Chapter I

A Fiction of Autobiography

All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster’s autobiography.

(Federico Fellini qtd. in Rosy Singh, *Autobiography*)

One of India’s leading post-colonial writers and political commentators, Nayantara Sahgal has written nine fictional as well as nine non-fictional works and continues to be an actively involved writer and thinker of the twenty-first-century India. Her literary credentials as an author of several national and international award winning novels, coupled with the conditions of her birth, inadvertently position her in circumstances that are without a substitute in the history of Indian English fiction. The author has witnessed and internalized the struggle for independence and the euphoria at the ‘midnight’ hour, and has been a part of its proud and humbling moments thereafter. It is clear from her writings that she values indignity in all aspects of Indian life, though it may be positively informed by global trends. Her works convey the perception that the hard-earned gains of the previous century should not be frittered away to the capitalistic homogeneity of cultural and economic imperialism. In a recent interview with Ziya Us Salam, the writer expressed her unease at the rampant capitalism in today’s world: “The consumerism, the money mania is not natural. I feel like an alien from another planet.” This research examines her subtle posture as a veteran vanguard of contemporary cultural thought and vigilante of political practices in the context of her historical representations of Indian society.

The optimistic mind of a free young nation well- captured by Sahgal in *A Time to be Happy* soon gave way to the overwhelming post-Nehruvian disillusionment in her prescient novels, *This Time of Morning* and *A Situation in New Delhi*. Her historian instincts have grasped with penetrating insight the regional politics involved in the bifurcation of states, the cultural paucity of an architecturally fantastic capital city and the politico-bureaucratic power
(im)balance in her sweeping work *Storm in Chandigarh*. Her politically and culturally analytical work *Rich Like Us* is a reflection of the anxiety of millions of Indians during the gloomy autocratic spell in the mid-seventies, infamously called Emergency, and the early attempts of neo-colonizing the nation by global economic giants. This polemical text presents a forceful argument constructed around authoritarianism, corruption, genuflection, fickle bureaucracy and the betrayal of a dignified mixed economy in favour of crass capitalism. Three of her most recent novels - *Plans for Departure, Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds* - are set in colonial India, maintaining a temporal distance of about fifty years or more from the historic struggle for independence, the larger backdrop of these texts. Exuding a metaphysical calm, these representations give an ironic insider's view of the political unrest in India, the injustice of the jittery ebbing colonial power, its pseudo-secular face, the avoidable trauma of Partition, the ambivalence of the educated Indian mind towards non-violence, the flip-side of the feudal aristocracy in India, and cultural syncretism, highlighting the humane element across boundaries and races.

Her memoirs *Prison and Chocolate Cake, From Fear Set Free* and *Relationship: Extracts from a Correspondence* are of great interest for the personal portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other national leaders; for bringing alive the hectic political activity in Anand Bhawan, the situation-room of the Indian freedom Movement, and of course, Sahgal's youthful reflections and personal travails of life. The writer has also edited a collection of letters, *Before Freedom: Nehru’s Letters to His Sister (1909-1947)*, which is of immense historical value, for this hoary family tradition of letter writing, fused the public and private aspects of the lives of the dynamic leadership that shaped modern India. The non-fictional works merit the author's meticulous scholarship - *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* and *Point of View* are particularly indispensable for an in-depth understanding her creative process in totality. Her second marriage to a distinguished bureaucrat, E N Mangat
Rai, the co-author of *Relationship*, gave Sahgal a vantage point to closely observe the bureaucratic world – its variegated cadre, levels of commitment, policy and decision making, its role at the cutting edge and the early stage of the cancerous decay in its rank and file. *Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing the Savage World*, the author’s recent publication on the former Prime Minister’s foreign policy, is a tribute to the high ideals of a leader whose ideas need to be urgently disseminated in the political class of the nation today.

The historical and political legacy of almost every decade of the twentieth century, imaginatively crystallized in Sahgal’s realistic fiction, is the focus of this study which envisages its immense relevance to the literary interpretation of a writer with a deep, diverse, meaningful understanding of the Indian experience. The significant bearing of modern Indian history and coeval political consciousness on the entire *oeuvre* is kept under critical focus and the aim is to co-relate Sahgal’s interpretation and assessment of history with parallel literary depictions in the fictional as well as the non-fictional writings of other significant postcolonial writers. It seeks to record the force and substance of the not so subtle undercurrents of colonial history and post-colonial politics in her fact-based-fiction, with the onus falling, as much, on *us* – the Indians, as on *them* – the colonizers.

With the new theoretical insights in literary criticism, power related discourses like colonialism, post-colonialism, nationalism, shifting political ideologies, globalization and cultural transformations across the developing world are the arguable areas of interrogation in a research of this nature on the author’s works. As postcolonial criticism has brought into critical focus the concepts of nation, identity, hybridity, migrancy, marginality, subaltern histories and, some polemical engagements like transcolonization and delocalization among others, the present study stands to gain by understanding the corpus of the author’s work from a postcolonial perspective. In addition, following the tenets of the new historicist approach, the juxtaposition of her fictional and non-fictional work will be a valuable exercise in
determining the dominant discursive practices that affected post-colonial change, and the way these get related to textual practices. The hereditary and environmental determinism of the fictional translation of the author’s political thought and rationale is enhanced by calling into focus theoretical concepts of autobiographical criticism.

A review of the critical studies on the fiction of Sahgal validates the fact of the immense and diverse response the author’s works have evoked. Besides book length publications, research papers, doctoral dissertations, innumerable essays, book reviews and interviews have appeared and continue to appear in widely circulated international literary journals, leading magazines and newspapers and the electronic media. To underline the major aspects of the research accomplished so far, a brief survey is in order.


There has been no specific research on the political and historical framework of her writings in the light of the new theoretical percepts, although the author has been clubbed with other writers in the assessment of her ideological and political concerns as in Gillian Dooley: Attitudes to Political Commitment in Three Indian Novels: Raja Rao’s

Although the fiction of Sahgal has been studied primarily from the literary and feminist perspective, and the socio-political aspect in a limited manner, a complete understanding of her works is possible only after placing them within the larger historical framework of the political processes of colonization, decolonization and neo-colonization that they portray. The thematic and textual interpretations provided by the bulk of these critiques will be resourceful to this study, which primarily examines the reflections of Indian history, post-colonial politics and change, in the light of the theories informed by school of deconstruction, exclusively in the writings of Nayantara Sahgal.

The study begins with some insights into the writer’s political lineage and the role played by historical personages in shaping her political philosophy through a scrutiny of Sahgal’s self-writing. This chapter includes two sections: the first section is a re-reading of the autobiographies of the writer and a re-interpretation of some previously done critiques; the second analyses the autobiographical influence of her personal interactions with Gandhi and Nehru on her ideology, and, thereby her fiction. To a large extent, the hold of realism on her poetics ensures that Sahgal’s creative writing is a fiction of autobiography.
I

I know that he wanted to understand me more as we went along, but you can’t do that, not unless you like to do puzzles.

(Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* quoted by Dirk Wiemann)

Sahgal, as one of the significant post-colonial novelists, distinctively placed in relation to colonial/post-colonial Indian history, politics and social change, has contributed profusely to the literary tradition of the narration of an ancient civilization that had begun building itself into a nation. The continuum of historical and political representations of India in her fictional, autobiographical, biographical, epistolary and journalistic endeavours is an inevitable fall-out of the writer’s genealogical proximity to the political dynasty of the Nehrus who were the widely acknowledged frontrunners of the Indian Freedom Movement. Having experienced the daily unfolding of the romance, optimism and dangers of the historic drama of Indian freedom struggle, the creative sensibility of Sahgal was spurred to construct her literary citadel on the Gandhian and Nehruvian influence that had merged into the mythic consciousness of the nation. Sahgal’s literary transmutation of India’s past and present experiences spring not from peripheral brushes, but keenly internalized political interface with the key players of the movement; the nationalist sentiment runs like a sturdy string through her entire oeuvre. Perhaps the intriguing dialectics of the contents of her well-received memoirs and the autobiographical reflections in her fiction, inextricably enmeshing private and public aspects of her life, have ripped the patina of artistic mystique from her fiction. For some insights into the current developments on the slightly difficult and diffusive genre of “autobiography” it is worthwhile to dwell a little on the theoretical progress made in the direction, for it is apparent at the outset that real life experience, howsoever camouflaged, remains the springboard of Sahgal’s fiction.
Autobiographical writing, still in its incipient state, ought to have been in the doldrums with the arrival of post-structuralism, but ironically it has flourished like never before in literary history. Although the discourse, having received serious critical attention only in the last fifty years or so, continues to be a problematic literary genre, partly due to the individual idiosyncrasies of the writers, as also its all-pervasiveness into any aesthetic use of language. Linda Anderson, in her critical text, *Autobiography*, after a detailed analysis of the distinct literary genre, agrees that modern critics have deduced abstract critical principles for autobiography based on the ideals of autonomy, self-realization, authenticity and transcendence which also reflect their personal cultural values. Tracing the evolution of the theoretical critique through the Romantic notion of selfhood to the transcendent view of art, she concedes the problematics of the unconscious or conscious fact and fiction mix and writes that autobiography produces an unease that could spread endlessly and get anywhere, undermining even the objective stance of the critic adding that this could be both productive and diverse (6).

On the other hand, dwelling on the limited heuristic value of autobiography, Paul de Man, in his post-structuralist essay, *Autobiography as De-facement* argues that it bends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into the neighbouring or even incompatible genres (919). Discrediting autobiography as disreputable and self-indulgent rather than a distinctive genre de Man raises the problematic issue of distinction between fiction and autobiography. Equating this unresolvable situation to being caught in a revolving door he heightens the autobiographical genre dilemma by bearing upon it the post-structuralist linguistic issues, smashing to smithereens any autobiographical attempt of constructing the notion of selfhood and arriving at self-realization. The death of the author phenomenon seems to have struck at the base of the concept of an author making the
subject of his self-arrival. Robert Smith shares the sentiment as he remarks, “As soon as language becomes an issue any last footing of the autobiographical subject may have had gives way (qtd. in Anderson 14).

It can generally be conceded that a complete restriction of a certain autobiographical or even biographical content transgressing into fiction and vice versa is literally impossible, although the legitimacy of self-writing is strengthened by minding the limits, the norms and interdictions of genre, as Jacques Derrida in his influential essay The Law of Genre states: “Thus, as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity (203). No amount of critical censure for its loose format and arbitrary content has been able to curb the increasing popularity of the genre; if anything, it has stepped out of the precincts of literary practitioners and spread, octopus-like, to every field of human achievement.

In a recent publication, Autobiography: Fact and Fiction, Rosy Singh deliberates over the inherent complexities and contradictions of this widespread albeit slightly narcissistic genre and highlights the sub-categories that have proliferated under this rubric: the representative autobiography having gained currency for its political voice has further branched out into the new minority writing; the pure autobiography often disembarks onto essays, stories, letters, paintings, poems, films and other art forms. Considering the to be in a constant state of flux, Singh draws attention to the multiplicity of perceptions and infers that the autobiographical discourse evolves into a complex conceptual and formal totality where subject and object, truth and perception, reality and imagination, remembering and forgetting, reflection and the nuances of language freely intermingle and in the process, facts get transformed into artifacts (4). Interestingly, in the absence of clear-cut texts in prose, the roots of the genre are traced to the lyrical poetry in the Orient. The autobiographical writing is burgeoning, be it for therapeutic release, political intervention,
emotional out-pouring or egoistic pleasure, and keeping pace with it are the deliberations of the critical discourse. The effort is to bring these recent theoretical practices in self-writing to inform the re-reading of the autobiographical writings of Sahgal.

As mentioned Sahgal’s autobiographical works include *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, *From Fear Set Free* and the epistolary collection *Relationship: Extracts from a Correspondence*, co-authored by E N Mangat Rai. The previous readings of the first two books categorize them either as autobiography or memoir within a larger genre of Sahgal’s non-fiction. Although the terms ‘autobiography’ and ‘memoir’ have been used interchangeably as terms of reference for self-representative writing, yet there is an essential difference in the treatment of self and subject matter in the two categorizations. As mentioned in *A Handbook of Literature*, an autobiography is a connected narrative of the author’s own life with some stress on introspection whereas memoirs deal at least in part, with public events and noted personages other than the author. Memoirs differ from autobiography proper in that they are usually concerned with personalities and actions other than those of the writer, whereas autobiography stresses the inner and private life of its subject. So, the memoir with its limitations of being a chronologically recollected record of significant events, associations and movements falls short on account of insufficient self-reflexivity as Laura Marcus notes in her critical work, *Auto/biographical Discourses*: The autobiography/memoir distinction-ostensibly formal and generic - is bound up with a typological distinction between those human beings who are capable of self-reflection and those who are not. Following the broad conventions, and foregrounding her personal experience against significant happenings and change, Sahgal too, like most self-writers, writes her own rules.

Revealing the growth of the author’s social and historical consciousness, *The Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Free Set Free* unroll as engrossing narratives interspersed
with personal reminiscences of the marathon struggle for India's freedom, its visionary national heroes and the aftermath of decolonization. They are a paradoxical mix of "reveal-some-but share-all" approach of the writer who maintains a subtle distance from the reader while enriching him/her with anecdotes of her varied experience and intelligent observations.

In retrospect, the two constructs are like a curious hybrid of autobiography and memoir. In fact, the evasiveness of the self-narration corroborates with the dramatic, vivid descriptive style, adding the ingredient of fictional imagination to lived reality qualifying the works as autobiographical-graphical-fiction.

_The Prison and Chocolate Cake_, an effervescent, sometimes random but mostly linear, recollection of the extraordinary teenage experiences of Sahgal in India, Mexico and the vast expanse of America, captures the movements, the stream of consciousness and verbatim speech of all the characters, including Sahgal, with the precision of an omniscient audio-visual camera. The author virtually steps outside her 'self' like an observer, to give a delightfully touching account of her mature parentage, balanced childhood, wholesome relationships, dynamic influences and multi-cultural experiences. High on reminiscence, a little wary of self-reflexivity, the narrative limits most of the reflections to socio-cultural heritage, accretion and syncretism. The account is episodic and action-oriented and the cohesive whole abounds in cultural nuances, historic detail and imaginative impulses operating within the autobiographical backdrop.

The voyage to America in 1943 in a U.S. troop ship in the precarious conditions of World War II, without a chaperon, with her sister Chandralekha, at the age of sixteen - an unusual, almost unprecedented happening, for an Indian girl - is the exciting opening of the book. From graphic details of the naval vessel to poetic renderings of the ocean as "the unleashed monster", "the evil ballet of waves", to realistic details of being without warm clothes in the Southern Hemisphere winter where the ship had sailed by default; to remaining
content with seeing Melbourne from the ship as civilians were not allowed to go ashore, the account keeps the reader involved in this "adventure-to-order" of the young feminine sailors. The ticklish optimism of the experience is sprinkled with crisp aphoristic one liners: "It just shows what will power can do, even if it is somebody else; Loose lips sink ships" and witty observations; "for all practical purposes we had joined the United States Navy," I refuse to abandon ship looking like a ragamuffin. The early imprints of Sahgal's firm conviction in the irreplaceable worth of meaningful communication in human interactions can be seen in the enthusiastic interface of the young passengers with men and women of eleven different nationalities on board, symbolizing an open-minded multi-culturalism that has defined her well-nourished Indian sensibilities. While the circumstantial realities are explained with sharp candour, the inner terrain of the writer finds no mention even in the uncertain voyaging condition of the ship - probably, in an effort to match up with the training in courage and discipline shown by her parents in testing times of the freedom struggle.

The political legacy of the Nehrus may have maintained a direct line of descendancy, but the literary heritage, laterally bequeathed, is in safe custody with Sahgal, who has retained its clarity, economy, sharpness and wit in her own stylistic nuances. In an interview with Paramita Ghosh, the author mentioned how Jawaharlal Nehru, her maternal uncle, commented that she "had a great feel for atmosphere" after reading The Prison and Chocolate Cake. Truly, her artistic comfort and penchant for description, a balanced act of sensitivity and objectivity, makes alive the people and personalities, the locales and locations she experienced in childhood. Swaraj Bhawan and Anand Bhawan, Allahabad and Almora, Woodstock and Wellesly, New York and Los Angeles - all have a characteristic cultural/historical role in shaping the thought process of the writer. But there is no transgression of the margin laid between the "raw-personal" and the "open-private" in the self-narration. If Allahabad, whose culture was a blend of the ancient civilization of the
Ramayana and the much later influence of the Mughals (27) is robed in a descriptive cloak of history, then the family home at Khali is treated no differently; it is masked in bare obvious kind of information. It remains the clichéd symbol of happy family life with a spate of frequent droughts and lack of modern comforts - the home stops short of evoking any personal tender strains, and with all its nostalgic potential, shares with the reader mere hints of Papu's great love for Khali (35).

Sahgal has intricately woven the freedom struggle for independence with her own upbringing at Anand Bhawan, which in those days was a silent beehive of activity, and history was being made in a blood stirring way in every day of their lives (117-19). The Govt. of India Act of 1935 which lead to the provincial legislative assembly elections in 1936, the disregard for the policy of non-violence in World War II and the resultant Non-cooperation Movement of 1940, and Gandhi's fast in 1943 are all handled with a familiar ease engendered by familial political grooming and insights. A.V. Krishna Rao, an early critic of Sahgal's works, comments on the inevitable historical-personal mix: Sahgal's autobiographical narrative at times reads like a delectable piece of historical fiction rather than a chronologically correct personal calendar of events (100). Factually, within the autobiographical framework are the personal insights and glimpses of a biography of a nation-in-the-making, with Sahgal alluding to the phenomenon of Indian politics and culture in every chapter.

The significance of jail in the creative psyche of the writer needs no emphasis as the title of the autobiography itself alludes to this oft-witnessed ritual in the Nehru household. Referring to the revolutionary participation of the elders in her essay, The Schizophrenic Imagination she writes, They were so enthralled with organizing for it and getting imprisoned for it that I thought going to jail was a career (95). In the 1940s life for most members of her family was lived in jail with brief spells of normal living (94) and the
separations were taken with striking, well-instilled fortitude on the part of the protagonist. In a recent interview with Rajnish Wattas, Sahgal recollected the stern rules of propriety observed in the family in times of trial, and how the children subtly emulated this emotional discreetness: "As a child, the most memorable episodes were frequent parting from my parents which had to be cheerful as the family code did not permit us to cry. As a writer Sahgal could not completely shed this family code and she continues to write brilliantly but with a consciousness of being a member of Indian’s first political family and not simply as one from the vast sea of humanity.

The portrayal of legendary freedom movement leaders (some of whom were Sahgal’s immediate family) like Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and, to a lesser extent, Sarojini Naidu and Padamja Naidu, lends freshness and normalcy to their iconic personas and the reader is happily receptive to these personalized mediations by the author. But it is only in the interactions with Ranjit Pandit, her father, and Bibima, her widowed grand-mother, that the tender note of affection finally strikes and Sahgal leads the reader to commit the much-awaited "intentional fallacy" in her debut publication. It is on the occasion of the death of Bibima when she writes, "I suffered my first irreparable loss. Day after day I sat in the deserted little puja-ghar, convinced that if I waited long enough she would return. To this day her memory revives the charmed hours of childhood and the belief that goodness prevails and that world goes on because of it that the reader connects with the inner self of the author and the universal poignancy of her experience(48). Linda Anderson analyses the levels of shared truth and concludes that "within critical discussions of autobiography, intention has had a necessary and often unquestioned role in providing the crucial link between author, narrator and protagonist. Intention, however, is further defined as a particular kind of honest intention which then guarantees the truth of the writing(2). Certainly, Sahgal has saved some candid
thoughts for the playfulness, space and freedom provided by the unlimited possibilities of fiction, voraciously taken up as a literary career by her a little later.

The chivalrous Australian, Mr. Quintan and the hotel detective, Mr. Stone are the only ordinary people to have entertained the Sahgal sisters in America - that too, perhaps, due to their total anonymity and their unscheduled landing on the West rather than the East coast of America. In the rest of the book, as mentioned, they either met with or were entertained by the famous actor Paul Robeson and his writer wife Esslanda Goode Robeson, Dorothy Norman and her artistic and literary circle, film-stars Danny Kaye and Miss Crawford, Pearl S. Buck (as Mrs. Walsh), Mrs. Margret Sanger, Helen Keller and Colonel Louis Johnson, the personal envoy of President Roosevelt. Of the significance of first session of the United Nations which the author attended with her mother in Oct. 1946 at New York, she writes, it meant colliding with celebrities of all walks of life in the corridors and elevators it gave us the opportunity to meet and talk to the best known political figures of our time, not as great and famous statesman but as ordinary friendly people it gave us the opportunity to meet and talk to the best known political figures of our time, not as great and famous statesman but as ordinary friendly people. A certain amount of posturing and formality is the prerequisite of sharp training in diplomacy, well thought out politics and privileged opportunity; but, it is in the narrative recounting of these exclusive experiences that the reader senses a tendency in the writer to marginalize the introspective self. The glare of the reflections of the rollicking images of the American sojourn blind the reader, and he must do with glimpses of the protagonist, rather than the person, Sahgal.

Situated close to the fascinating city of Boston is Wellesley, one of the most beautiful campuses in a country renowned for the beauty of its university campuses, where Sahgal completed her graduation in the subject of History. At a dinner in 1947, to an inquiry of Lord Mountbatten, about the affiliation of Wellesley to Harvard by any chance, Sahgal spontaneously replied only socially expressing her high self-esteem in being associated with her internationally renowned alma mater. The narrative evokes awe, rather
than kinship, at the exclusivity of such experience and the playful recounting sometimes creates a disconnection with the reader.

Written as a young girl the autobiographical-memoirs reveal a certain consciousness of social norms and a cultured responsibility towards familial legacy. Considering the entire corpus of her work certain gaps and silences are evident, which will be analyzed later in relation to the epistolary text, where the gaps are filled up and the silence is broken.

Khushwant Singh, a contemporary writer as well as an acquaintance of Sahgal, observed on the release of the book as a Harper-Collins Perennial imprint in 2007: "Nayantara is too genteel to allude to tensions that developed between members of the first family… I hope some-day she will write a sequel to Prison and Chocolate Cake and come out with the truth of the bitter family feud (Tales)."

The sequel, From Fear Set Free, Sahgal did write, and as early as 1962, but continued with her deliberated silence, and kept unease in personal relationships and family feuds totally off limits, as revealed later on in her non-fictional prose writings. The second autobiography advances rhythmically in a chronologically linear movement interspersed with backward reminiscent swings - the effortless back and forth movement is a stylistic recourse binding the narrator's nostalgia to the nation's post-colonial present. The sketchiness and the terse wit of the previous autobiographical attempt is complemented by the wholesome body and bulk of the second effort, erasing some of the ambivalent impressions regarding attitudes and personalities, while maintaining a status quo on the portrayal of inner self.

In the fifteen years of independence (1947-1962), with the Gandhian phenomenon losing relevance in the face of the unforeseen Chinese aggression, Sahgal re-invokes the deeply assimilated Gandhian influence and brings into focus "the most fearlessly active force at the disposal of mankind as an expression of the poetry hidden in the individual." In the midst of changing political values and ideological contradictions she reinforces the
hypnotic Gandhian charisma which unified India’s multi-layered social diversity around the concept of human dignity, equality, secularism and democracy: “To the multitudes he had been India, and he alone had stirred her to the depths of her being as no Indian before him had done,” (39). Lamenting the partition of India and reasoning out that “if the race theory in all its pitiful illogic had surprisingly, become the foundation of a new nation, just as distressing was the apparent speed with which thirty years of training in non-violence had dissolved like silver in a corroding chemical” (32). Her mellowed prose, with intimacy and insight, compels the skeptical surging nation towards fidelity to abandoned concepts of Gandhi’s political mysticism.

“Our deep rooted identification with India was attributable more to Mamu than the fact that we were ourselves Indians—thus remembers the author, her inspirational third parent—the pragmatic, romantic, national icon, Jawaharlal Nehru (22). An image of the dauntless realistic hero coping with the deluge of problems freedom had brought has been lastingly etched out (38). Her description of a glimpse of the Prime Minister’s residence, on her return from America in 1947, helps gauge the limitless task in the aftermath of the partition which plagued the country’s freedom: “In the garden I could see a huddle of tents set up to shelter the refugees who straggled in. Lights were on in the small reception office downstairs. It was crowded with people. Relay of typists and stenographers worked uninterrupted. Upstairs in Mamu’s office the light would burn till late at night. In the morning the look of scant sleep would be on his face, contact with (masses), transcended fatigue and discouragement, kindled a lambent optimism” (28). Nehru’s personal loneliness, callously demanding routine, humility and greatness find inclusion in this otherwise guarded narrative when Sahgal recalls: “Sometimes I had run ahead of him to his room to switch on a light before he entered it, so that a friendly glow would wait him but he mostly walked into
an empty dark room and had no personal foibles and made no demands on the people around him(140).

There is a sense of the fresh off-shoots of *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, getting transformed into a dense growth, with the mature prose intricately elaborating the skeletal sapling and adding new inevitable dimensions of growth, experience and associations - a few auras have been blurred and a few enigmas unraveled in this representation of personal uncertainties and post-colonial adjustments. The earlier idealized, carefully deliberated delineations of her parents, Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, are now treated with comparatively relaxed, realistic touches, enlivening them into the uniqueness of their beings. With unprecedented frankness Sahgal writes about her mother's spiritual serenity in public and changeable temperament in private life: she was embroiled in a hectic daily activity serrated with flashes of temper and laden with an almost unceasing aura of crisis which would be either exciting or exhausting for everybody around her(15). The description of her maiden flight to America, when she boarded the plane at Karachi in 1944, which she noted with alarm had bucket seats and pilots who looked like school boys and considered abandoning the whole incredible scheme for a moment, but instead, invoked from jail memory the sight of a solitary plane from overhead [that] had symbolized freedom captures the very essence of her bold, optimistic personality (14). Revolutionizing the concept of motherhood from a hysterically doting image of affection to an unusually pragmatic, spatially distant yet concerned, reservoir of strength, she displayed remarkable adaptability and gamely adjusted to the demands of service under Mahatma Gandhi, and matured into a woman who grasped the challenge in a forthright, almost masculine way(15). These perceptive personal insights mark the transformation in the author's style from juvenile brilliance to confident craftsmanship.
The tender exalted memory of her father, Ranjit Pandit, is enriched and expanded with family narrations of his European sojourns, his education in London and Heidelberg, his patronizing *green fingers* and his penchant for Indian and World languages. One of the best known Sanskrit scholars he had been approached by the Oxford University Press to compile a book of Sanskrit verse before his untimely death in 1944; he was well-versed with numerous languages like English, French, German, Polish, Italian, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and Sanskrit, to mention the ones referred to in the book. *Traveling with Papa had its trials* writes Sahgal, considering the interventions of the fascinating men and women of different nationalities he could pause and discourse with (176). Sahgal’s unsuspecting, healthy attitude towards gender is engendered by her father’s unbiased views, and in relation to the ancient law-giver, Manu, she writes: *My father, a historian and scholar, was willing to give him due credit, but he disagreed with Manu on some vital points, preferring the Vedic concept of woman, when the wife had been her husband’s equal in the home and the state* (51).

Reporting the London literary fest 2010, Shyam Bhatia wrote: *Sahgal revealed that Churchill had apologized for [her] father’s treatment in Bareilly jail to her mother in 1955* (Twin Dynasties). Till date the writer has retained the freshness of the warm relationship with her father. Overall there is a naturalness and comparative ease in the depiction of personal relationships in the text with the exception of her interactions with her husband, Gautam Sahgal.

Ironically the book is dedicated to Gautam Sahgal. There is an under-current of tension and uncertainty in the marital relationship which never surfaces; nevertheless, it creates ripples of unease. The author’s impatience and reservations about the constant search for a house in the initial years of marriage is symbolic of a shaky, shifty foundation of the relationship. The prescient anxiety of the narrator before entering wedlock foreshadows the imminent difficulties as she contemplates: *I had lived on the fringes of political activity at*
Anand Bhawané From the smallest detail to the overall picture, it would be strangeé from the atmosphere of political crusade to one of the commerceô(81). The couplesôtrip to America in 1949 for the birth of their daughter, Nonita, is totally tension ridden in its conception as well as execution. At the very outset, the author mediates between her American friend, Max, and Gautam, for ãGautam and Max met and disagreed from the first spoonful of vichyssoise at the Plazaôand Sahgal continued ãinwardly puzzling over the many unavoidable difficulties that cropped up when one was half a couple and not first an individualô(109). There was a difference of opinion on art and culture and Gautam showed ãdisappointing tendencyôtowards male companionship rather than any ôdesire for togethernessôand says Sahgal with a slight: ôHe enjoyed going to Sugar Ray Robinsonôô barô(117). It is not possible for the reader to overlook the fact that the fulfilling, interactive space in the marriage is mostly occupied with the inconsequential description of the availability, belligerence and romance of the domestic help that was engaged by the couple. Remaining aloof and suggestive, the author struggles to give a facade of normalcy to the marriage, without a mention of the internal trouble brewing between them.

The entire text operates and advances through a forceful thrust on juxtaposition and contrast of situations, times, traditions, places, races, families and economies. The contrasting colonial and post-colonial scenarios; the fulfillment of independence and the bloody deprivation of the partition; the growing cynicism towards the efficacy of the Gandhian thought and the realistic urgency of the multifariousness of nation-building; Kanpur where ôsugar and textiles took the place of people and market phraseology of conversationôand Allahabad ôwhere people know not the difference between five rupees and ten except that if you had ten you invited more people for dinnerô(83,87); Motilal Nehru, ôneither abstemious nor austere, a frank admirer of the Britishô ôwhose retinue was no second to a princeôand in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Massacre, the Motilal Nehru who ôbecame an
uncompromising rebel, a lawyer turned law-breaker, the wealthy epicure in cotton-spun yarn, one of Gandhi’s most stalwart satyagrahis (10,101); American officials, forthcoming with their insatiable hunger for statistics and passion for detail and their British counterparts who in their social snobbery learnt nothing about India, except what the minimum association with Indians taught them (108,85); the Sahgals, whose home in pre-partition Lahore had the best linen, glass and wine that frequent visits to Europe could provide and the Nehru-Pandits, who in support of the Swadeshi movement made bonfires of foreign good and used only indigenous products. The list of these keenly experienced dichotomous observations is unending and creates a fiction-like tension in the autobiography. The author understands this dichotomy as an echoing resonance of the clash of the opposing currents of the past and present and its inevitable intervention in her life:

   A part of me, deeply enmeshed in a political consciousness, strained every nerve in automatic response to what went on in India. This part was emotionally involved with India’s future, and belonged to my uncle’s home at this moment. The other part struggled to pull free and build a life as near normal as possible for myself. Long after I was married the tug of war continued. (47)

   Much as Prison and Chocolate Cake finds a mellifluous unwinding, continuity and expansion in the literary space of this sequel, it is also an inexhaustible reservoir of characters, situations, locations, settings and much more of the voluminous fiction Sahgal went on to create. Within the autobiographical canvas can be spotted the fascinating network of a travelogue, touching destinations abroad and in India - the writer takes a de tour down memory lane to the hill resort, Mussorie and then, Darjeeling where she had visited to meet the invincible Sherpa, Tenzing, who had recently conquered Mt. Everest; through the diplomatic missions of her mother, Sahgal uniquely experienced the magnificent cities of
Moscow, London, Washington and New York and back home she followed the trails of her personal destiny to Delhi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Bombay, Chandigarh and Srinagar. The repertory of idiosyncratic characters ranges from a vast variety of domestic help in her household and embassy set-ups and other inimitable acquaintances: Hem massi in Lucknow who was piquant as an anchovy after a dose of syrup; the Delhite, Bunty, nicknamed Harrow-on-the-Hoogly; Mr. Gill, the caretaker in Lucknow, the well-dressed Adam in his own Eden; Govind Ram, a Kashimiri Cook from Allahabad and Etienne, a Cordon Blue Chef in the Indian embassy in Washington, who called each other Monsieur Govind Ram and Etienne Sahib; Vyasji, in Allahabad, the self-appointed helper-in-chief - there are enough discoveries in her diverse experiences to be molded and re-defined as fictional characters in the course of her literary career.

The inversion in the twisted title of the book "From Fear Set Free", taken from The Bacchae of Euripides quoted by Nehru in The Discovery of India (22), gives the impression of releasing the trajectory of freedom in the author's life but the text itself is clueless about the fears. On a visit to the eastern Himalayas in October 1950, Sahgal writes about the celebrated view of Kanchenjunga with its five snow covered peaks: There was ferocity about even the shining daytime grandeur of Kanchenjunga, a terror about her midnight moonlit view. Kanchenjunga was a witch... Only the unsuspecting were hopelessly bewitched. And again the silent admission of the mountain as being monstrous and menacing, a plague and a torment make the reader ponder on these allegorical subconscious outpourings of the knotted self. All the fears of the unknown took possession of me writes Sahgal, deviating from her usual realistic, unambiguous manner. This recourse to allusion and prosopopoeia or personification, totally atypical of Sahgal's style is perhaps the defictionalizing moment of the literary construction. It is rather odd and incongruous with the, by and large-in-control image of the protagonist otherwise revealed in the text.
Undoubtedly, there is a mysterious, unadmitted fear gnawing at the inner being of the author which finds textual resolution in Nehru’s words to the author, metaphorically spoken in relation to the courage of two women in the tribal jungles of Ecuador, when they were dining alone at the PM residence one night:

Mamu quietly affirms that it is possible to do many things once fear has been shed. I am struck, as he speaks, by the word shed. Not conquered, not overcome, and merely discarded like a restricting garment so that the body can breathe unimpeded. (236)

With an assimilated and well internalized use of the language, infused with candour, abounding in irony and humour, the narrative, on the whole, makes archival gains from the amalgamated personality of the writer with an upmost political lineage, mature political acumen, rare sensitivity, artistic inclination, a western logic with eastern instincts and the duality of a modern woman’s consciousness. The stylistic abruptness caused by the restrictive manner of handling autobiographical material in the first attempt gives way to a synchronized crystalline cadence of prose in the second. Reflecting on the cultural gains from American education Sahgal writes: “Although I was quiet and reserved I must have absorbed some of their uninhibited naturalness (54) and then, in relation to a childhood face-off with Miss Hutchinson, the British school teacher, when asked to wipe off the intransigence from her face, she psychoanalyses her defense: that precious but perishable thing, a sense of identity was in danger. Intuitively I protected it. The different look was the answer. I went through the first years of school with that armour, leaving the real me behind at home. (198). Blending the “armour-ishness adopted early-on in her colonial experience with the “naturalness of the American way of life, the writer excels in description simultaneously holding back the fears plaguing her mind. It must be admitted that in the grooming of the Indian reader on the multifarious political, linguistic, diplomatic, bureaucratic, cultural and historic aspects of the
Indian experience, the influence of this memorable account is fathomless and will continue to remain so.

*Relationship: Extracts from a Correspondence* (1944) is a collection of excerpts taken from the thousands of letters, avidly written to each other by Nayantara Sahgal and E N Mangat Rai between February 1964 and December 1967, giving rise to an honest, passionate, intellectual and *subversive* relationship. Referring to the frequency and bulk of this *record correspondence* Mangat Rai lightly comments, *I rather think we would beat the Brownings*, and again of the sheer efficacy, commitment and compulsive engagement of this hoary tradition he writes, *I am afraid I may continue to write the occasional letter to you even if you were right there with me* (181). Published twenty-seven years after the actual exchange, the love-letters were intended as *a celebration of the relationship they brought to birth* (ix) between two married adults, who grew into an inextricable *We* that *gave the encounter a terrifying strength and compulsion which neither letter-writer alone possessed* (vi).

Initiated as a process of truthful sharing of intimate thoughts and experience, Sahgal recalls the potent beginning of the correspondence and the sight of the first envelope she received: *I knew at once all the possibilities that might grow from it* (238). An amalgamation of the romantic idealism, daily routine, passionate nostalgia, practical hurdles, clandestine plans, their respective marriages, social gossip and inventions, and much more, the correspondence essentially remains the unveiling of the *faith and belief and confidence* (156) between two intellectual lovers. What startles the reader is the glaring contrast in the presentation of some of the factual realities, between the previously published autobiographies, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free* and the letters in *Relationship*, published after a temporal gap of about three decades. The unsavory incidents, bitter prejudices and intra-family incompatibilities of the Nehru-Sahgal families
chronologically belonging to the autobiographies, the period before 1962, are either skipped, understated or camouflaged in the self-narratives but find truthful and naked expression in the epistolary form of *Relationship*.

While Sahgal displays comparative modernity in defending an affectionate photograph with the Hollywood actor, Danny Kaye, clicked in 1946 against the narrow-minded remarks of some "well-intentioned people back home" in *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, her almost contemporaneous involvement with a European artist and the subsequent sexual encounter, in the same trip to America, finds no mention in the book. Her husband, Gautam Sahgal's hunting expeditions, guzzling bouts and camaraderie, and his mercenary inclinations are subtly slighted in *From Fear Set Free* but the suffocation in the marriage, Gautam's promiscuous behavior and relationship of 1958 and her own fascination in 1959 for a man named Kjeld find a mention only the personal space of the letters. Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi's extremely condescending attitude towards her cousin, mentioned in one of the letters, when she received the author with a "Yes?" in the tone of someone conducting an interview that was not in the schedule which "thoroughly extinguished" Sahgal, was not a freak moody incident of the arrogance of Gandhi, but a manifestation of deep-rooted prejudice in action kept totally under wraps in the autobiographies(236). Unwilling to be victimized by the withholding tendencies of his beloved, Mangat Rai, in the initial stages of the correspondence, urges her to write a kind of *personal* autobiography for him: "You enjoy writing so why not start an autobiography for me, for I like to know you..."(19). Maybe the subsequent letters to Rai were less guarded and a more forthcoming expression of Sahgal's actual self.

Re-read in continuation with the self-narratives, *Relationship* arouses shocking disbelief, almost paralytic to previous critical interpretations raising the curtain on the dismal, tumultuous, unstable domestic domain of Sahgal with its kernel moral differences,
intellectual aspirations, communication crises, emotional turmoil, passionate illicit relationships, economic considerations, physical abuse and literary engagements. It falls like a thunderbolt on the analytic constructions elicited from the autobiographical-memos, instantly dismantling the structures of opinion, which have to be gradually rebuilt after deliberating over possible reasons for these dissimilar pictures of personal existence, one blurry, the other refreshingly clear. An apt rationalization comes from Sahgal herself in the introduction to this publication as she writes, “letters are more personal and more revealing especially of the immediacy of the raw emotion than perhaps any other form of writing, written as they are with complete confidence of privacy” (v). Supplementing the previous works with the correspondence, is in itself an admission by the author of the initial autobiographical inhibitions she could not overcome and an evidence of the writer’s unstoppable literary growth and maturity.

Re-looking into the causes of the metamorphosis of the autobiographies, in the aftermath of Relationship, into literary constructs with semi-authorial self, symptomatic of public documentation, it is rewarding for the reader to take into consideration the writer’s political lineage, with its fabled influence abroad as well as in India. The awareness of her unique destiny as belonging to a historic role-model family, firmly embedded in her consciousness, haunted and guided Sahgal as a (self) writer almost till her cousin, Indira Gandhi, came to power in 1966, and many a times it upset the balance of truthful solidarity between the reader/writer. Wary of identifying completely with the reader she narrates from a subtly raised pedestal carrying the invisible cross of the responsibilities of familial reputation, historical considerations and political realities. As a result of this reticence the autobiographical memories are masculine in their thematic grip, have a pragmatism and objectivity whereas the letters are comparatively subjective, intensely private outpouring, laying bare the inner map of the thought process of the letter-writers. Frank Moraes, editor-
in-chief, *Indian Express*, remarked about Sahgal in 1966: “I think you are a rare woman because you feel with your mind—a trait usually accepted as typically masculine (170). So, as a member of the Nehru clan and a bearer of the collective and inherited political history, she exercised, without falsification, discreet selectivity in the material of her reminiscences in her life-writings.

Considering Sahgal’s two autobiographical works in the light of *Relationship*, Ranjana Harish, re-visited the works through the gynocentric filter of gender and argued that the real self has been eroded in order to win acceptance in a patriarchal climate and traces Sahgal’s silence on controversial personal issues to socially unacceptable aspects of female life, diminishing a publicly successful self which may threaten male culture, evading events which may lead to controversy (167-171). The feminist reading can be re-interrogated to build up reasons more plausible in the slightly unusual case of Sahgal. Nurtured in the paternal warmth of liberal humanists and male feminists in the person of her father, Ranjit Pandit, and maternal uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru; having extensively traveled Europe, Russia and America; having enjoyed the privileges of American college education, the unchallenged freedom of a self-arranged marriage, a high-end social circle, elitist evening get-togethers, financially cushioned household, a well-nourished literary talent, Sahgal’s world was not of misery or deprivation by conventional standards. What was unfortunately missing was the compatibility between two individuals tied in wedlock. Pearl S. Buck the famous writer, intrigued by Sahgal, thus, wrote to her mother: “No one thing or person will satisfy her complexity; she cannot be happy with simplicity; do hasten to get her married, even if later she changes her mind! She will need more than marriage anyway (48). Sahgal lived up to this prophecy and began by advocating the case of an unmarried couple living together for some months every year because [the lady’s] husband agreed to it and everyone concerned had accepted the situation at a dinner party in 1964 (43). Paradoxically, she wanted this
streak of liberalism to operate at all levels of proximity within the confines of marriage and was not keen on divorce. Reflecting on her illicit bonding with Rai, she wrote to him in 1965:

I wonder sometimes if I am corrupt, and you too, and everyone else is right. Perhaps what we do í this higher morality as you call it - is a terrible thing Ê last night Gautam said with a violent determination that I would never get from him the sort of freedom I wantedô(73).

Resisting the limitations and boundaries of marital space, she could not comprehend the reasons of Gautamôs possessiveness and penned in one of the letters: ÊAnd yet men have lived and cherished women whom other men have wanted, and had. Men have stood by unfaithful wives, even dreadful wivesô(206). Sahgal clearly demarcates between the claustrphobic middle-class morality and her own ôhigher moralityô in the introduction to Relationship: ÔHusbands have respected their wivesôseparate identities through marital crises and conflicts, including affairs open and covert. Wives have exercised varying levels of freedom with no destruction to their marriage or themselves, and in this respect the village culture has shown far more tolerance than that of the more rigid urban middle classô(viii).

It is rather unlikely that it was her victimization as a woman in the institution of marriage and other patriarchal set ups that made the author ôthe criminal in the dockô(87) and ôa bird caged too longô(22) and quite probable that conflicting ethical convictions leading to incompatibility, at the given point of time, caused the marital discord and suffering. The tracing of the reasons for the evasion of ôselfô in the autobiographical works of Sahgal to the manifestations of ôsuppressed selfô in an unhappy marriage by the feminist critique is contradictory to the strength, confidence and individualism, characteristic of the author right from childhood, and much daringly in her later life.

In an interesting critique of the epistolary, Suchitra Mathur understands the text to be a ôdeliberate subversion of the nationalistic paradigm and its monolithic ôIndian womanô corollaryô and suggests that ôwomanô was constantly re-fashioned as the embodiment of
Indian identity through the \(\text{hegemonic discourse of nationalism} \) in the nineteenth century and the \(\text{nationalistic ideology is primarily written on the body of a woman} \) The argument is primarily based on Partha Chatterjee's premise that the Indians, in the surge of the nationalistic consciousness, could represent the history of their lives only by incorporating it into the narrative of the nation. According to Mathur, the text, in its bold stance, represents the need for re-evaluating the gender politics of the past, and reads it as a \(\text{betrayal of both nationhood and womanhood} \) which is also the thrust of the \(\text{fourth wave Indian feminism} \) and applauds Sahgal for having broken patriarchal shackles(46-54).

While the critique is dot on for highlighting the significance of reclaiming culturally prohibited public space for the raw feministic expression of personal correspondence by Sahgal, the natural inference of the autobiographical writing minding the parameters of nationalism chartered in Chatterjee's discourse, has been overstretched to project the victimization of the Indian woman into the construct of the nation-state. On the contrary, the era of nationalism empowered the woman more rapidly than her Western counterpart and the vanguards of the feminist movement in anti-colonial India were mostly men. Besides, the autobiography has not been the exclusive genre of the marginalized gender as projected in the critique. Initially crediting the correspondence to have deconstructed the traditional notion of womanhood, Mathur goes on to paradoxically state that the \(\text{feminist alliance is not made prescriptive} \) and is not the primary aim of the book(51). The argument also gets blurred as the critique ends as a complete anti-thesis of the proposition it started with \(\text{the afterword by the male co-author, Mangat Rai, is interpreted as thwarting the feministic stance and the critic wraps up the essay with the definitive comment:} \) The afterword reminds the reader of the dominant framework, the public forum of the literary marketplace that continues to be defined by patriarchal nationalist discourses(54). What is not mentioned is the five
appendixes in the form of political articles, androgynously authored, that follow the afterword in the harmonious collection.

It can be concluded that as a member of the Nehru family, which symbolized the natural aspirations and political convictions of a large number of Indians, the author consciously weighed the exigencies of public life and systematically constructed a homogenized thematic stability by hiding the unsavory personal details and evading the core self in her life-writing. The autobiographies and letters are not totally corroborative and constitutive but they are not mutually exclusive on most humane issues and universal concerns.

II

Gandhi, Nehru, Sahgal

Nehru venerated Gandhi. The two men differed in temperament and attitudes to modernity. Beyond the differences were some fundamental similarities. Both were patriots in the most inclusive sense, who identified with all of India, rather than with a particular caste, language, region, or religion. Both abhorred violence and strongly preferred democratic forms of government to dictatorship.

(Ramachandra Guha, Makers of Modern India)

For Sahgal, who opened her writing account with two autobiographical works and has to her credit a significant contribution to the first-rate corpus of political and historical fiction by a woman writer in India, it is not only inevitable but also creatively natural to let some autobiographical content flow into her firmly grounded realistic fiction. Sahgal’s political writings, which supplement her fiction, include her cousin’s political biography Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power, A Voice for Freedom and a collection of essays called Point of View. Her first-hand account of the independence struggle is put forth in her historical work,
The Freedom Movement in India. In addition, the writer undertook the onerous familial task of editing Jawaharlal Nehru’s letters to his sister, published under the title Before Freedom and has recently written a hagiography, focusing on Nehru’s visionary politics titled Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing a Savage World. It is essential to trace the patterns of the inflow of the novelist’s subliminal political and historical thought process into her fiction and to analyze the nuances of the ideological content emerging from a historically informed literary imagination.

Given the backdrop of a significant political event in all the nine novels of Sahgal; her historically and politically nourished genealogy, upbringing, education and literary calling, it is almost mandatory for any kind of critical response to her works to touch upon, even if tangentially, the autobiographical element in her fiction. Shyamala A. Narayan has followed the author’s real life interventions into her literary sensibilities and painstakingly traced the fictional representation of political/ bureaucratic personages correspondingly to Jawaharlal Nehru, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Pratap Singh Cairo, Mangat Rai, V.K. Krishna Menon et al. in her essay “The Autobiographical Element in Nayantara Sahgal’s Fiction”. She draws stark similarities between houses and cities, situations and relationships as depicted in the autobiographies and then, respectively in her fiction (16). The factual overlappings have also remained the focus of feminist critiques undertaken in the recent decades. Anna Guttman analyses the use of the metaphor of family for nation in Sahgal’s Rich Like Us and Lesser Breed and also states that the fictional family is evocative of the mythologization of Sahgal’s own family and of the challenges this poses to her as, both, a writer and an individual in attempting to understand them (101). To a large extent research papers have focused on drawing parallels between or juxtaposing the fictional and non-fictional works of Sahgal, and also her other overlapping post-colonial historical accounts, to decode the entwinement of the personal and political in her imagination, which is rather thinly guised in
her first five novels. The need is to move further on and unravel the cultural, political and ideological undercurrents that have seeped into her fictional constructs from the intimate autobiographical engagement and outpourings.

The recent critical developments related to patriarchal monopolization of the disciplines of History and Autobiography shed light on the early forays made by Sahgal into the hitherto, almost unexplored territory by women writers. Authenticity, subjective objectivity and the creative impulse of ordering material involved in the writing of History and Autobiography, have conventionally been associated with gender - the unwritten norms of both disciplines were formulated by androcentric assumptions. Male consciousness and experience enjoyed far more literary legitimacy in the disciplines than the "limited vision" of the women writers. Both disciplines, till the previous century, accepted and promoted masculine experience, skill, vision and judgment (Anderson 102-104). Keeping in mind the literary gender prejudices, and ideological content of the self-writing, help in understanding the motivation behind the ground-breaking efforts of Sahgal in the field.

With authority and complete naturalness, basking in the confidence provided by her neutral upbringing, unintercepted by gender politics, Sahgal ventured into the masculine domain of writing, underpinning the central premise of her literary creativity: a thrust on humanitarian values that overrode boundaries of gender, class, race, language, culture and territory. Critics attempted to write off Sahgal's bold and potentially firm initiative into these hegemonized literary arenas by condescendingly attributing to her the title of "chronicler of India's first family" forgetting that Sahgal's literary and feminist sensibilities were spruced by pragmatism, spontaneity and courage rather than opportunism, theoretical contemplations, or the ugly nihilism of the distraught. Without dissociating from the historical realities of her experience, Sahgal has rebutted such charges by the kaleidoscopic range of her intense fiction.
Sahgal’s writings have opened up the question of the feminine as a challenge to the phallic or masculine position of authority in these disciplines. The exclusive claim of male writers on ́Íin the autobiographical field, and superior architectural arrangement of the matters of the past in historiography, sound hallow after a critical examination of Sahgal’s archival inputs into these hitherto monopolized genres. Linda Anderson understands the diversification of literary empowerment as the opening up of possibilities of political intervention with far-reaching consequences, and optimistically observes that the deconstruction of it [autobiography] as a genre which privileged a white masculine subject gave way, as part of the same movement of diversification to a sense of its potential or use as political strategy by the new social groups (103). Rather than putting autobiography, after her initial two attempts, to the radical use of speaking for self and beyond, as suggested by Anderson, Sahgal diversified from it to political/historical writing, journalism and the compelling impulse of fiction. The autobiographical self, quite impossible to disentangle from a novelist’s consciousness, continued to inform her fiction - Julia Swindells, keeping in view the decentered universe of texts argues that the autobiographical self is not invented ex nihilo but constructed by calling on the representations that are historically available and which may include fictional ones (qtd. in Anderson 104).

The confluence of fiction, history and autobiography in Sahgal’s imagination makes her writing an irreplaceable strand in the country’s artistic narrative. Speaking at the India Today conclave in 2010, Salman Rushdie emphasized the historic dimension of art, and defined it as work which for future generations will tell the story of what our time was like. The artist is the people’s ambassador to the future. Remaining open to public scrutiny at all times, a work of art provokes debate and discussion urging society to move ahead with a clear understanding of itself. Sahgal as a storyteller, firmly grounded in history, has to a large extent conscientiously fulfilled her moral obligation to progeny.
As mentioned earlier, Sahgal’s last four novels, *Rich Like Us, Plans for Departure, Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds* stand apart as skilled, well-synthesized, imaginative transmutations of the finely blended autobiographical resource material. Her first four barely camouflaged, but fast-paced, attempts in the genre, *A Time to Be Happy, This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh* and *A Day in Shadow* read like gripping regionalized tales showing early signs of thematic seriousness, still waiting to transcend the aches of personal disillusionment of her eventful life. Her in-between-text, *A Situation in New Delhi*, marks the transformational phase in her creative evolution and stands as a bridge between her visibly subjective fiction on one side and her impeccably unified award-winning narrations on the other.

Two powerful influences stand out like lighthouses, guiding the moral vision of the author. These pervasive forces, nostalgically alluded to by significant characters in her fiction, happen to be embodiments of a crucial phase of modern Indian history. They are Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, affectionately adopted by the psyche of most Indians by conferring on them paternal endearments of “bapu” and “chacha” respectively. Having grown up in the lap of history, with a personal attachment to these visionary leaders, Sahgal, far from squandering her ideological wealth, guarded it through thick and thin, and crystallized it in her remarkable prose. Her fictional interface, in the deep recesses of her creative mind, with impressions of the towering figures of her life, is of special interest as the two leaders have maintained their lead role as political icons in the last century or so.

About her first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi at Anand Bhawan, Allahabad, at the age of four, Sahgal recalls in *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, innocently blurting out, “But he’s ugly” to which Gandhi responded by gleefully laughing, affectionately patting her cheek and hoping she would always remain as honest (26). As she grew up in the personalized, interactive era of Gandhian idealism, her fertile impressionable mind gravitated towards a
spiritually inclined nationalism attainable through self-realization. This early
autobiographical account conveys a clear sense of the contemporaneous growth of the
writer’s generation, the children of Gandhi, with that of Indian nationalism. It was a
battery, charged with Gandhi’s empirical amalgamated approach to politics, colonialism,
religion, economy and social structures as Sahgal recounts:

Our growing up was India’s growing up into political maturity - a different
kind of political maturity from any that the world had seen before, based on an
ideology inspired by self-sacrifice, compassion and peace. (20)

Salman Rushdie has explored the possibilities of the same metaphor through magical
realism in his modern classic Midnight’s Children but with a pronounced post-colonial
setting. The euphoric enchantment and engagement with the phenomena of Gandhi comes as
a luminous contrast to the anti-politician zeitgeist in the contemporary Indian consciousness.
The oxymoronic title of the effusive account Prison and Chocolate Cake spells out the
commitment in politics in that era the semantic sweetness of the cake is juxtaposed to the
dreariness of the prisons, and it was that became a compelling desire for the aroused
nation. An overall view of Sahgal’s writings reveals landmark events of political history to be
the ethical binding strand.

Setting a new agenda for critical studies, by appropriating Gandhi into the emergence
of postcolonial thought, Ashis Nandy, in his provocative work, The Intimate Enemy,
describes him as a transcultural protest against the hyper-masculine world view of
colonialism (48). He elaborates the Gandhian psychology of resistance where one
burrowed from the very culture that was being resisted (Nayar 29). Gandhi was deeply
influenced by Western thinkers and acknowledged his ideological debt to John Ruskin, Leo
Tolstoy, Henry Maine and H D Thoreau. The Mahatma evolved his strategy by remaining
receptive to the greatness of other thinkers as has been aptly commented: "Tolstoy’s love for force and Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience was, in fact, the base of Gandhi’s successful passive resistance movement" (Sharma 5). Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation of the Bhagwad Gita as the The Song Celestial and his The Light of Asia along with the Sermon of the Mount in the New Testament influenced Gandhi’s practical idealism, his sophisticated ethical sensitivity and what Nandy calls his “political and psychological shrewdness” (41). This foundational moral awareness helped him formulate a transnational political methodology acceptable to the national consciousness of the colonizer and the colonized alike. His “being a living symbol of the other west” (Nandy 40) cutting across racial, social and religious barriers, galvanized the entire Nehru clan including Sahgal, into the demanding poetics of nationalism - their complete transformation from Anglicized elitism to Gandhian asceticism made them national icons of high invisibility in the gaze of the nation.

The entire fiction of the author bears the ethical impact of the Gandhian thought as an empowering influence and some texts have towering characters like Kailas in This Time of Morning and Kishori Lal in Rich Like Us, religiously living up to the Gandhian ideals of life. Sahgal has assimilated her encounter with Gandhian dynamism as a liberating force against injustice, too universal in prevalence, to be contained within the narrow confines of nationalism, political agendas or cultural boundaries. She evocatively invokes the consummate artistry of his moral sophistication in From Fear Set Free:

The task Mahatma Gandhi undertook was to express the poetry hidden in the individual. The human being he maintained, cleansed of fear and thus of hate, whose energies could be turned to non-violent resistance to evil in every sphere of activity - national and international, social or domestic was the need of the hour, any hour ,any era, any country of the world. (5)
Sahgal advocates this melodious mix of contemporary political issues with fathomless spirituality as exemplified by Gandhi’s lived reality. For emphasis the writer quotes Gandhi’s arousing, blended thought: “The outward freedom that we attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment” (6). Sahgal’s literary inputs have added to Gandhi’s concerted effort to make India a free abode of civilization and she strives hard through her fiction, to transform the political animal to a political human and waits hopefully for this arrival.

Differentiating between undiluted anticolonial politics, with the sole aim of political freedom, from the psycho-spiritual politics of Gandhi which created the new concept of a “fearless people” out of sprawling intricately woven multi-layers of privilege, wealth and education (16), Sahgal credits the rooted, penetrative approach of Gandhi and honestly raises a dynastically directed question: “Could Nanuji [Motilal Nehru] or any other man have led the people in all the ways Gandhi did, beginning not with the struggle, concerned not with the goal but with the people themselves?” (102)

A remarkable aspect of the multi-dimensional political sainthood is the courage and conviction of Gandhi’s engagement with the volatile practice of untouchability, in an effort to emancipate the downtrodden from the age-old psychological stigma. Sahgal acknowledges Gandhi’s compassionate addressal of this socially divisive dictate, and understands his vanguarding the cleaning of latrines as an act of infinite compassion that had the effect of dynamite on rock, setting the country’s social conscience ablaze against untouchability (226). Gandhi’s adoption of a persona symbolizing austerity and self-dependence - his wearing just a loin cloth - berated by his critics as moral exhibitionism, was a visual connection with the deprived masses. Sahgal eulogizes his perspicacious intellect for adopting this symbolic equalizer as “no single fact had done more to re-orient the thinking of an entire nation than Gandhi’s semi-nakedness” (40). Her comment freezes the euphoric seize
of the nation’s imagination by Gandhi’s well-intentioned sartorial transformation and enigmatic magnetism.

The seepage of autobiographical impressions into her creative world has resulted in politics with conscience becoming the leitmotif of the oeuvre. Ardent Gandhians of the pre-independence era, Kailas and Prakash Shukla in This Time of Morning, become senile old fools, back numbers finished, forgotten, an old nuisance, old fossils, meddlesome fools, crusading zealots and so on, in the lexicon of degenerate politicians, harbouring lamentable raw ambition, shoddy values and an impatience with the ideology of renunciation (84-86). Kailas’ retrospective stream of consciousness about Gandhi’s keen political and social understanding of the Indian way of life at a high level meeting is, sadly, incongruous with the direction and policies of the new creed surrounding him, eyeing him with malevolence. He recollects:

[Gandhi] had been a pilgrim whose passion for truth had burst the bonds of religion, refused the confines of sainthood and had spilled over instead into the mainstream of daily life flowing into field and farm and factory. He had been no saint who stood aloof from the world’s struggles. He had been a human being - a man among men who had demonstrated, as men did from time to time, the glory and grandeur of human effort. (84)

Kalyan Sinha, Advisor on foreign affairs to the Union Government in the novel, symbolizes the new brood of politicians, basking in the new found freedom, quick to relieve themselves of all moral encumbrances with sarcastic declarations: Haloes went out with the Mahatma. (88)

The confrontations of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in South Africa (the laboratory of Gandhism) with the colonial regime, and the trajectory of his dramatic metamorphosis into a non-violent revolutionary, are organically incorporated into the novel. The pathos in the
story runs through Kailas's nostalgia about his association with Gandhi and the political sea, matchless in high tide for excitement and risk (180). Going through his voluminous notes, his mind is flooded with photo-sharp memories of having watched a revolution take shape and mature, a vivid new way of looking at tragedy and translating it into courageous effort (181). Recounting the episode by episode evolution of Gandhi's philosophy of revolution, free of rancour and retaliation he yearns for the bygone era of selfless, visionary leadership (183). Criticism from a small quarter, expostulating against these sprinklings of history in Sahgal’s fiction as a show of scholarship, totally ignores the intensity of the writer’s long and intimate involvement with history, the passionately laid out historical framework for fiction and her commitment to the literary preservation of Indian realities for posterity.

The Gandhi verses Marx debate, a lateral variation of the twentieth century East-West ideological confrontation, has surfaced in the significant texts, Mistaken Identity and Rich Like Us. Regarding the silence and selectivity of the Western academia, Promod K. Nayar notes that the most revolutionary participant of anti-colonial struggles, Mahatma Gandhi, is curiously not often cited or appropriated by postcolonial theorists. His notion of self-rule and non-violent resistance, his critique of capitalist modernity and the campaigns against caste are crucial modes that radically altered the politics of India’s anti-colonial struggle (29). By institutionalizing, Frantz Fanon, the Algerian revolutionary as a foundational inspiration, the western-packaged theory strangely gives the, by far politically forceful, sub-continental Gandhian wave a slip. Having researched the gaps in postcolonialism, Nayar traces them to the politics of ideology; he sites Robert Young’s observation of the postcolonial theory’s commitment to Marxism not sitting well with Gandhi’s spiritualism as the probable cause of the lapse (29). It is indeed remarkable that the cerebral characters in Sahgal’s novels discussed these issues much early on and, in a manner, prognosticated the
stark lacunae in the academic theory. Behind this penchant for clever characterization, is the writer's rare intellectual sensitivity and alertness to the worked-into-life philosophical formulations of the Capitalism, Marxism and Gandhism that have chartered the course of mankind.

The writer's fictional alter ego, Sonali, in *Rich Like Us*, in a recollective swing into the youthful era of her effervescent undergraduate days in Oxford, delves into the debate at length. It was a rapturous, exuberant slice of life for Sonali and Ravi Kachru, childhood friends, now fellow-Oxfordians and lovers; they were enthralled by the fresh flush of European schools of thought - the insoluble intangibles laid out for inspection, as pristinely pure and glitteringly fresh as if generations had not handled them already and wouldn't in future.(19) While Sonali admits responding to the siren song of Marxism and being reduced by its power packed ravishing turn of phrase (expropriate the ex-proprietors) she asserts, mine was no romance with Marxism, Ravi's was.(121). Skeptical about the Marxist sequence that would change mankind(121) Sonali negates any proletarian surge in India towards the Communist Party after it had cooked its goose by supporting the British war effort in the II World War, rather than the Quit India Movement:

The first trade union in the textile industry had been the work of Mahatma Gandhi and he kept throwing a spanner in the works of the proletarian uprising by just being around. My life is my message he told a reporter requesting one, and since egalite has to be lived not talked about, the message had come across loud and clear. Even with him dead and gone long since, the revolution has got itself preserved in pickle and it was no good expecting the true red voices to tell us why By comparison Gandhi's non-violence had worked like a streak of forked lightning. (122)
Sonali goes on to express her disapproval of the doctrinaire approach of Marxism, its regimentation and methodology of "crack[ing] the whip and lick[ing] them into shape" and metaphorically carries the arguments to the private space of her room where she felt well and happy with a little disorder around, an insurance that [we] were human beings, not sardines (122-23).

Sonali’s spirited interrogation of the indisputable academic norm of Europe being the center of universe and the Bible and Marx having the last word on mankind contains the seeds of avant-garde, home-spun postcolonial thought, in this novel conceptualized in the 1970s. Her juxtaposition of the efficacy of the Gandhian thought against the incongruous super-imposition of Western constructs on the Indian consciousness in this dialogue with Ravi, by now a radical Marxist, is truly a precursor to any theorized subversion of the Western ideological hegemony:

Wasn’t it time after all these centuries to produce a thought of our own and wasn’t that what Gandhi had done, pack off an empire with an antique idea instead of an atom bomb? And half naked in his middle-class middle-caste skin he had taken human rights a hundred years ahead in two decades without a glimmer of class war. (125)

Ravi scoffs at this mystiqued elevation and eroding the veneer of originality, unjustifiably assigns to Gandhi, an oppositional role in the one and only theoretical battlefield available to the Marxists, with his retort: "God’s gift to the Capitalists, if ever there was one, to make sure there’d be no revolution for the next thousand years" (125). When Ravi, later, shockingly throws all commitment to the winds and becomes a firm bureaucratic pillar of the Emergency regime, the writer makes a point about the ephemeral fascination of the human mind with Marxism. Sonali, specifically in the face of crisis during Emergency, and generally as a way of life, adheres in principle to a realistic concern for actual conscience-pricking
images of injustice, giving a scratchy inner lining of anxiety. Though she is not averse to being aware of the Marxist possibilities in our heads like grand symphonic harmonies, so that we never fall into somnambulism again, it is the Gandhian vision she prefers (123).

In her essay, "Some Thoughts on the Puzzle of Identity," Sahgal implores capitalists and communists towards flexibility rather than fixation, and attributes economic failure in systems across the globe to parochialism: what has failed is the capacity of these two western gospels to understand and make room for each other and profit by an intelligent combination of the two (90). One can say with certainty that through the iconic figure of Gandhi, the most indulged fakir of the Orient who struck an awesome balance between his ideas and his actions, Indian philosophy had come of its own to meet the twentieth century challenges.

Gandhi's Salt Satyagrah serves as an ignition point to some of the core episodes in Sahgal's mordantly witty novel Mistaken Identity. Primarily the story of Bhushan Singh, a young scion of a north Indian principality, falsely implicated in a case of sedition by the British government like the other older jail inmates, it turns out to be an extremely involving kaleidoscopic view of the bonhomie between passionate unsung heroes of the Indian freedom struggle. The jail becomes a microcosm of the diverse participation in the marathon independence movement. When the Salt March prisoners are brought to jail, including half a dozen half-grown school boys a baritone rings across the yard at night:

With dear old Gandhi
We'll all march to Dandhi… (98)

Slogan shouting at the warder, as a show of solidarity, becomes a collective ritual with Mahatma Gandhi ki jai being the most popular slogan with all but the leftists. In the midst of the blood-curdling, soul-stirring sequence of events that ensued from the whipping of the satyagrahi boy tied to a tripod, Bhushan Singh observes that the comrades who were
lukewarm about the Gandhi slogan, join in for solidarity sake and introduce one of their own
\[ \text{ Victory to the peasants and workers} \] which the yard boys take up lustily\( ^{99} \). He reflects
over the bickering between the Gandhian, Bhaiji, and the comrades, and remembers that the
subject the Marxist loved to snort about was Gandhi:

The comrades make him sound like a comma in the middle of a sentence
which would read a hell of a lot faster without it. If he had called off the last
civil disobedience agitation just because it turned violent his party would be in
better shape \( \bullet \) what else could you expect of a Machiavellian Utopian? \( ^{69} \)

The friction between Gandhi’s fundamentally moral, non-violent methodology of inching
towards social egalitarianism, and the ignited radicalism of communism aiming for almost
the same goals, remains an important aspect of the conflictual bedrock of Sahgal’s fiction.

The Postcolonial Theory is one of the first critical introductions to map in Gandhian
thought as a “closely aligned elaboration of postcolonial self-recovery” (Leela Gandhi 18).
Analysing Gandhi’s psychological resistance to colonialism, ironically lacking in loud
nationalistic overtones, wary of party politics, the critic writes about his preference for a
more decentralized polity closer to the needs and aspirations of the vast and
unacknowledged mass of Indian peasantry (19). In Point of View, Sahgal gives a first-hand
account of the ubiquitous reach of his leadership amongst the masses and the political
empowerment that resulted:

It was not a revolution according to the book but it was a people’s movement
cutting across class barriers. It wrought in its way fundamental change for it
brought the average Indian into the political reckoning for the first time in
history. \( ^{119} \)

On a closer analysis, in certain overtones and undertones of Sahgal’s fiction, some of
the idiosyncrasies of the Gandhian thought are playfully treated. Sexual abstinence and non-
industrialization, Gandhi’s emphasized ideals, are significant areas of difference in opinion between Sahgal and her moral mentor. His vegetarianism—an extreme modality of *Ahimsa*, his quirky experiments with alternative medicine, the question of the *veshya* (*fallen sisters*), the celibacy vows and the famous fasts have been ironically treated in *Mistaken Identity*. For example, Bhaiji, the memorably characterized Gandhian, dreams of an independent India of *vegetarian capitalists and rural handicrafts* and the gems of his thought are related to the *Vedic span and the precious fluid* for he expounds that *man* reproductive fluid (as he calls it) can be saved up to regenerate his body and brain and extend his life beyond the normal hundred years (70).

Her historical inclinations clash with Gandhi’s unconscious ahistoricity. In his polemic relating to the theory and practice of non-violence, Gandhi confines his views on the discipline to a force that thrives on disruption as he enunciates: *History, as we know it, is a record of the wars of the world*. History, then, is a record of an interruption of the course of nature (Guha 152-53). In another deviation from Gandhism, Sahgal who was undoubtedly captivated by Gandhi’s anachronistic religio-political vocabulary, did not endorse his faith in creative cultural purity. Attempting to demythify the superiority of the Western civilization Gandhi wrote in *Hind Swaraj*: *We brought the English and we keep them. Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible? Your hatred against them ought to be transferred to their civilization* (66). Gandhi’s idiom of isolated creative cultural autonomy with a categorical disavowal of the cultural experience of hybridity does not augur well with Sahgal’s multiculturalism, endorsed as an inevitable outcome of cultural fluidity. Probably Gandhi’s compulsions as a multi-faceted leader of the masses, who had to harness the energy and imagination of an anguished nation, were far too complicated and urgent than Sahgal’s commitment to her readers. The latter could deliberate on the issues of identity and history without political imperatives, considering the functional
difference between narrative fiction and revolutionary politics. It is possible that political exigencies compelled Gandhi to underplay the gains from his Western education as well as the hybridity of his experience.

Sahgal remains handcuffed to history and cultural plurality, a little at variance with Gandhi’s obsession with futuristic concerns. Emphasizing the deterministic impact of events on human experience Sahgal wrote in *Point of View*: “though I use a political backdrop or event - since these happen to be the outer focal points that trigger my imagination I prefer to think of my fiction as having a sense of history...” (97). Sahgal seems to have balanced the divergent cultural inputs into her consciousness, while Gandhi, a captain in crucial times, conveyed a deliberated impatience and cynicism towards the Western heritage. Basking in her multicultural identity she writes:

> As an Indian, I am a mix of cultures and confluences of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, of east and west. The interplay of a variety of historical and educational factors in my upbringing should perhaps have torn me apart... curiously enough they have had the opposite effect. I have learned to make the most of my cultural confusion and to regard it as a blessing not a curse. (91)

Sahgal does not go all the way to religiously spin the indigenous wheel of civilizational plentitude yet the moral fabric of her novels is woven out of the Gandhian ethos. The phenomenon of Gandhi was passed on to her impressionable mind as an heirloom in the Anand Bhawan, symbolizing family values, commitment and strength. Debjani Ganguly, has affirmed the relevance of the Chaplinesque political style for its language of nonviolent relationality in the public domain of moral internationalism, based on the notion of compassion for and connectivity with strangers, the language of soul-force based on truth and love (4), in her recent work, *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality*. Sahgal’s
Gandhi is not re-invented but presented in the original; the young protégé had prudently gauged his timeless relevance.

Gandhi chose Nehru as his heir amongst the other leaders who identified with his ideas far more closely than him. Nandy explains the phenomenon in terms of a winsome attitude towards “dissent,” in an evocative response to the legend in *Speaking of Gandhi’s Death*: “there was a tacit awareness that in Nehru’s world there was a greater scope for dissent; it is that idea of open-mindedness which I would consider a more crucial factor in the choice of Nehru, not his ideology” (35). Sahgal has reiterated the benefits of disagreement and healthy criticism in all her novels. It is the wholesomeness of the ideas of Gandhi and Nehru that energizes her works.

The preliminary influence that facilitated Sahgal’s earnest reception of the Gandhian thought, other than her grandfather, Motilal Nehru, was her maternal uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru. After serving in the Inquiry Commission of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, he strove for the independence of India being planned under the Gandhian meta-narrative. On return to India, after education in England, young Nehru was re-aligned to his country by Gandhi and he acknowledges the magical impact and wizardry of Gandhi when he writes, “Always we had the feeling that while we might be more logical, Gandhiji knew India far better than we did. If we could convince him, we felt that we could also convert the masses” (*Autobiography* 71). Nehru recollects how Gandhi’s proposals, before he assumed the leadership of the freedom struggle, were sometimes not approved by the concerned committees but he “argued his way to their acceptance and subsequent events showed the wisdom of his advice. Faith in his political insight grew in me” (48). Further on, Nehru’s factual description of “Gandhiji” betrays his deep reverence for his political mentor, although there were vital issues on which they disagreed: “He was humble but also clear cut
and hard as diamond, pleasant and soft-spoken but inflexible and terribly earnest. His eyes were mild and deep yet, out of them blazed out a fierce energy and determination. (51).

Nehru, regarded Gandhi as his political father and Sahgal, cherishes her familial closeness to Nehru by referring to him as her third parent - the personal attachment amongst the three is further strengthened by their ideological bonding for humanitarian causes and high political ideals. Richard Cronin, in a comparative study, Imagining India, has critically analyzed the autobiographies of Nehru and Gandhi, preferring Nehru's introspective realistic approach to Gandhi's intuitive one. A little impatient with Nehru for confusing Gandhi and India, taking one for the other, even Cronin, grudgingly concedes the inevitable euphoria created by the Gandhian phenomenon, by finally endorsing Nehru's scarcely conscious belief that Gandhi's leadership was secured by something more mysterious than his political effectiveness and concludes by saying, To consult Gandhi's wishes was to practise a primitive, magical democracy. (132). On the basis of his study Cronin concludes that Gandhi and Nehru are different in their approach to the issue of self-discovery - while Gandhi is evasive and dramatic, Nehru is reflective and realistic. The fact remains that Nehru learnt his lessons in politics by completely immersing himself in the Gandhian phenomenology, had impeccable faith in the efficacy of his strategy, and was often overwhelmed by it, as Richard Lannoy, in his voluminous account of the Salt Satyagrah, The Speaking Tree, writes:

Gandhi was arrested after midnight sleeping under a tree in camp near Dandi and sent to jail. On his release eight months later he concluded the Gandhi-Irwin pact, after which the government abandoned its repressive measures and released political prisoners. This was the occasion when . . . Nehru wept. (400-401)
In addition to her keen intellectual, political and feminine sensibilities, Sahgal’s literary work is a relishable blend of the Gandhian social morality and Nehruvian well-intentioned rationale. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, in *The Scope of Happiness* quotes from a letter of her husband, Ranjit Pandit, written from the barrack he was sharing with Nehru in Naini Jail: “If you had not known him and perceived so truly his greatness, you could hardly believe any man was capable of so much goodness, gentleness and cheerfulness as Bhai…” (98-99). A perusal of the epistolary collection, *Before Freedom*, edited by Sahgal, lays bare the deep involvement of Nehru in the upbringing of his nieces and his detailed advice to his sister regarding matters concerning the somewhat westernized education of Sahgal and her sister in the US. Sahgal calls her three parents “child-oriented and educators by instinct” and writes in the same collection, “Jawaharlal had taken a direct hand in Indira’s education with his books, *Letters from a Father to His Daughter* and *Glimpses of World History* and these later became fascinating reading for us, much younger children” (230).

The privilege of Sahgal’s experience is in having Nehru, in addition to her erudite father and energetic multi-faceted mother, as her parent/teacher/maternal uncle and undeniably she has done justice, through her illuminating writing, to this privileged opportunity of growing up in a world of progressive ideas. The writer has also inherited from the distinguished trio some aspects of her literary talent, eloquence in language, a strong desire for freedom and a sense of justice in the dispensation of power. In another mention of her triple parenting she recollects:

There was not a trace or aura of command about Jawaharlal, Ranjit or Nan and not one of them spoke to us children in a voice raised in anger. They were democrats to the marrow, taking no decision concerning us without first holding a family conference presided over by the youngest member. This recognition of individual freedom and equality at a tender age left us free to
grow identities of our own within the nurturing bond of a strong family identity. (230)

Other than through her genealogical ties, it was as an individual with strong cultural anchorage and political inclination that she related to Nehru, the national titan of the freedom struggle and thereafter. Nehru’s example had Ŧfired the imagination of his devoted niece and she valued as a treasured lesson in patriotism an oft quoted thought from Nehru’s speech: ŦWhere ever in this wild world goes an Indian there goes a piece of India with him. In her longing and inability to be with Nehru, in the last days of his fatal illness, hard pressed with the incompatibilities in her marriage and the upbringing of her children, mentioned in Relationship, evoke pathos for this deeply valued relationship. On his death in 1964, Sahgal shared her desolation with Mangat Rai in one of the letters:

For years I have dreaded this event and since last January I have tried to steel myself to accept the possibility. How little I have succeeded is apparent to me now. I have never been as passionately devoted to anyone as I was to him. He was a rare and wonderful human being. There will not be another like him in a thousand years Ŧ I know that I shall miss him till I die Ŧ (4)

In the parlance of the literary/cultural theory, Nehru, is the perfect embodiment of the postcolonial ethos in India. He symbolizes the shining optimism, historical achievement and cultural confusion in the aftermath of colonialism and without any pretensions to cultural purity or superiority, admits to the spiritual bewilderness created by the multi-cultural experience in, An Autobiography:

I have become a queer mixture of East and West out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called Western than Eastern, but India clings to me, as she does to all her children, in innumerable ways Ŧ I am a stranger and alien in the West. I
cannot be of it. But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile

feeling. (617)

Sahgal grew up in this ambience of acceptance of hybridity in the Nehru household and transformed it into a celebration in her literature. Nehru’s legendary narration of postcoloniality, his At the stroke of midnight speech on August 14, 1947 (Leela Gandhi 6), released the trajectory of new India optimism, which unfortunately hit the wall in a crippled state in 1975, when Emergency Rule was declared in India against all expectations of the independence stalwarts. Rushdie captured the waning shades of post-colonial hopes in his postcolonial text Midnight’s Children and Sahgal has preserved the same for posterity in her polemic Rich Like Us. The latter is largely a portrayal of the disenchanted brand Gandhi-Nehru Indian, seeking refuge in the recesses of nostalgia, while the center stage is usurped by politicians and their cronies, in a tearing hurry to pursue and achieve selfish motives, all along, making a pretentious symbolic use of the iconic colossuses of the freedom movement to camouflage their political ravages. It is a conscience-smiling lament on the near extinction of the dignified, principled and visionary species of leadership which had the courage to subsume their personal ambitions in the interest of the nation. It creates a picture of the crumbling nation painstakingly built with team work and laments that the democracy of Pandit Nehru was in deep trouble (169). India awoke to life and freedom and the passionate, untiring effort of building India under the Nehruvian vision took off, as Sonali’s father, an accomplished retired bureaucrat reflects:

We were not guilty of Hiroshima, Nagasaki or sending Jews in cattle cars to gas ovens, of the past others were trying to forget and we joined ours seamlessly to the present it was a time when irresistible forces and immovable objects curtsied politely to each other and stepped aside to let enormous changes to take place without a sound. Zamindari was abolished
and cultivators became land owners. Maharajas with nothing to rule became businessmen, diplomats and politicians and everything from soap and fertilizers to refrigerators, bicycles, radios and cars became Indian É everything under the sun became Indian, including millionaires (187-188).

The writer satirically unveils the superficial understanding of the Nehruvian ethos, with the middle-class over-awed merely with his lineage, background and manner ï there being incessant third-gimlet talk at the Gymkhana club about the jail-birds who ruled the countryô(184). The rage for rememberingô soon took over, with none to follow his principled path but all vying to offer lip-service to the nation-builder: ôWhat a man, what character, what integrity, what ability, what democracy! What refinement such as never-before seen! Wishful memory sprouted forests of antennae. Relationships, anecdotes, encounters with Panditji popped up like jack-in-the-boxesô(184). The background of the novel, the ignominious Emergency Rule, is a clear statement on the damage done to the Nehruvian legacy by none other than his daughter, Indira Gandhi, by unleashing a political tsunami on its virgin lands of freedom, paralyzing democratic institutions, spawning parasitic trends in the corridors of power, sounding the death-knell of any remains of Nehruvian optimism.

A Situation in New Delhi, Sahgalô averagely rated novel, with a symbolically apocalyptic beginning ôShivraj is deadô is visibly, a literary edifice constructed in the memory of her beloved parent/uncle/leader. Shivraj, the recently departed prime-minister of India in the book, is quite unambiguously Jawaharlal Nehru. Shyamala A Narayan, in a critical brief of Sahgalô fiction, voices the oft-sensed response to the writerô early novels:

A Situation in New Delhi presents the Indian capital faced with the After-Nehru-Who question; established politicians have given up all moral values and the frustrated youth are becoming Naxalitesô Some of her characters are...
easily recognizable public figures: Shivraj (Jawaharlal Nehru) is an example.

(Nayantara)

The intensely subjective circumstances of the novel may have become deterrents in the objective stance of the artist, nevertheless, the characterization is not incongruous with the habit of sticking scrupulously to the people she knows intimately, creating a fiction out of her autobiography.

Ironically, in the opening pages of the novel, John Drexel, a British publisher, deliberates over Michael Calvert’s (Shivraj’s close associate) proposal of writing a biography of Shivraj, whom he dearly loved: ‘Assessment and objectivity were in his opinion, confused by personal knowledge and attachment’ (7). He goes on to reason out and resolve the dilemma in his own mind, before giving the final nod to Michael: ‘This excess of grief, this emotional upheaval he was obviously caught in, was an assurance that he wouldn’t, this was part of the process that would narrow down to the clear stream of judgment when the time came to write’ (9). This could be interpreted as Sahgal’s fictional assurance to the readers that the political backdrop of this national tragedy in the novel is a structural homage paid to a great leader who was of all humanity, who had risen much above the confines of bloodline family after the arousal of his political consciousness and later, his arrival as a neat national figure. It can be argued that Nehru was too towering a political figure to successfully carry off a fictional guise - it is much more convincing to write about Nehru as Nehru or Panditji as Sahgal did in Rich Like Us, than as the fictional Shivraj.

Sahgal’s portrayal of Shivraj, is a blend of her personal awe-inspired affection, and the immense political inspiration she drew from him as an exemplary national leader. Michael Calvert, yields up insights from his associations with the departed leader: Shivraj had been a political animal, but a man with interests, too, from the earth’s crust to astronomy; with friends not just followers; It would have been a pity to confine him to a political
platform, hung with an ideology. The trademark realistic prose of the writer meanders into the gentle flow of poetry when Devi, his sister, remembers that Shivraj was both rest and excitement, new and familiar, longing and fulfillment and for her, the way men would be aeons hence, when the planet evolved a finer breed. Sunil Khilnani understands Nehru to have been deeply influenced by Tagore’s combination of cosmic spiritualism, practical reasoning and his pagan belief in life-spirit and perhaps he embodied the virtues to aptness. Quite clearly, Nehru’s faith in democratic values, his scientific temper, a lucid prose-style, celebration of life, commitment to social justice, pride in a pluralistic society and abhorrence of fundamentalism, left a deep impression on Sahgal and he has been the key inspirational force behind her writing.

Nehru and Gandhi, remarkably individualistic in matters of policy, and life itself, but drawn to each other in the interest of India’s freedom and progress, remain the consistent underlying strength of Sahgal’s fiction. Her personal ties with both iconic leaders helped her experience the enthralling spell of the nation’s significant period of history and enriched her imagination to create a fictional corpus that gravitates the reader towards high, value-based political and social ideals. As fiction often carries the unconscious echo of the creators’ predicament (Naipaul 519), Sahgal’s fiction is sourced by Indian history and post-colonial politics, the two main strands of her autobiography.