting voices, wishes India well without the mythical responsibility of a native; Sahgal, personally and publicly attached to the generation that midwifed the nation’s labor-pangs, adheres politically to a holistic vision for India; and does not hesitate to risk an extra word to celebrate the wealth of its cultural assimilation, keeping alive the dream of a peaceful welfare state.

**Rushdie and Sahgal**

While Salman Rushdie, with an instinctive inclination for satire, has created the magnificent literary web of magic realism and Sahgal with her fertile grounding in politics has pioneered a more naturalistic fiction, the literary camaraderie between the two post-colonial writers is obvious. Most significantly it is the imperative location of a political and historical thrust that draws their works together. Both the writers fearlessly entered the troubled waters of the Emergency regime to produce their remarkable novels - Sahgal encapsulated it brilliantly in *Rich Like Us* and Rushdie created literary history and political outrage with *Midnight’s Children*. These creations have attained symbolic eloquence for speaking up at a time when most writers decided to give the harsh political realities of high visibility, a wink. While Sahgal, who wrote from within India, had to forgo her ambassadorship to Italy for her criticism of the autocratic style of her cousin, Rushdie faced a libel case in British courts, filed by the lawyers of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, which was later settled outside court. Of the terms of agreement, wherein the then Prime Minister accepted a single personal defamatory statement to be her only complaint, Rushdie wrote on the 25th anniversary of the publication of novel, *Midnight’s Children*, xvi). Sahgal has achieved a fine balance between the *spittoon* act of an intellectual and fictional discreetness in the crystalline aesthetics of *Rich Like Us*.
Kaur 233

(discussed in detail in chapter iv); Rushdie has tackled the Emergency regime by taking mesmerizing surrealist flights from the same bits of reality.

When the constitution was altered to give the Prime Minister well-nigh-absolute powers, I smelled the ghosts of ancient empires in the air. It smelled like burning oily rags. Saleem Sinai, the extraordinary midnight-child of the text, thus, pickles up the disillusioning history of the mid-seventies through words and memories. Bulldozers raze the magicians' shabby hovels to the ground for the "civic beautification programme". Vans full of well-dressed men and ladies of high birth and foreign education drag the poor for nasbandi jail torture through hanging by feet, live electric wires up anuses, candle-light burning of skin, and much more, evokes the dreadful atmosphere; Rushdie is vocal about all as the incarcerated Saleem remains passionately in the grip of constant whispered reminiscences, nostalgia for old quarrels, for the war of ideas and things. The Rushdian frustration is at its peak when he juxtaposes the tales of the power-drunk philanders, of the legions of bastards swelling in the unectomised bellies of great ladies and whores with the harrowing story of test- and hysterectomized, the children of the midnight [who] were denied the possibility of reproducing themselves.

Demarcating between the role of a clinical historian and an involved intellectual, Rushdie cautions that the Emergency, too, had a white part - public, visible, documented, a matter for historians - and a black part which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us. The political malfunction being intricately woven into the symbolism of the text, its main concern remains the message that the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverizing, the irreversible discomfiture of the children of midnight - the children of course symbolizing the dreams and hopes of a new born nation. Rushdie speaks truth to power loud and clear, and
literally usurps the semantics of the "sloganized centrality" of no less a person than the Prime Minister through the introspective stance of Saleem:

Did [my] dream of saving the nation leak, through the osmotic tissues of history, into the thoughts of the Prime Minister herself? Was my lifelong belief in the equation between the State and myself transmuted, in the Madam's mind, into that in-those-days-famous phrase: *India is Indra and Indra is India?* Were we competitors for centrality - was she gripped by a lust for meaning as profound as my own Ī and was that, was that why Ī...? (587)

True to her naturalist grain, Sahgal attends to the upheavals of politics, culture and commerce with the mordancy of her wit and historical insights, while Rushdie provides an intellectual shock therapy by treating an equally shocking theme through the linguistic and stylistic novelty. The riddle-ridden prose, the abrupt bombardment of ideas, the comic eruption of words for surprise, weave an irresistible intellectual maze which the reader pleasurably negotiates for some enlightening revelations. Rushdie essentially differs from Sahgal for having inadvertently earned international fame as *controversy’s child* and his status as a diasporic writer whose imagination continues to be energized by the fertile experiences from his homeland, India.

The literary kinship between the two writers can be traced in their non-fictional prose as well - an analysis of Sahgal's collection *Point of View* and Rushdie's essays in *Step Across This Line* brings out the marked ideological similarities and differences in some of the significant issues taken up by them. Like most secular Indians, the idea of *India* is appealing to them for its plurality and polymorphousness although there is a fine line of distinction in their perceptions. While Sahgal emphasizes the syncretism and acculturation and sees India as a "unique proposition based on the most civilized human instincts Ī a sort of meeting place of the human race"(48), Rushdie celebrates the regional loyalties and the compositional
contradictions and so, explains the strength of this national idea: "The selfhood of India is so capacious, so elastic, that it manages to accommodate one billion kind of difference... This is a notion far more original than the pluralist ideas of 'melting point' or 'cultural mosaic'. (179). Notwithstanding the factual difference between the spatial rootedness and uprootedness of their circumstances, their thoughts converge on the perception of 'nation' and 'nationalism'. The engagement of imagination to the native land is an indisputable truth, but the notion of a parallel development of the 'twin narratives' of the novel and the nation-state and the narrow overlapping of the fictional map on the political map does not appeal to either of them. Sahgal has unequivocally stated that 'India's identity is not related merely to a land mass, or defined in terms of her territory and boundaries. Rushdie warns of a 'New Behalfism' and 'walled-in tribalism' on the part of writers: 'In the best writing, a map of a nation will also turn out to be a map of the world and goes on to add: 'Nationalism is that 'revolt against history' which seeks to close what cannot any longer be closed. (67).

There is absolutely no obfuscation in the criticism by Sahgal and Rushdie of the purist religio-ethnic discourse of Hindutva that has putrefied the political realities of India in a way beyond simplistic assessment. Sahgal derides the attempt being made to 'deconstruct India into a purely Hindu identity, and squeeze her into this single mould and is apprehensive of the victory of the religious bigots in reducing the giant enterprise of Hinduism to pygmy proportions. Unlike Sahgal, Rushdie does not limit communalism to the political folds of the Bharatiya Janta Party; he chronicles the 'horrific reprisal murders' of 1984 when the whole Sikh community paid the price of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguard at the behest of the Congress leadership. Rushdie records Rajiv Gandhi's indifference to frantic calls for help during the massacre and thus, quotes an eye witness who had approached him to stop the pogrom: 'Salman, he was so calm. The writer also notes the stifling of the voices of the riot widows who remained opposed to radical Sikh
demands and asked no more than justice for the dead by the Rajiv Gandhi Government through an attempt of censorship of a documentary film on riots. Holding the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, offshoots of the BJP, responsible for the Gujarat riots, Rushdie digs out its fascist roots and laments the fashionable language of respect for religion, What happened in India, happened in God’s name. The problem’s name is God’s (403).

Creatively resourced but exiled by the East, and sheltered by the pax Americana, Rushdie is quick to point out the ideological hypocrisy towards globalization in parts of the world, for while we relish its omnipresence as consumers we oppose the cultural contamination as a moral police: Is not mélange, adulteration, impurity, pick-and-mix at the heart of the idea of modernity? Doesn’t the idea of pure cultures lead us inexorably towards apartheid, towards ethnic cleansing, towards gas chambers? (297) Sahgal, on the other hand is extremely vocal about Western controls on industry, capital, technology, finance, information and trade, and laments the fall of the Soviet Union if only for its countervailing ideology of checks and balances on capitalism: It used to be the empire that told us who we were. Now it is this new empire, of the managers of the global economy who warns us we will have no existence unless we toe the line (85).

While the diasporic writers seems to be wrestling with equivocations of identity, Sahgal clearly differentiates between the experience of immigrant writers from the writers having a geographical contact with the atmosphere of a nation: They are not encumbered by the nitty-gritty of carving out a continuity from difficult, sometimes unpredictable circumstances, with gaining an inch of breathing space at a time, in the on-going process of building a nation (85). Although diasporic writers, as Sahgal puts it, are fashioning identities born out of choice, not out of history Rushdie has an uncannily sense of exactitude of the people and the country of his birth and breeding. Probably it is the complete freedom
of speech he has got accustomed to in the West, which gets him into trouble so frequently.

Coming down harshly on Rushdie in the course of the controversy of the Jaipur Literary Fest 2012, Shahid Siddiqui charges him of complicity with the western world which, under the pretext of "freedom of expression" uses Rushdie's works to justify its Islamophobia ("Write, Wrong"). While Rushdie has been accused of being the literary equivalent of MTV and of spreading an unoriental condition called "Rushdie-itis", the thematic overlap of his writings on those of Sahgal is immense.

A description of Sahgal - female, Hindu (Brahmin), Indian writer of English, anti-capitalist - could be, so to say, an essay in contrasts to that of Rushdie - male, Muslim, diasporic writer, pro-capitalist - and the intentions and sensibilities pouring out of their works could be as severely anti-thetical as possible but it is far from so. The subtle internalities of good literature have seen the works of both major novelists through decades of discerning readership.

**Tharoor and Sahgal**

1975 is the clear cut-off year of historical reference to contemporary history in Sahgal's fiction. With a quarter of a century left for the millennium to change in *Rich Like Us*, the writer turned back to colonial history, the freedom struggle and its deep relevance to post-colonial times in her three recent, artistically enriching novels *Plans for Departure, Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds*. Did the Emergency invoke a *déjà vu* of the worst in colonial times? Was it the worse for being the decision of an Indian, a first cousin and the daughter of the most outstanding pragmatic idealist of the 20th century? Has India survived the worst, proving skeptics wrong the world over? Did the return to, almost impossible, electoral politics after the twenty-two month nightmare restore the writer's faith that the freedom fighters had not struggled in vain? Is she re-visiting the colonial history, in the full blossom of her creativity, to save her first hand impressions of the unique times for posterity?
Has she saved the best of her for the most inspiring epoch of a life time? Whatever the reasons, Sahgal’s engagement with the India of the last three decades has been limited to her talks and addresses, with her fiction mummifying the period up till 1975 and no further.

Within this frame of reference, Sahgal has located all the seeds and saplings of change sprouting in a new polity, the wholesome and conducive as well as the pernicious and inhibiting. Shashi Tharoor in his memoir, India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond has sparkling critical insights to offer on the bumpy ride of the growth of the pluralistic nation. A parallel reading of his work with aspects of Sahgal’s fiction brings to the fore different standpoints on core post-colonial issues in India.

Nehru, the single most important strand that shaped the transitional phase in the sub-continent, remains the most awe-inspiring leader for both writers. He was a special shining being, than whom all men were lesser men(15) wrote Sahgal about a childhood recollection in her recent book on Nehru’s foreign policy; although her assessment of Nehru is a personal-political mix with the element of deep respect for such an illustrious third parent; it comes after a life time of reflections and is too well researched and well thought-out to be conveniently termed as idolatry for obvious reasons. Going back to the idiomatic midnight hour, Tharoor has this to say about India’s first prime minister: Jawaharlal Nehru became the keeper of the national flame, the most visible embodiment of the freedom struggle, the spirit of Indian independence incarnate. Incorruptible, secular, a politician above politics(27) - this is no small tribute coming from the pen of, ironically, a not so tactful diplomat-writer.

Even in his startling originality, Tharoor, is on the same page with Sahgal when it comes to crediting Nehru for his staunch anti-imperialism, tireless nurturing of democratic institutions, firmness to protect India against foreign aggression, commitment to uplift the poorer sections of society, his politics of consensus within and outside the party, deference
for veterans and constitutional institutions, impeccable secularism and his mystic mass appeal. As far as the policy of non-alignment is concerned, Tharoor is ambivalent for he writes that it preserved [India’s] self respect and enhanced its international standing without bringing any concrete benefits to Indian people (who arguably might have fared better in alliance with the West)(29). On the other hand, Sahgal emphatically states that non-alignment, having lived out its relevance like other great policies of the world, has left behind a legacy of psychological empowerment for nations trying to rebuild themselves after centuries of servitude and despotism. The writer does not feel the doctrine has lost topicality for, Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing the Savage world is, in fact, primarily about non-alignment and the whole idea has been resurrected all over again: "What might have been a candle in the wind of cold war became an energy and a political strategy that enabled Afro-Asia - which until then had played the role assigned to it by Europe - to assert itself as a confident player"(153). Citing it as an established principle of international diplomacy, Sahgal perceives in it "the wisdom needed for sane solutions for many problems at home today. Tracing its philosophical depth the writer concludes: "Gandhi made non-violence an active force against oppression. Nehru made it his approach to world politics and the foundation of his foreign policy"(132).

An area of a wider schism of opinion between the two authors is the economic policy of Nehru; it is also an area of utmost transition in India in the last two decades. It is a coincidence that both authors have had their educational brush with the capitalistic society of the USA at roughly the same age of their lives. Sahgal endorses the socialist economy described by Nehru "the way forward as a day-to-day grind based on improvisation and experience, open to change where change is needed"(155) and regrets the delay, caused by successive regimes, in making the bit-by-bit changes required to further fortify the
indigenous structure of economy with such an enduring foundation of modernization and industrialization.

Tharoor’s trenchant critique of Nehru’s economic policy is anything but uninteresting and it begins by tracing the Marxist leanings of his youth: Jawaharlal Nehru’s political beliefs owed far more to the Russian Revolution than to Gandhi’s Hindu humanism (28). Critical of Nehru’s historical abhorrence of Western capitalism, his delusion of a ghost of the British East India Company in all trade and commerce transactions and his outdated policy of “self-reliance,” Tharoor lets the cannon loose on his Fabian socialism which only led to condemning the Indian people to poverty and stagnation and engendering inefficiency, red-tapism, and corruption on a scale rarely rivaled elsewhere (29). His quotable quote on a visionary like Nehru, “In India, one of the lessons we learn from history is that history too often teaches the wrong lessons” (29) seems a lot misplaced, and would have worked well for the more parochial revisitations of history by extremists groups and the like. Tharoor’s own capitalist convictions are well entrenched for he writes: “One could gladly exchange a week in paradise for a week in the Maurya Sheraton, and not notice the difference” (280) - it is not surprising that he endorses the change, or is it the disparity, that globalization has ushered into India. In retrospect, in the face of the global financial meltdown India stood its own, and Nehru, perhaps, was not off the mark.

The biggest political hurdle crossed by the nebulous Indian democracy, the authoritarian spell in the mid 1970s, has been examined by both Sahgal and Tharoor, and the reality doesn’t give them much choice but to concur on controversial issues involving coterie politics, slum demolitions, the compulsory sterilization schemes and the arbitrary quotas assigned to them, electoral malpractices, arbitrary postponement of elections, jail atrocities, Jayaprakash Narayan and the “twenty-point program” eyewash. Tharoor has a penchant for incisive, witty, penetrative analysis; Indira Gandhi seems the most unlikely of post-colonial
leaders to be spared the mutilative strokes of his pen. Quite clearly, Nehru’s daughter had betrayed her father’s legacy, making short term political gains the driving force of her myopic vision. There is a possible hint of a wish of the dispensability of the Indira Chapter of Indian history in the naughty glint of the author’s surmise: Had Indira’s Parsi husband been a Toddywalla (liquor trader) rather than so conveniently a Gandhi, I sometimes wonder, might India’s political history have been different? (31). Other than her secular credentials Tharoor doesn’t really find anything of merit in her political tenure for he observes, Mrs. Gandhi was skilled at the acquisition and maintenance of power, but hopeless at the wielding of it for larger purposes. She had no real vision or program beyond the expedient campaign slogans; ‘remove poverty’ was a mantra without method. Her genuine convictions, as one observer put it, were somewhere to the left of self-interest. (33).

Sahgal has moaned the weakening of democratic institutions for personal as well as political reasons; they had been painstakingly raised by Jawaharlal Nehru whom the author loved dearly; swaraj that had involved so much sacrifice had been turned into a political toy in the hands of a whimsical cousin. Besides fictionalizing the event in Rich Like Us Sahgal expanded a research paper she presented in the University of London in March 1974 into a well-documented book, Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power. The book which was not let to be published in India initially was for Sahgal, a duty on behalf of the voices the Emergency silenced a duty to the values of a free society that Nehru had devoted his life building. (xv). Capturing the various nuances of Indira Gandhi’s political temperament Sahgal explains: Democracy was not Mrs. Gandhi’s style, but it remained an insistent craving. In a world where leadership has to be one of two kinds, coercive or persuasive, she could not resolve her dilemma and fell between the two debasing democratic values and destroying the system while repeatedly avowing her dedication to it (180). Various factors which worked on the mind of the then Prime Minister have been dissected threadbare; the
account is indispensable for a rounded political picture of her. Unlike her father, Mrs. Gandhi, promoted dynastic politics: the craving for her son, Sanjay, to succeed her was the cause for many a political sin. Sanjay died recklessly flying a plane and to quote Tharoor again: One editor wrote trenchantly that had he lived, Sanjay would have done to the country what he did to the plane (37).

Both the writers share a love for India and have remained constantly engaged with the on-stage as well as back-stage political drama of its paradoxical journey towards economic prosperity and cultural recovery. While Tharoor's ideas are voyeuristic, crisp and trendy, Sahgal deliberates over every thought and weighs every word in her political evaluations, for she holds herself responsible for creatively assimilating the vast, rich, singular, diverse experience of her life and handing down, with wit and gravity, a substantiated history of India's liminal decades.

Roy and Sahgal

Some of the dilemmas facing the nation today that have provoked Sahgal - nuclear weapons, globalization, communalism, modernization, saffronization - have also been the target of Arunditi Roy's political essays brought together in The Algebra of Infinite Justice. What is interesting is the striking difference in the approach of the two renowned writers to contemporary political issues. In her rhetorical prose, admittedly far racier and more gripping than her fiction, Roy takes the Indian state head-on, for in the midst of putative peace she is unfortunate enough to stumble on a silent war (192). Emanating from the writer's pivotal opposition to the Narmada Valley project and dam constructions in general, which have rendered millions who redefine the meaning of liberty homeless, the vitriolic war of words is unsparing of the Indian state:

What kind of country is this? Who owns it? Who runs it? What's going on?

The Indian state is not a state that has failed. It is a state that has succeeded
impressively in what it set out to do in the way it has appropriated India’s resources — its land, its water, its forest, its fish, its meats, its eggs, its air — and redistributed it to a favoured few. Thanks to us, Independence came (and went). Democracy, our version of it, will continue to be the benevolent mask behind which pestilence flourishes unchallenged. There is a hole in the flag and its bleeding as long as we have faith we have no hope. To hope, we have to break the faith. (69-72)

While Sahgal’s fiction incessantly reinforces the strengthening of the institutions of the nation through exemplary commitment and reform, Roy is slightly distrustful and cynical about the state and paints a very dismal picture of the establishment. Remaining in the media spotlight for her activism, Roy is now famous for her profuse romantization of Maoism/Naxalism in her essay, “Walking with the Comrades” wherein the writer has depicted them as “Gandhians with guns.” While Sahgal has unequivocally warned of Naxalism as a nihilistic methodology in A Situation in New Delhi, Roy spent time in the hide-outs in Dantewada, in the jungles of Central India to announce with a sense of pride how the Maoists had re-emerged “more organized, more determined and more influential than ever,” how they had insurrected themselves in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal, “homeland to millions of India’s tribal people, dreamland to the corporate world.”

Roy debunks the “sandwich theory” of the tribals being caught between the Maoists and the State, and decries the Home Minister, P. Chidambram for envisaging a plan to deprive the locals of their “museum cultures.” In contrast to the Nehruvian policy of consensual politics, Roy subscribes to the idea of projecting tribalism and the Indian State as monolithic structures — one eternally destitute and the other insanely ruthless. Sahgal does not demarcate so stringently between two and proposes readdressal to grievances from within the
established structures through negotiation and talks. While Roy overlooks the complex social composition of the movement, its dated methodology and its dangerous proxy coalitions to naively propagate its egalitarianism, Sahgal is clear in her argument: there simply cannot be anything good in store for humanity in the carrying forward of a radical philosophy, which lacks the basic attribute “humane”.

Capitalism remains a constant engagement with all thinkers working out the fallouts of political decisions on the plight of society. While Sahgal has cautioned against lapping up the whole concept without minding its limits, Roy tears it to bits and pieces with her high satire and hyperbolic tirade, accusing the Indian state of a minute by minute complicity with its import into the country. In an elaborate metaphor, evoked by Roy, the US is the kingdom of Rumpeldom ruled by the corporate Rumpelstiltskin now a transnational multi-gnome:

Rumpelstiltskin is a notion (gnotion), a piece of deviant, insidious white logic that will eventually self-annihilate. King Rumpel reveals only part of himself at a time. He has a bank account heart. He has television eyes and a newspaper nose. There’s more; a Surround System stereo mouth which amplifies his voice and filters out the voice of the rest of the world, so that you can hear it even when it is shouting (or starving and dying) and king Rumpel is only whispering, rolling his r’s in his North American way. (Algebra 145-146)

In an effort to trace the monstrosity of the diktats of globalization and the implication of its economic fundamentalism in human terms, Sahgal wrote Rich like Us and Lesser Breeds. Being a child of the rare times, of the freedom struggle, in a complete coherence of idiom, the writer has confessed her incompatibility with the no-holds-barred capitalism assisted by rapidly changing technology and sagaciously warns against the invisible peril: The new imperialism is an absentee push-button affair and involves no human process at all,
only profits (Point of View 88). Belittling the mask of benevolence and concern put on by Western corporate houses, Roy unfolds their vernacular by deconstructing the plea of a visiting CEO, “What he meant, of course, was, ‘you are a market of one billion customers. If you don’t buy our equipment, we will miss the next revolution’ (Algebra 155). The underlying Marxian tone of Roy contentiously questions if corporate globalization would close the wide gap between the privileged and the underprivileged; without a leftist thrust Sahgal, too, advocates a vigilant eye on the entry of foreign players in the trade arena.

The arms build-up and undue militarization of the state have been touched upon by Sahgal in her essays urging nation states to get over the super-power syndrome and fells that “the quest for power has to be deliberately abandoned and consigned to the gutter by nations who call themselves civilized.” The nation state in all its array of military might, its sphere of influence, its wars and hard bargains driven for commerce, is an ugly crushing fact (Point 136). While Sahgal promotes a gentle nationalism based on cultural confluence and influence across boundaries, Roy takes the reader on a roller coaster ride of ideas and bombards the makers of the nuclear bomb in the most stringent terms. Attacking the Vajpayee government for its betrayal of the people, who know not a modicum of truth of the radioactive fallouts or thermal blasts of the bomb, the writer lambasts the veracity of the opinion polls with her trademark sarcasm: “It’s official now. Everybody loves the bomb. (Therefore the bomb is good)” (Algebra 38).

In addition to its rightwing policies, Roy perceives far severer dangers from the communal hatred that is being injected as a slow-release poison directly into civil society by the Sangh Parivar. In her heart-rending interrogation of democracy in her essay, “Who is She When She’s at Home” on the sad occasion of the Gujarat riots 2002, Roy laments: “Increasingly, Indian Nationalism has come to mean Hindu Nationalism. It’s disturbing to see how neatly nationalism dovetails into fascism” (Algebra 284). The misuse
of religion for politics, abhorred by Sahgal in her novels and commentaries, ignites the
caucic crusader in Roy:

> Yes, I’ve heard - the bomb is in the Vedas. It might be, but if you look hard
> enough, you’ll find Coke in the Vedas too. That’s the great thing about all
> religious texts. You can find anything you want in them - as long as you know
> what you are looking for. (33)

Subverting the "Ram Janam Bhoomi" ideology, given the sails by the BJP for electoral gains,
Sahgal appeals to sanity through her poetic intervention: He may not in fact have been born
anywhere, except in the reverence and rapture of his devotees - and what better place to be
born! - who need no brick and mortar to back up their faith (Point 192). While Sahgal’s
reticence towards the Congress party may be understood as an acquiescence of its policies in
the last two decades, Roy as a voting citizen openly prefers the Congress as the lesser evil
for it does by night what the BJP does by day. In their assessment of Mrs. Gandhi there is
clearly no variation, which once again validates the objectivity of Sahgal’s in-depth research
on the subject.

It is Indira Gandhi who started the real slide. She invented our particularly vile
local brand of political expediency. Between herself and her sons she managed to bring the
country to its knees (31) observes Roy contrasting her to the leaders of the National
Movement who passed on the flaming torch to her. Without going into the specifics of the
Emergency, the writer limits herself to the topicality of events, but considers it important to
mention that Mrs. Gandhi led from the front the political forces that filled the marrow of our
secular parliamentary democracy, mining it for electoral advantage (Algebra 288). In spite
of the unparalleled opportunities that destiny provided the leader - unrivalled national stature,
absolute power within the Congress Party, popular mandate in 1971, success in the 1972
Bangladesh war - the country was driven to the brink of disaster and Sahgal wonders: Is it
unimaginable ineptitude, or deliberate destructiveness? Is it the wrath of God and nature, or the spectacle of a party in disarray? Or are we up against a personality who is quite simply determined to stay in power, whatever the cost?오토 (Point 128).

A concurrence on some issues can be evinced in the scrutiny of essays by the two authors especially in their focus on the intricate web of moralities, rigour and responsibility that art imposes on a writer오토 (Algebra 191). While their perspective on Naxalism remains the major area of difference, their position as literary activists also needs to be marked. Sahgal participates from the margins with her intellectual activism, Roy enters the murky waters of political activism along with other civil society enthusiasts. Ironically, Roy, who declared that she is full for being circumspect, all for discretion, prudence, tentativeness, subtlety, ambiguity, complexity오토 Most of the time오토 (197), ends up being quite the reverse all of the time. In her hair-raising prose Roy paints so dismal a picture, so pessimistic an outlook, that the stirring arguments lose steam, becomes somewhat ineffectual, upon deliberation. If Sahgal is grounded in history, Roy swims on topicality; Sahgal has a constructive scheme, Roy is out rightly oppositional; Sahgal’s deliberations call for a reading, Roy’s interrogative eloquence stuns the reader into listening; Sahgal enriches her fiction with a non-fictional foundation, Roy empowers her non-fiction with fictional hyperboles.

**Sahgal and Nationalism**

The various nuances of transition in the socio-cultural engagements of a nation also source the changing dynamic of its nationalism. The changing themes of anti-colonialism, Independence-1947, euphoria, modernization, mixed economy, non-alignment, democratic mobilization, internal Independence 1977, disregarded federalism, over-centralization, communalism, the subaltern spring, economic reforms, immigration, globalization, re-emergence of Gandhian strategies have all customized, from time to time, the garment of the evolving Indian nationalism as understood in the post-colonial context. The fact that the
discourse of nationalism is widely debated, often slighted, sometimes exploited, dubiously sighted, even thwarted and juxtaposed to internationalism, speaks of its utter relevance, and deep enmeshment with the new guises of imperialism which simply cannot be wished away. With overwhelming emphasis on the political history in Sahgal’s fiction, the writer has her own creative stance on nationalism and its 20th century manifestations, which will be taken up after a brief digression to the diverse academic opinions on this growing phenomenon.

For Said, the idea of post-colonial nationalism denotes “restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices— a mobilized political force that instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination” (Culture and Imperialism 217). Tamara Shivanandan, has authoritatively enunciated the concept of nationalism emerging from the historical experiences of imperialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization and globalization in her essay “Anticolonialism, National Liberation, and Postcolonial Formation” (45-65). The difficult struggles for freedom which began with the hope of beginning a “new history of Man” as Fanon evocatively stated, belied the hopes and dreams of the decolonized world and Shivanandan observes: “the rhetoric of anticolonial nationalism and dreams of what independence would bring seemed misguided in retrospect” (42). The politics of the decolonized countries was caricatured by the Western commentators in the words of Said as a “nasty mix of tribal chieftains, despotic barbarians and mindless fundamentalists” (Culture 276). The term “recolonization” is gaining currency to denote the distressed economies of most decolonized nations and the failure of the postcolonial leadership to achieve meaningful transformation of their societies (Shivanandan 43).

The essay reveals the changing perceptions of the developed countries towards the idea of nationalism - a complete reversal from their previous position of veneration to one of a menace. The apparent reason stated was the causative role of nationalism in provoking World War II. The new opinions in circulation focused on its social virulence, its abetment to
Fascism and Nazism and its inherent opposition to international solidarities. Sivanandan clearly spells out the changing semantics of the construct:

Confronted with the spectre of 'national socialism' European and American commentators in the post-war period tended to conceptualize nationalism not in terms of identity and identification, sovereignty and self-consciousness but in terms of imperialism and genocidal aggressivity: the implication of nationalism for them was not liberty and freedom from tyranny, but rather the embodiment of tyranny. (46)

Claiming complete patency over the concept, the condescending scholarship in the West, considers nationalism inappropriate for the Third World countries and watches with cynicism its failure in nations deprived of self-governance for centuries. The writer traces the Euro-American recoil from nationalism to the successful use of it by the colonized countries to defeat the imperialistic designs of Europe. Maybe Benedict Anderson's use of the term 'pirating' for appropriation of European nationalism by anticolonial movement, is a manifestation of this disapproval. Used by the Third World countries the garment of nationalism seems to have become sullied and unfit for use. The whole debate of the derivativeness of the nationalistic discourse is laid to rest with the argument of Basil Davidson in *The Fortunate Isles* (1989): 'European nationalism was possible only because of what Europe was doing in its far flung dominions' (21).

Within the field of postcolonial studies, critics have contributed dispassionately to the burgeoning conceptualization of the percept and the fact that, acclaimed thinkers, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Aijaz Ahmed, have all based the rubrics of their theory on the failure of the nation-state does not augur well for the kind of change unfolding in independent India. In line with his concern for subaltern histories Guha understands the nationalistic discourse to have failed to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the
people on their own, that is, independent of the elite, to the making and development of this nationalism (Subaltern Studies 3). Chatterjee continues with a subaltern thrust in his tirade against the falsehood and non-egalitarianism of the nation-state proclaiming nationalism to be kind of mythical refuge fed to the masses in lieu of non-performance. He supports his arguments with the resurgence of separatist movements within the polity and revival of the anti-modern fundamentalist cultures raising doubts about the resolution of the national question (Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 167). Questioning the autonomy of the new nationalisms Ahmed takes the debate back to the confines of ideology; ‘Whether or not a nationalism will produce a progressive cultural practice depends on the power block that takes hold of it’ (In Theory 102). Shivanandan considers nationalism to be a concrete basis supported by the historical legacies to resolve the issue of sovereignty and quotes Neil Lazarus to support her view-point:

[It] is only on the terrain of the nation that an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged; and this is important, in turn, because in the era of multinational capitalism it is only on the basis of such a universalistic articulation that imperialism can be destabilized. (47)

Sahgal has lived and waded through the changing consciousness of the idea of nationalism in the present and past centuries. But some of the sparkling observations mentioned above, creditable for their originality and short-term enforcement, are mostly out of tune with Sahgal’s vision of a nation - a nation ensconced in the comfort of its geopolitical realities, enriched by the acculturation of a shared history, reflected in the polymorphous identity of its organically related ethnicities; a nation engaged in the welfare of these inter-connected multi-lingual societies having come together as a political entity. The partition of India in 1947 on the basis of religion, tearing apart an ancient, culturally layered
society, was in the view of the author a particularly insensitive act of perverse politics.

Nationalism, for Sahgal is not an illusive, hollow, false formulation to stuff the collective consciousness of a nation; it is not a patriotic lullaby to sedate the progressive awareness of the nation; it is not to be thrust forcefully on an alien group - it is ideally the collective strength of a naturally affiliated section of humanity that facilitates good governance and humane politics.

While the Subaltern Studies group has a point in its thrust on the inclusion of the *non-elitist* story or the role of *subalterns* in the future historiography, the obdurate emphasis on the need to decry, invalidate or wish away the mainstream history as it happened within the larger global historical design, will not yield any substantial transformational gain. Sahgal witnessed the most happening decades of the previous millennium, the 1930s and 1940s, in India and abroad, and the sense one gets from her writings, corroborated invariably by most thinkers, is of too many world transforming events taking place simultaneously or in quick succession. India, *the jewel in the crown of the empire* was fighting its way out in an unprecedented fashion; it was a field of unimaginable hectic activity, planning, motivation, gains, losses, bargaining and much more; the unmanageable morass of its wounded subcultures awaited comprehension; India was up against a formidable foe resourced by its freshly galvanized spiritual strength. Contrary to the deconstructive analysis of the *elitist* anticolonial leadership by the Subaltern school, the clear underlying thesis of Sahgal’s writing is that India had great luck with the kind of leaders who came forward and took the stewardship of the country in trying times, ushering in a new era not only in the colonized world but the history of mankind.

Nehru and Gandhi are the folk heroes, the mythic characters of modern Indian nationalism. Being critical of the Gandhi-Nehru duo and writing off such pre-eminent leaders for being products of elite colonial education system is akin to belittling Barrack Obama, the
first black president of the US, for being a product of The Harvard Law School. In all fairness to their Western exposure, it must be said that it’s good to know the rules of the game you have taken a beating at for two hundred years, provided the rules are not insensitively applied on the countrymen bled dry by the colonial enemy. Sahgal does not think that the parochialism of a particular ideology or an academic display of the spectacle of impoverished masses can solve problems unless the political will to improve conditions is firm.

Her fiction dealing primarily with the independence era, underscores the fact that the mystic political activism of Gandhi before 1947, and the idealistic pragmatics of Nehru after it, have laid the sound foundation of a nation that cannot be easily destabilized. The British colonizers conquered India with the sly policy of divide and rule and they left the subcontinent two hundred years later, dividing it to be misruled, but Sahgal asserts, with good reason, that the impeccable credentials of Nehru prevented all mishaps which were waiting to happen in the postcolonial chaos. Her novels, with primary topical themes, are mostly a lament on the poor replacements to the tall leadership and the decadence they spawned nationwide. Examined in totality, the literary corpus is an inspiration for the revival of the high ideals of commitment and service to humanity, within one’s given reality, as embodied by Gandhi and Nehru. Invoking Nehrus words on the death of Gandhi, ‘The Light has gone out of our lives’ Sahgal echoes the nostalgia, in her comments on the coeval leadership vacuum: ‘The India I want to see cries out for such a light, a living example among us to give us hope and heart for each day of our lives’ (Point 137).

As the West continues to be cynical about the derivative discourses of democracy and nationalism in the Indian patchwork of multiculturalism, Sahgal is positive about the amorphousness of ideas and culture, the diffusive quality of knowledge and the boundless influence of productive thought. All arrogance about authorship of seminal ideas is baseless as Said too, writes in *Culture and Imperialism*: ‘Cultures are not impermeable; just as
Western science borrowed from Arabs; they had borrowed from India and Greece. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm (217). Few writers celebrate cultural traffic of the bygone centuries like Sahgal, who, understands this syncreticism to have enriched the Indian identity and conveys so much in a simple playful statement: The British added one more complex layer to Indian identity and we are still sorting out the fallout of this top layer (Point 84). While on the subject of intermingling and merging of cultures, the novelist has some words of profound wisdom for the West, too:

There is a whole universe of value waiting to come to light which does not lend itself to definition in European terms, or on European terms. It may be time for the west to strike it rich by acknowledging other angles of vision, and by using other keys to open up its own culture to new definition. (92)

There are some serious apprehensions in the West, both, about the complete fruition of nationalism in some decolonized countries as well as in its shaky set-up in others. Much is made of the intrinsic belligerence and survival tactics of these new nationalisms to keep them under constant pressure and vigil in the suffocating hierarchy of nations. As mentioned earlier, for Sahgal, nationalism is a pledge to a consensually adopted, harmonious organic polity and she clearly states that the time was up for vitriolic national sentiment in the age of nuclear weapons: Why should a nation in this day and age need nationalism? A true sense of selfhood does not depend on the inflated glorification of a nation, the trumpeting of its virtues, or the drumbeat repetition of what it stands for. What it stands for emerges clearly enough in the natural course (Point 136). If nationalism parading as Fascist and Nazi terror is an anathema in her works, so are the Emergency Rule, and the jingoism of the Hindu Rashtra.
Sahgal, Media and the Mass Movements

In her early works, with the exception of *A Time to be Happy*, Sahgal has shown a principled impatience with the contagious malady of corruption spreading to all institutions of governance. In *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal has particularly decried the institutionalization of this monster menace during the period of Emergency. Ever since, malfeasance has become rampant in government offices, and graft is now an accepted way of life. Corruption has anesthetized the moral nerve of society. A positive change, a flicker of hope has been sparked by the Anna Hazare movement, led by an unassuming social activist from Maharashtra. Under the umbrella issue of corruption, the blitzkrieg of Anna and his team, supported by the masses and media, has taken the politician head-on for his arrogance, complacency, insincerity, selfishness and aloofness - the political class with a singular lack of intellectual and political self-confidence, has been surprised and upset by a unique coalescence of the people of India around the symbol of Anna. The pent up anger of the last sixty years or so, against the moral sterility of the political class, which has remained a major thematic concern of Sahgal, against all cynicism, has finally created a mini-history and evoked an ideological response that is heartening. Pratap Bhanu Mehta deliberates on the euphoric culmination of this stunning non-violent crusade:

Indian democracy’s strength is its protean capacity for reinvention. It can turn crisis into renewal. Moments of extremism generate a counter movement to produce a new equipoise. Powerlessness can give way to a new consciousness of power. Hope and disappointment chase each other like shadows. What is a democracy if it cannot quickly turn a mood of self-flagellation into quiet self-congratulation? (10)

The fictional soothsaying of Sahgal had pre-empted a political morass in the country leading to an apocalyptic condition of corruption but, the resounding comeback of Gandhian
values, was truly miraculous – it was indeed difficult to believe that Anna’s peaceful revolution was not a Film Division sponsored event but a real public outcry. The engagement with meaningful politics of the Indian people was long overdue. Its imagination was gripped by the creative idiom - ŌAnnaleela, ŌAnnafest, ŌAnnamania, ŌAnna-Domini, ŌAnna-horribilis, ŌBrand Anna-lysis, ŌBana-Anna rebublic, ŌAnna memorabilia, ŌAnnarchy ŌAnna-tomy of the movement and in all its adulation and skepticism, political apathy seemed a thing of the past. This was probably the defining moment of change that all politically engaged thinkers like Sahgal had worked towards in independent India. Apologetic about the political mismanagement of the awakening in the arrest of Anna by his party colleagues, the parliamentarian, Shashi Tharoor thus responded in a write-up: ŌOur government does realize that ideas can be arrested (ŌLet’s Agree to Agree). Most analysts, in the civil society versus parliament debate, felt that the parliamentarians had been led by the scruff of their necks to the House, although some followed a tad gracefully. Ashis Nandy led the attack from the front:

Indians choose their representatives, I guess, the way President Harry S Truman chose his allies from among the Latin America despotocratic rulers: Ōknow he is a bastard but he is our bastard. The parliamentarians have not cared much for proceedings and proprieties. During the last few years, a sizeable section of the parliamentarians have tried very hard to turn Parliament into a circus. In functioning democracies there is always some space for the politics of desperation. In the matter of corruption we have reached that stage. (8)

Sahgal was of the view that powerful ideas need to be arrested in literature for their timeless use. The J.P. revolution of the 1970s vividly portrayed in Rich Like Us has marked similarities with the Anna movement; the latter is, as a matter of fact, born out of the unsorted
mess of the Emergency period. Superfluous accountability, rhetorical dramas, dynastic politics, media strategies, rampant corruption, eyewash policies became the electioneering code of the *netas* who forgot the people until the next elections and the masses continued to live on the margins. Sonali, the protagonist, recalls a J.P. rally she attended in the summer of 1975: “This, the biggest crowd I had seen, had brought itself over there. If J.P. was public enemy No. One (sic), inciting the army to revolt and the people to lawlessness and disorder, as the emergency declaration later said, then the government was stark staring mad” (197). The similarity to the malicious campaign against Anna Hazare is quite obvious.

Recalling other popular movements in the context of the Anna campaign, Sheela Reddy highlights the changing nature of the Indian governments: “For Nehru the touchstone of a true democracy was the quality of its government’s response to a protest movement. Till he was at the helm, the aim of his government was political consensus with the protesting masses. His daughter replaced it with a politics of stonewalling, forcing her opponents into confrontational politics” (32). As mentioned earlier, *Indira Gandhi: Her road to Power* is Sahgal’s dispassionate analysis of the subject. The Anna crisis, which partially diffused aided by the pressure of the media coverage, had almost got India to the precipice. *A la J.P.* treatment, with Anna thrown in prison, was quickly amended by the political strategists of the ruling Congress. In the absence of any single aspirant to imperial power like Indira Gandhi, who ushered in a totalitarian regime, any delay in resolving the impasse with civil society would be an invitation to anarchy in the country.

The position of the press in the watershed movements of post-colonial India, the J.P. movement and the Anna Hazare movement, provide a view of the changing face of the public modes of expression in the last fifty years or so. Being a political commentator for national dailies and a writer of polemical non-fiction and fiction, Sahgal was deeply affected by the censorship of the press during the J.P movement in 1975. To protest against the curtailment
of the freedom of the press, the writer resigned from the membership of the Sahitya Akademi Advisory Board. Finding publishers for her works in the phobic atmosphere of dictatorship was not an easy task. The writer has documented the facts related to the gagging of the press in *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power*:

The Emergency enabled Mrs. Gandhi to move toward an institutionalized control of the press and the Opposition. A series of steps including a ‘code of ethics’ for journalists and editors, government nominees on newspaper boards, and the ‘voluntary merger’ of India’s four news agencies—PTI, UNI, Samachar Bharti, and Hindustan Samachar—into a single government regulated agency called Samachar, ensured government control of news. (156-157)

In a complete negation of democratic rights, a one-man newspaper was eliminated, many were shut down, and prominent editors were arrested to create a fear psychosis. In a country where democracy had been tenderly nurtured by its stalwart leaders, this stifling of expression did not bring about the results desired by the leader; the masses had tasted freedom and wanted it back as Sonali reflects in *Rich Like Us*, ‘It is uncanny what a bare month of censorship can do, exactly the opposite of what I would have expected of a news blackout. I have heard from people who lived under it all their lives that censorship really does kill and bury curiosity’. But one month is just long enough for an artificial silence to start exploding. The facts it is trying to conceal, shriek out to be noticed.(21).

Shashi Tharoor, a young aspiring writer of nineteen in 1975, recalls the Emergency, a seminal event of [his] political maturation, with a personal anecdote in his political autobiography *India*. A thrilling, inoffensive short story of his suffered, in Calcutta, the petty tyranny of the censor board members, who had shifted into newspaper offices all over the country: ‘It was a detective story with a trick ending, and it was called ’The Political
Murder\textsuperscript{Ô} but the very thought that anyone might be murdered for political reasons was
anathema to the Emergency censors, who tended to make up in zeal what they lacked in
judgment. A big red stamp was duly applied on the manuscript\textsuperscript{Ô}: (34). As Sahgal has
pointed out, silencing the press did snuff out the J.P. movement, but it also gave Indira
Gandhi some far-fetched illusions and became the nemesis of her humiliating defeat in 1977.

In sharp contrast, the people\textsuperscript{Ô}s awakening of 2011, called by some, in hyperbolic fits,
as the second independence movement\textsuperscript{Ô} was in many ways a movement, propelled into
flight by the electronic media, once it spotted the iconic symbol of Anna in the fore. The
media, gauging the people\textsuperscript{Ô}s growing sense of frustration with governance, seized the
opportunity and matched it with the sincere commitment of Anna, to pitch the protest almost
to a level of anarchy. Barkha Dutt, Group Editor, NDTV, admits to the media narrative that
provided a blanket coverage of Anna\textsuperscript{Ô}s fast, almost holding up a permanent oxygen mask\textsuperscript{Ô}
to the agitation: \textsuperscript{Ô}It\textsuperscript{Ô}s even been pointed out that Noam Chomsky\textsuperscript{Ô}s scathing commentary on
the mass media - \textsuperscript{Ô}Manufacturing Consent\textsuperscript{Ô} would be re-written in TV studios today as
Manufacturing Dissent\textsuperscript{Ô} (\textsuperscript{Ô}Digging\textsuperscript{Ô}). The Indian parliamentarians have lamented the
shouting down of the oppositional points of view by television anchors and a total media
coup of public opinion. The hyperventilating channels, displaying a total lack of balance and
maturity, created a highly volatile situation and, at a certain point of deadlock in talks, the fire
fanned by the media seemed out of control.

Anil Dharker in an explicit article, \textsuperscript{Ô}The Topiwala Camera\textsuperscript{Ô} questions the wisdom of
the smart interactive television, exposing the hidden commercial motives of its private
channels: \textsuperscript{Ô}The television medium itself is dictating what we think, what we say and when we
say it\textsuperscript{Ô} should [the media\textsuperscript{Ô}] role continue to be of the news-gatherer, observer and analyst?
Or should it be that of an activist? ...do you expect it to act as the movement\textsuperscript{Ô}s propagandist?\textsuperscript{Ô}
The Television Rating Points of news channels were at an all-time high during the protest.

If the media saw a prolonged night during the Emergency, it was too much of a noise and glare trying hard to keep alive Movement II of the civil society. This complete role reversal of the media has an overtone of a depressing shift in ethical and social values, a deepening 'climb-up' effect on Indian politics and economy. The sea change in the media interventionist methods in a state-versus-people crisis draws attention to the ineluctable invasion of the electronic media into Indian reality, making its virtual world, the lived experience of its citizenry - the intrusion of the virtual into the real has assumed an uncanny proportion.

The freedom of expression, Sahgal has guarded with all her might, is in the danger of being vulgarly commercialized. The arrogance and abuse of power by the political class defined the contours of change in Sahgal's writing - varied hegemonies have proliferated since those times, and media is the riskiest out of them. It must be mentioned that the print media, nourished by the inputs of Sahgal and other worthy legends, has displayed a comparative objectivity and has remained a more credible source of information in post-colonial India.

In the final analysis, Sahgal's writings are a representation of the impact of political discourse on the history-in-the-making and the attendant narrative of change. Change is the electrifying energy that binds the historical background of her fiction to the pertinent issues of here and now. It mirrors the multi-dimensional face of politics; it also reflects the multitude of crass politicians in her disillusioning search for statesmen.

Sahgal's fiction has not penetrated the labyrinth of complexities in the aftermath of the economic reforms, and the information and technology boom (Lesser Breeds her last novel is the farthest removed from contemporaneity in temporal terms) and her non-fictional
discourse tangentially touches upon the postmodern revolution ushered in by technology, sex, glamour, media and materialism. While the sudden transformation in the liminal decades of the previous century, and the on-going fluidity and incoherence in the cultural configurations has eluded her thematic concerns, Indian history and post-colonial politics have been deeply reflected upon and canonically fictionalized by Sahgal.