Chapter II

Through the Prism of Theory

Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance.

(Paul de man, Resistance to Theory)

The dogged resistance to theory which galvanized the academia into a heightened sense of intellectual responsibility, engaging it in a hurry and flurry of critical responses now seems passé. With all the skepticism that it arouses, its paradoxes and ever mutating paradigms, its highly specialized mandarin prose, theory has inadvertently penetrated all levels of human experience, be it intimate choice and personal space, social interactions and behavioral patterns, internet and information, media and management, nature and environment, and politics and economy. Its referential and analytical, path-breaking, potential in the fiercely debated areas of race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, genetic engineering, warfare etc. has irretrievably changed, and is still in the process of, changing human thought - dismantling among other culturally and politically constructed paradigms, the looming large edifice of the "superior white European male. The complete blurring of margins between the traditional subject areas of Literature, Philosophy, Political Science, History, Geography, Economics, Sociology and Psychology leading to an inter-disciplinary malleability, had much earlier on lent accepted norms and conventions redundant. This has given theory all the room for its fluxities, instabilities and dispassionate observations, totally in consonance with and capable of, highlighting the manifestations of contemporary change and chaos happening at a disconcerting rate. Disregarding the choice of opting out of theory, Browning, Halchi and Webster emphasize that the constant changeability in the swelling inter-disciplinary field is comprehendible only through the prism of theory: One of the positive
aspects of recent decades has been the acknowledgement that theory cannot be ignored by denying its presence (that denial is just another form of [naïve] theorizing) (3).

It is indeed problematic to keep in step with the deluge of conceptual productions in the \textit{academic} marketplace under late capitalism (as Frederic Jameson puts it); nor is it possible for these theoretical visions to keep in containment the equally profuse technocentric social eruptions of our times with any definitive resolutions. The \textit{after} of every freshly churned out theory is as simultaneous as its \textit{launch}, as mutations and interpolations are waiting in the wing to take over and give it a new meaning, the seminality of which further awaits an addition of new dimensions, and thus the process of the philosophical complexities of the age goes on. In spite of the outcry about theory being apolitical, deracinated and abstract, it remains the buzz-word in the literary academies. Off late, its social off-shoots like the reflexive modernization theory, the rational choice theory, the complexity theory, communitarianism and the like, have gained currency and influence, and are hands-on trying to handle the challenges of the complicated unexpected change. At the outset, this section outlines relevant aspects of \textit{deconstruction}, for the simple reason that it is irrefutably an ideological umbrella under which all positively informed interrogative forces thrive and find their terms of reference. It is followed by a brief survey of the time tested tenets of new historicism, postcolonialism and cultural materialism which will help analyze the historical, political and cultural aspects of Sahgal\textit{'}s fiction through new perspectives.

Sahgal\textit{'}s fictional, non-fictional and autobiographical works have been critically studied and analyzed from the feminist, psychoanalytic and political point of view, mostly within the broad framework of humanistic criticism, missing out on the \textit{empire writes back} nuances and \textit{white mythological} breakdowns in her \textit{oeuvre}. The postcolonial approach, with a lot of indigenous cultural inputs, has been applied in a limited manner in some of the feminist critiques of her works. This research project seeks to re-interpret her critically
acclaimed novels in the light of rapid and radical conceptual developments in the field of academic, literary and cultural studies mentioned above.

As it is clear that the recent trends in postcolonialism(s), new historicism and cultural materialism have been essentially founded on the not-so-recent theoretical concepts that have trickled down from post-structuralism, and now, inform and illuminate some of the crucial issues addressed by these discourses. The mysticism of deconstruction generally marks their tonality and functions as the determinant of much of their present nature and content. These theoretical insights have been eclectically applied to bear on the re-reading of Sahgal’s significant texts. The objective is to arrive at a new set of meanings by decoding the post-colonial historical/political realities and ideological undercurrents in the heightened aesthetic outpourings of the texts, and re-placing them within contemporary influences on human thought without being skeptical of historical renderings or derivative in theoretical analysis.

In this era of concept subversion, philosophical adventurism and intellectual amateurism, inherently reactionary to prevalent versions of thought, each critical swing finds its terms of reference in the preceding and contemporary formulations of literary and cultural theory. Surficially opposed to western ideologies and the great canons of ‘myth-making’, postcolonial theory and practice ‘intersect’ in several ways with recent European intellectual movements, such as post-structuralism and post-modernism, and also with, contemporary Marxist criticism and feminism. While tracing the postcolonial connection and its theoretical fallouts in Sahgal’s thematically political fiction, the cornerstone concepts of postcolonialism such as nationalism, trans-nationalism, identity, race, language, ethnicity, hybridity, marginality and ‘otherness’ have critically energized the perspective. In addition valuable gains have been made in historical/cultural meanings from a new historicist/cultural materialist examination of the texts.
An eclectic theoretical project cannot be envisaged without the interventions of the influential principles of deconstruction which have shaken the hinges of the conventional critical process. The visible overlappings of the critical segments of these insights into post-structuralism, marked by the oppositional reading of texts, by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text (Johnson 5), have made this re-interpretative endeavour engrossing. The attempt is to delve into the narrative depth of Sahgal’s storytelling to emerge with a clear understanding of the gravity of her purposefulness in the historical/political representations of the modern/postmodern Indian society, and to bring out the relativity of truth, the ambiguities and contradictions in the texts, if any, which may have been subconsciously authored by Sahgal as a product of her past experiences and ideological positioning. Focusing primarily on the conceptual bearings of deconstruction, new historicism and postcolonialism on the author’s fiction, relevant aspects of the contemporary narrative and cultural theory will be the research methodology of this project which envisages re-locating the semantic terrain of interpretations in the light of these developments and changes.

Outlining the core epistemologies of deconstruction becomes paramount to any theoretical examination of literary texts due to its emphasis on cracking down on hegemonic structures, centralization and dominant positions, which further inspire most resistance movements, of action and thought, in present times. Barbara Johnson put it quite bluntly in her stimulating treatise, The Wake of Deconstruction: what is commonly referred to as theory is a combination of structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, philosophy, poetics and cultural materialism but often theory refers primarily to deconstruction (79). Delving into the paradox of the all-pervasive influence of deconstruction, with an inherent self-effacing resistance to being a theory above theories, Johnson cautions with her reflective remark: Deconstruction is not at its best in a dominant position it needs those
discrepancies it analyzes in order for its analytical activity to arrive at an insight producing stance. But if deconstruction is setting the terms for what is to be analyzed next, then, it is collapsing the room it needs to breathe in (102-103). Till justice and equality become an accepted norm and a global reality, any prediction of the death of deconstruction seems farfetched. Since political equality, justice, asymmetrical application of power and multicultural proliferations, intellectually informed by deconstruction, are Sahgal’s primary thematic concerns, imperativeness of post-structuralism to the study needs no emphasis.

Post-structuralism, part continuation of and part rebellion against structuralism, is an intellectual movement that has moved away from the historical development of language towards a relational meanings of words, challenging the broad generalizations and humanistic interpretation of texts by arguing that any piece of writing, any signifying system has no origin, that authors merely inhabit pre-existing structures (langue) that enable them to make any particular parole. It continues to remain the force ma jeure, propelling all theoretical schools of thought towards a questioning mode of understanding reality and seeking justice. The Derridian decentered universe with no intellectual reference points, no stable standards by which to measure any idea or thought, and the Barthian demise of the author, do not per se form the foundational tenets of postcolonialism or of new historicism but the linguistic skepticism created by reading the text against itself by the deconstructionists, in sharp contrast to the reading principles of the liberal humanists, is the ideological umbilical cord joining these approaches to post-structuralism. Arguing in favour of deconstructive, rather than reconstructive reading in his germinal text Of Grammatology, Derrida says, Reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses (158). It is with the aim of reaching these unimaginable, unpredictable lingering meanings in the fictional texts of Sahgal that the study will briefly look into some aspects of deconstruction.
which have promoted a subtle infiltration of the oppositional trends in reading, in all critical practices.

In addition to undermining logocentrism, an intellectual universe of the liberal humanistic thought, with man as the measure of all things, providing norms against which deviations, aberrations, variations could be detected and identified as other and marginal, the other governing manoeuvres of post-structuralism are the concepts of binary opposition and différence. (Barry 67). The structured units of language, group themselves into binary pairs or oppositions placed in some relation to each other, with one part of the pair always assigned a higher moral/cultural value. One of the deconstructive strategies has been the unraveling and eroding of some oppositions which have enjoyed a privileged position in western metaphysics e.g. speech/writing, soul/body, life/death, reason/madness, self/other, male/female. Derrida attempts to show that these constructs represent privileged relationships and each of these oppositions is a violent hierarchy constantly in an internal conflict. One term on either side of the slash has been conventionally subordinated, in gestures that embody a host of religious, social and political valencies (Habib 104). Subverting the privileged position given to speech, Derrida, in Writing and Différence coined the term différence which is central to his thought. Deriving partly from Saussure's concept of différence, where every term is defined by what it is not, by its difference from other terms, Derrida, incorporates into his term an ambivalence in the French word differer which can mean both do differ and do defer, thus, adding a temporal aspect to the notion of meaning (Habib 105). Breaking the binary hierarchies, Derrida has attempted to re-examine the association of speech with life and writing with death, demonstrating that even living speech is based on a split between signifiers and signifieds, on self-difference and deferral (différence) rather than immediacy (Johnson 18).
The most passionately loved and hated of the deconstruction critics, Paul de Man masterfully immortalizes the subversive thrust in the critical discourse in *Resistance to Theory*: “Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance” (19). He argues in favour of a systematic study of rhetoric with attention to the structures of language and cautions against falling into the trap of the received conclusions about a text. Two significant tools related to the methodology of deconstruction, which facilitate this baffling “non-understanding” of a text without suppressing the reader’s own relationship and political reality to it, are *aporia* and *bricolage*. *Aporia* is an irreconcilable, self-contradiction in a text although broadly all paradoxes, shifts/breaks, conflicts, absences/omissions which get into play when the established stable structure is decentered or shaken up are categorized under this heading. *Bricolage* as a reading practice, understands meaning as fluid, slippery and provisional rather than permanent or immutable. In Derridean terms every system or structure must be understood as a construct and the centre is not a fixed eternal truth but an idea to keep everything in place. *Bricolage* provides a way to think without establishing a new centre, a privileged reference and origin or truth. It does not approach a text carrying the baggage of conventional meanings and associations and arrives at new uninformed meanings. It relocates the intellectual tradition in the reader, away from the established politicized canons of thought. Johnson vociferously critiques the immutable truths of the orthodox humanistic canon in her essay, “Double Mourning and the Public Sphere”:

It is as though they are saying that if more than one interpretation is possible, then everything is equally meaningless; if value judgments are open to debate, then they cannot be made; if words sometimes shift in meaning, interpretation becomes fruitless rather than all the more necessary; if analysis is an interminable process of struggle and debate, it is not worth starting. It is as
though thinking, reading, and interpreting are only worth undertaking if we know in advance that we will come to rest in absolute, timeless, universal truth. (26)

Although Derridean arguments have subverted the western mindset and expanded consciousness of the inherent play of language and thought (Guerin 378), opponents attack it for its self-contradiction and also for promoting philosophical nihilism. David Ayers, discussing the problematics of Derridean reception writes in *Literary Theory*: Derrida could be seen as a Zeno figure endlessly producing paradoxes, all based on the same discrepancy of language and reality or as a Sophist constantly referring arguments of truth to the level of rhetoric (137). Deconstruction has been unfavourably labeled as famously obscure, a mess and morally bankrupt by scathing critics; David Lehman goes on to say that today’s politically correct academics come close to embodying a notion of the literary critic as an agent of the thought police (qtd. in Johnson 25).

How can something so long-standingly moribund continue to have so robustly unwelcome a life? questions Johnson in her riveting defense of deconstruction (18). The answer lies in the strength of the mystifications of deconstruction to stimulate human thought to work towards disintegrating unfair hierarchies and in leveling imposing structures of dominance. So, in spite of the substantial criticism of the deconstructive critique on account of its abstractness and hedonistic abandonment of all cultural and historic constructs, it has immense corrective value when applied relevantly for textual analysis. Critics have explored the implications of deconstruction in the context of broader issues of gender, race, psychoanalysis, and feminist and postcolonial concerns. Deconstruction has provided a cautionary stance to the system/text analysis and has had a profound influence on most disciplines. Habib defends its methodology as he writes, its remorseless insistence on exposing the foundations of and assumptions behind important concepts is a strategy that can
be valuably enlisted by many forms of thought which endeavour to scrutinize conventional
ways of thinking (110). The present critique will mind the silences, gaps, shifts in
viewpoints, conflicts, and directly encountering the structures of language, will analyze if the
ambiguities are occasion enough to read the text against itself to bring out the textual sub-
consciousness in Sahgal’s fiction.

The fundamental challenge that the theory of deconstruction posed to the
conventional referential theory of meaning had repercussions on the study of historical
dimensions of literary texts with the rise of new historicism in the last quarter of the twentieth
century. The term “New Historicism” first used in 1982 by Stephen Greenblatt in The Power
of Forms in the English Renaissance, has, in the words of the American critic Louis Adrian
Montrose currently been constituted as a terminological site of intense debate and critique of
multiple appropriations and contestations due to a lack of its coalescence into a systematic
and authoritative paradigm (780). In the same treatise he mentions how some Marxist critics
dubiously assimilate it into their formulations on the grounds that it insists upon the
omnipresence of struggle as the motor of history while others actively indict it for its
evasion of both political commitment and diachronic analysis, while some theorists view it
as a mode of socio-criticism engaged in constructing a theoretically informed, post-
structuralist problematic of historical study, others see it as aligned with a neo-pragmatist
reaction against all forms of High theory (781). Notwithstanding all the piling up of
ambiguities, new historicism with its kernel percepts contains possibilities of new insights
into Sahgal’s historiographic metafictions (to use a term coined by Linda Hutcheon), which
are set within a historical framework and give graphic details of colonial on-goings, factual
description of national heroes like Tilak, Gandhi, Bose, Nehru and others, and realistically
punctuate the history of modern India.
Drawing extensively from the Foucauldian trademark ideas of power/knowledge and at places from the Marxist ideas of Louis Althusser and Mikhail Bakhtin on how ideologies construct subjects, the term has come to define a mode of reading in which a theoretically informed historical attentiveness is substituted for a traditional narrative historicism (Ayers 186). The cultural poetics of this textual practice seeks to unveil the cultural meaning and ideological undercurrents emerging from historical representations in literary texts by applying post-structuralist assumptions and strategies for analysis. The idea is to probe into the author’s social position, points-of-view, motivations, the rhetorical devices and the targeted audience with an aim of re-reading the political ideas conveniently associated with the text – in the case of Sahgal, it is her anticolonial stance, postcolonial politics and feminist leanings.

New historicism as a critical method is based on parallel readings of literary and nonliterary texts in which both are given equal weight and constantly inform and interrogate each other. It is a practice in which non-literary texts/historical documents are not subordinated as contexts but are analyzed in their own right, as co-texts rather than contexts, in an effort to ground the concept of referentiality in a model of a dynamic, unstable, and reciprocal relationship between the discursive and the material (Montrose 777). Frederic Jameson has responded quite offensively to this proposal of an inter-active relationship between the literary text and ideological subtext in his book *The Political Unconscious*:

> The whole paradox of what we have here called subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation of which it is also, at one and the same time a reaction. History is inaccessible to us except in textual form. It can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization. To overemphasize the
active way in which the text reorganizes its subtext as some inert given that the text passively or fantasmatically reflects is surely to produce sheer ideology. (80-81)

Jameson, in this Marxist interpretation, is skeptical of the social and cultural re-reading of history via the symbolic rhetoric and rejects any precedence. The dialectics of a textual precedence of literary texts over conventional narratives of history resulting in repackaging history through perspectives of literary criticism re-problematizes the issue and each attempt at a new historicist critique seems to define its own parameters.

The application and practice of this theory created ripples in the literary circles with its profound revelations. Greenblatt used the juxtaposition technique, at length, for the radical analysis of the Renaissance plays which he points out, are mediations for the consolidation of state power, and are in collusion with the ruthless imperial policies of the European nations. He critiques Shakespearean plays as centrally, repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder as he infers in the analysis that subversiveness is the very product of power and furthers its ends (791). Unlike the critiques of the English Renaissance plays which function as paradigms in new historisist studies, Sahgal’s narratives, in terms of temporality, are not that far removed from the history that they fashion, but these period-specific precedents need not be deterrents for exploring and refiguring the social and material configurations influencing the process of her creativity, which further shaped and still shape the historic realities of present times. A postmodernist text like Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughter-House Five*, according to Christopher Norris, with all the surrealistic contrivances finds inclusivity in the hybrid genre, *historiographic metafictions*, for its scattered, graphic, contemporary eye witness accounts (Browning et. al. 41) in comparison, Sahgal’s texts, replete with realistic renderings, are, by far, more valuable constructs to be dug into for manipulation and ideological manufacturing, if any, by the operating forces of power.
Typically, a new historicist critique places the literary text within the "frame" of a non-literary text and projects itself as a "historicist" rather than a "historical" movement. Balancing the textuality of history, the historicity of texts as suggested in this famous chiastic definition offered by Louis Montrose. He enunciates that literary texts have their cultural specificity and social embedment and the textuality of history is due to its inevitable mediation by historical agents consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement (782). Unlike most history which is textualized after inputs from varied resources, the case of Sahgal becomes specifically worthy of analysis as she is an eye-witness to the significant episodes of the political turn-arounds and an involved participant in the ideological perforations of the last many decades of Indian history, imaginatively conceptualized in her fiction. Re-construing the meaningfulness of her aesthetics through parallel readings will be undertaken in the next chapter which focuses on the historical framework of works. For example, juxtaposing her polemic, *Rich like Us*, with her non-fictional work, *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power*, and other journalistic and fictional publications pertaining to the Emergency Period (1975-1977), the time frame of this text, would be an valuable exercise.

As mentioned earlier, Michael Foucault, the French cultural historian, had a seminal influence on this school of thought by his incisive examination of the methods by which modern civilizations create and control human subjects through institutions such as family, school, hospital, jail, art and culture, and his corroborative scrutiny of power, its execution and propagation. The repressive and coercive face of the state seems benign in comparison to the subtle, all pervasive nature of discursive practices of power structures since they are a reinforcement of the way power is internalized by those whom it dis-empowers, so that it does not have to be constantly enforced externally (Barry 176). Although, the key figure of the school of thought, Stephen Greenblatt, resisting the influence of theory, situates himself
as a "neo-pragmatist" in his essay, "Towards a Poetics of Culture" the essence of the Foucauldian thought pervades most of his critiques - taking recourse to Machiavelli in a subsequent piece, "Invisible Bullets" he writes, "physical compulsion is essential but never sufficient; the survival of the rulers depends upon a supplement of coercive belief." (790).

In his path-breaking treatise, History of Sexuality, Foucault wrote about the all-pervasiveness of power seeping into and controlling even the most intimate areas of personal space: "Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere — simply the over-all-effect that emerges from all these mobilities." (93). He has upset the conventional conceptions of power by explicitly stating that methods of power function not, "by right but by technique, not by law but normalization, not by punishment but by control." (87). He further goes on to negate any binary difference between the ruler and the ruled at the root of power relations and warns against locating power only "in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and decadent forms would emanate." (88).

Since resistance and rebellion, too, according to Foucault, do not emanate from a single individual source, certain pessimism, about individual interventions in historical processes, pervades this approach. Skepticism about the possibilities of individual endeavour in bringing about change, in the face of the problematized post-structuralist perspectives of truth, power, knowledge and language, has evoked a fair amount of criticism. Questions have been raised about the critical practice for it "consistently registers the ineluctable and exhaustive nature of power, the futility of resistance and the inescapable fact of our containment within linguistic and ideological constraints." (Brannigan 8). Analyzing the inescapable Foucauldian structure of power, Habib writes, "A conventional Marxist critique of Foucault would impugn his apparent removal of political agency from the operations of power." (153). Foucault's concession about the co-existence of power and resistance, and his
emphasis on the idea that there is “no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary” (95-96) is founded on the truth that history is the story of lives of the masses, the real agents of change and is a plurality of resistances.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that fluidity, plurality, anonymity and unauthorial elusiveness are basic to the decentered notion of, both, power and resistance. The Foucauldian unfolding of the power construct will find ample reference and application throughout the study. The analysis of colonial/post-colonial reflections of history in the next chapter seeks to gain from the insights of the “historicist” approach, which argues that all social and political discourse, all organizations and institutions, every form of art, including literature, is situated within a historical perspective - the text is an outcome not merely of an isolated creative process, but of the dynamics of various forces in play in that particular “episteme”. The new historicist approach has its uses in literary analysis as “irony” and “ambiguity” have a bad habit of licensing a host of hermeneutic sins (Ryan 161) and a closed literary study may sometimes be misleading.

Cultural materialism, the British counterpart of new historicism, has been briefly discussed for a quick recapitulation of the analogous deconstructive strategies as well as the sharp differences in the remedial approaches of these largely akin movements. The critics of this school of thought, are identified as “cultural materialists” and the best known, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, are editors of the thought provoking collection of essays, *Political Shakespeare*. From Foucault’s “discursive practice” they move on to Raymond Williams’ notion of “Structures of feeling” which refers to the meanings and values which are anti-establishment and also opposed to dominant ideologies in society. They are optimistic about the possibility of change, human interventions into prevalent conditions and the subversive potential of literature as a resistance to dominant ideology. Cultural materialists situate the text in present time and demonstrate how texts perform a material
function within the contemporary power structure. According to Brannigan, the right wing politics of Thatcherism in 1980s Britain, was the context in which cultural materialists revisited interpretations of Shakespeare, Webster, Wordsworth, Dickens and post-war British Literature, launching forth a trajectory of thought provoking critical re-productions (18). These critics mostly re-read news-making canonical works, and their emphasis within Renaissance plays has been undermining Shakespeare as a cultural icon in Britain by interrogating the role of the Royal Shakespeare Company, the film industry, museums, the educational curriculum, book-publishers and the heritage business. All culture, without any label of "high" or the diminutive distinction of "low", is regarded as a field of ideological manufacturing, contestation and opposition, and specific eye-catching strategies are employed by the critics for "reading the way in which contemporary politics and culture preserves, re-presents and remakes the past" (Brannigan 13). Sahgal’s works, both, as products of a historically transitional culture, with its own distinctive survival strategies, and as dissident writings, repudiating the cult response to the momentous change taking place in modern/post-modern India, can be examined using the yardstick of this practice which rips bare, layer by layer, the core motives behind human actions.

Studying the aspects of history, ideology, masculinity and miscegenation in the case of Henry V, Alan Sinfield in her famous book, Faultlines, underlines the fact that ideology is not just a set of ideas but a material practice, woven into the fabric of everyday life. Unequivocally eroding the traditional paradigm of the human being embodying universal truths, the writer shifts to the particularities involved in the formation of subjectivities and thus elaborates:

Ideology is composed of those beliefs, practices and institutions that work to legitimate the social order - especially by the process of representing sectional or class interests as universal ones. This process presupposes that there are
other subordinate cultures that, far from sharing the interests of the dominant one, are in fact exploited by it. This is one reason the dominant tend not only to 'speak for' the subordinate but actively to repress it as well. (113)

So, ideologies need to be vigilantly watched as their sole aim is self-perpetuation. The present re-reading stands to see if the literary texts of Sahgal, sub-consciously swing towards ŭunity, ŭstasis and ŭegitimation of inequality and exploitation, or work towards mobilization of social justice, bearing in mind Sinfield's observation that the construction of ideology is complex - even as it consolidates, it betrays inherent instability.

As is obvious from the title of her discourse, Sinfield envisages the possibility of Ŧaultlines or possible interventions in the apparently invincible circle of power envisioned by the new historicists. Rapping them for getting drawn into Ŧhe Ŧrapping model of ideology and power, whereby even, or especially, maneuvers that seem designed to challenge the system help to maintain it Ŧ Sinfield seems to apprehend a setback to the historical agencies of change in their conceptualization (37). For her it is not an individual consciousness level but his Ŧnvolvement in a milieu, a subculture” which helps him to inhabit an oppositional stance to bring about socio-historical reform, although she concedes that the idea of co-option of resistance by dominant ideology is not specific to new historicism - it is a rather wide-spread intellectual malaise in all the spin off Ŧisms of deconstruction.

To adopt an extremely recent instance, offered by Krishan Kumar in his critique of Benjamin Barber’s concept of an imminent titanic war Ŧ Jihad vs. McWorld, the critic shocks the reader by highlighting Barber views that the forces of jihad are not a throw back to pre-modern times; they are rather a product of Ŧcosmopolitan capitalism and Ŧare not only remembered and retrieved by the enemies of McWorld but imagined and contrived by its friends and proponents. Jihad is not only McWorld’s adversary, it is its child (67). So the
dynamics of opposing forces within socio-economic actualities are complex and cannot easily be torn apart in this intricate relationship involving the hybridization of identity and the unpredictability of human behavior.

The third school of thought conceptually informed by deconstruction, which is immensely relevant to the political aspect of this study, is postcolonialism. Poststructuralism, as a matter of fact, has contributed to the formulation of its critical and political vocabulary and provided it with a set of conceptual tools to challenge the cultural and philosophical legacies of colonialism (McLeod, *Postcolonial Studies* 172). In its kaleidoscopic range of intellectual and political engagements, postcolonialism defies the constraints of a simplistic definition and may loosely be labeled as a condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise as historical agents in an increasingly globalized world (Boehmer 3). The historical period marked by the hyphenated term, post-colonialism with a widely accepted reference to *after-colonialism* remains the nourishing ground for postcolonialism, the ideological discourse, which can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath (Leela Gandhi 4). Keeping its theoretical commitment to subverting discourses supporting colonialism, its new avatar is engaged in a rigorous epistemological and theoretical analysis of texts and a political praxis of resistance to neocolonial conditions (Nayar 17). Taking the argument towards internationalization of literatures, Dharwadker writes that a literary paradigm-shift in post-colonial countries is not the same as the transition from modernism to post-modernism in First World Societies but is part of a wider mondial movement towards a new world order, a rhetoric that has been in circulation since the end of the cold war between Russia and the US (qtd. in Punter 6).

Containing the political, economic and psychological aftermath of the immensely subjugating colonial experience of the Third World countries the continent of Asia,
Africa and Latin America - and the impact of global geopolitics, globalization, and economic shifts within material conditions in Asia and Africa, this critical discourse continues to grow in such diverse directions that each theorist comes up with different perceptions, problems and possibilities. Having become, shorthand for something (fortunately) marginal (Loomba xii), postcolonial representations in the decolonized world include subaltern literatures of women, Africans, Dalits, Creoles, labourers and the cross-cultural experiences of the diaspora. Although there are no originating moments of postcolonialism, the possibilities of its evolution and growth can be traced to its conceptual overlappings on Derridean, Lacanian, Foucauldian and Marxist thought. It is essentially a deconstructionist revelatory practice which comes down heavily on the imperial policies of the colonizing nations and the cultural fall-outs of the subjugation. In the theoretical playground in present times, postcolonial study is the most intellectually charged arena; a forum where the Eastern and Western academia debate the intellectual and political possibilities of equality and the recoveries of lost histories of the subjugated nations; an opening where the diasporic interventions blur all cultural and nationalistic demarcations creating space for the on-going rush of social debate on fluid subjectivities.

In the absence of a founding moment of postcolonialism, Aime Cesaire's *Discours sur le Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong and Chinua Achebe, along with Mahatma Gandhi's dignified anti-colonial resistance, are some of the diverse influences that gave a beginning to the historical genealogy of this critical discourse. In the last quarter of the twentieth century it has built itself as a literary construct around the works of the holy trinity - Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Insights and varied perspectives brought in by Robert Young's *White Mythologies*, Leela Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory*, Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Bart Moore Gilbert's *Postcolonial Theory*, Ania
Loomba’s *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* and Peter Childs and Patrick William’s *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory* have contributed to the burgeoning corpus of specialized writing, transforming it into a discipline in the field of humanities. *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and the works of Benita Parry, Ashis Nandy, Neil Lazarus, John Mcleod, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Harish Trivedi, Aijaz Ahmed, Promod K. Nayar and many others continue to see postcolonialism, in all its transmutations, as deriving inspiration from the anti-colonial struggles of the colonial era. Ranajit Guha’s and Partha Chatterjee’s subversion of historical texts to include “subaltern” representations, and the work of the African-American critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. are vitally linked to the multifarious projects of postcolonialism.

Digging into the crumbling structure of Western knowledge and power relations, postcolonial critics since the 1960s have been preoccupied with sparkling formulations and deconstructive strategies in a field where everything - history, culture, and literature - is “contested” and “contestable.” Cautioning against the misuse of the term “theory” as “a stage of progress” in postcolonial criticism, David Punter understands it to be “a stepping aside - of interest in itself, to be sure, only insofar as it might, at some deferred point, resume its part in a dialectic with ‘practice,’” which is both literary as well as political (8). Without undertaking the impossible task of discussing fresh inputs and postures in the ever-enlarging postcolonial area(s) of study, this section will limit itself to the seminal influence of Edward Said in the academic sphere, to the concrete political arguments and views that he enunciated and to the pragmatism and commitment in literary criticism that he ardently advocated.

Breaking the humanistic myth of literature as a transcendental art and an objective/universal source of knowledge/values in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said emphasizes that texts are “a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components” (53) and therefore need to be carefully analyzed to be socially relevant.
In the same text he lays out his vision of literary criticism that could make a difference: criticism must think of itself as life enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge in the interests of human freedom.(29). The paradox is that Said inadvertently remains the inaugurator of postcolonial theory while he himself viewed the conformist expertise in theory as a withdrawal from social responsibility and a drift towards power and authority.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said has used the *contrapuntal* method of analysis for the writings from the colonial period, across various disciplines, examining the *exclusions* to uncover the designs of the strategy of imperialism. Wary of the wholeness of literary narratives, Said advocates *reactionary reading*, the filling in of gaps and silences, and for an example, juxtaposes slavery to elitist comfort in an apparently non-political novel like Jane Austin’s *Mansfield Park*. Said believes that by doing so he has saved the novel from *trivial* exercises in aesthetic frumpery and much can be achieved if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation to make connections to read what is there and not there, above all to see complementarity and interdependence instead of isolated, venerated or formalized experience that excludes and forbids the hybridizing intrusions of human history (115).

Said’s concept of *Orientalism* wherein he critically examines the myth of power, the race classifications, experiences of cultural exclusion of the colonized peoples, and on the whole, subversively scrutinizes the East-West relationship, is largely inspired by Foucault’s *discursive practice* and theory of power/knowledge and he evinces this explicitly in his discourse on authority:

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status; it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it
dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions and judgements it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed.

(Orientalism 19)

The creation of an exotic, oriental culture, with its separate stereotypical social attitudes, ideologies and practices against which the occidental world could project itself as rational, civilized and superior, by the Eurocentric anthropological studies in the last couple of centuries is not ‘monolithic’, as it has been projected; it is an on-going historical process which now operates with subtlety at policy levels, and the motivation for racial superiority lurks unabated in Western psyche. Said cautions against this discriminatory stance: ‘In quite a constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand’ (7).

We know that Said parted ways with Foucault and moved towards social/political engagements, primarily writing for the cause of a homeland for the Palestinian people, when he understood the possibilities in, and uses of, hegemonies handed down through cultural constructs: ‘We can better understand the persistence and durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers were productive, not unilaterally inhibiting’ (14). Said, the radical commentator and political crusader, looked for remedial interventions, and found Foucauldian thought limiting and anti-revolutionary, and thus envisaging positive alternative articulations to dominant ideology by thinkers, he led from the front and unequivocally stated, ‘Unlike Michael Foucault to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism’ (Orientalism 23).
Said passionately advocates the need for the intellectual to remain connected with political realities, to recover the silenced histories of the marginalized, and constantly strive to "speak truth to power." The "worldliness" and circumstantiality of the text is very crucial as it is concerned with "the" materiality of the text's origin, for this material being is embedded in the very materiality of the matters of which it speaks: dispossession, injustice, marginality, subjection (Aschroft and Ahluwalia 16). In a diagonal opposition to Roland Barthes' concept of textuality, laden with ahistorical perspectives and the demise of individual subjectivities, Said asserts the text's status as "an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency" (World 39). The "locatedness" of intellectual activity of not just the writer, but also the critic, matters to any serious interpretation of a text as Said further elaborates: "No critic or interpreter can be entirely believed if he or she claims to have achieved an Archimedean perspective that is subject neither to history nor to social setting" (Culture 37).

Chapter IV of this research project is, specifically, an attempt at a postcolonial re-reading of the political aspect of Sahgal's novels (in the light of Said's profound intellectual thoughts and contemporary concerns). The writer has herself projected politics to be the primary concern of her writing and recently stated in an address, "the politico-cultural climate provides ample material for art... there are times when art must take sides" (Politics of Literature). But in order to bring to the fore some shibboleths of this theory, a brief analysis, in general, touching upon the postcolonial aspects of her texts, to elucidate the novelist's response to the issues, which are central to postcolonial studies, has been undertaken.

It is by now obvious that postcolonialism defies the confines of exact rendering, marked critical procedures and is now talked of in the plural. As a result of the critical writings that have expanded the post-colonial paradigm to accommodate the contributions of such colonized peoples as native Americans, Chicano/as, Afro-Hispanic and African-
American peoples\(\) (Madsen 2), the term post-colonialism has also been re-defined by stretching the canonical confines of Common\(\)wealth Literature,\(\) to include other transnational conditions of post-coloniality. The diverse histories of colonized countries across the four continents, the revolutionary potential of the various systems of thought that informed its challenging heterogeneity, and its interface with the deeply embedded western ideologies, have kept it in a state of constant erosive fluidity. Due to its vitality and productivity as an enabling, demythifying concept it affects a vast range of issues, with manifold pre-occupations. Inquiring into the dynamism which operates between the novelist and her cultural tethering, the major areas of enquiry in postcolonial studies, such as colonial discourse, nation and nationalism, worldliness, language, genre and hybrid identity, in relation to Sahgal\(\)s fiction, have been briefly discussed in the re-reading of her novels.

Sahgal has closely witnessed the history of subversion and of repression in the 20\(^{th}\) century India, and has been a participant in its postcolonial narrative thereafter. Her fiction, too, works within the framework of colonial/post-colonial socio-political realities. Although her fiction in totality is not, paradigmatic of post-colonial literature, her affiliation, per chance, to both nation and narration is profound and meaningful. In her last four novels - Lesser Breeds, Mistaken Identity, Plans for Departure and Rich Like Us - the haunting memories of the Raj surface up and seek resolution through fictional representation. Mistaken Identity is a tribute to the unsung heroes of the revolution, who were tortured, whose families were hounded and who lined up at the gallows with a thirst for freedom as, Dey, the communist inmate languishing in a mofussil prison, says to the fascinating non-hero Bhusan Singh, I am telling you about them so that when you are old and the struggle is won, and a few survivors are hogging the glory, you will remember the ones who went to their death but never went down in the annals (83). The insights of Homi Bhabha into these attempts at cultural inclusivity by the marginalized people render such narrations as
compulsive step towards self-determination: the act of re-memoration turns the present of narrative enunciation into the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted and for that very reasons becomes the unheimlich space for the negotiation of identity and history (Location of Culture 198). The echoes of subaltern history, too, are clearly audible.

Gandhi today, has been translated into an ideological abstraction it is now, an area of study germinating issues for debate, many of which would be shocking and unimaginable in the pre-independence era, but the Gandhi of Sahgal fiction is a living force, intuitively admired or ideologically hated. Being a child of Gandhi India the subtle undercurrents of Gandhian ideology flow consistently through Sahgal fiction and the diverse responses to Gandhi find ample representation in the texts. Withstanding the bewilderment, mockery and ruthless ridicule of various characters in her novels Mistaken Identity and Lesser Breeds, the Gandhian influence emerges as the stabilizing factor running through inter-personal to international relationships signifying the dynamism it effused in that era. It is being argued in the academia that the initial elaboration of the postcolonial theory can be fully conceptualized only with the inclusion of the phenomenal figure of Mahatma Gandhi, with his psychological resistance to colonial power through Ahimsa and Satyagrah, as a rudimentary influence on its foundational concepts. The instructive influence of Gandhi on postcolonialism can be assessed from his interrogative intervention in Hind Swaraj, Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible? (66). The epitome of the rejection of the Western civilization, under the influence of Gandhi, was exemplified by Sahgal grandfather, the legendary aristocratic patriarch, Motilal Nehru, who adopted Gandhism, in letter and spirit. The family members were committed to rooting out foreign rule and made a personal beginning by giving up their scholarship and their careers at Bar to devote their lives and their resources to the struggle for freedom. Sahgal, who was nourished on the idea of revolt for justice, said of them in a plenary address at Canterbury: They were
so enthralled with organizing for it and being imprisoned for it that I thought going to jail was a career (Point of View 95).

Jail, a symbolic anti-thesis of freedom, is a recurring motif in Sahgal’s work. It is, in fact, the structural mould of her cryptic novel, Mistaken Identity, which traffics in identities of self and nation, and through the limiting confinement of the jail, the story is pushed back into engaging confessions, loaded tributaries and sub-narratives of the inmates. Comrade Dey, in the same novel, exposes beyond doubt, the double standard of the civilizing mission of the British - “the white man’s burden” in an incisive remark to one his fellow-prisoners in jail, “Capitalists have a weird sense of proportion. Hours can be spent in their courts of Law attacking and defending a man who has purloined a pen knife. But sail out and loot a country, bash up the population and make a scavengers’ feast of their remains, and you go down in history as Something the great” (154). Clearly this is a Sahgalian deconstruction of the imperialist agenda metaphorically theorized by Benita Parry as a discourse of triumphalism celebrating gladiatorial skills (35).

Envisaging a significant role for a novelist/journalist, Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities contends that nations are imaginative, cultural constructs and the novel becomes a sort of proxy, for the nation. By lending her realistic prose to the rendition of anti-colonial and socio-political concerns of the nationalist reality and through her journalistic interventions during Emergency and thereafter, Sahgal has amply made her contribution visible to the myth-making of nation building. By looking back to the defining moments of history, in all its manifestations, its travails and turmoil, her novels cement the past and present of its participants to this artifice of the Indian nation. It must be taken into account that the nationalism pervading her novels is more like a cultural bonding between peoples with a shared historical experience, far removed from any racial pride in a superior religio-ethnic identity that has been invoked for political gains in recent times. Sahgal firmly
supports Said as he debunks ‘our culture and country is number one’ kind of catch-words, often exploited by power seekers, and gears her postcolonial stance towards humanitarianism.

Theorizing the idea of post-colonial nationalism, Partha Chatterjee in his influential book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* argues that nationalism itself is a derivative discourse appropriated from the idea of Western nationalism and is symptomatic of neocolonialism. Since the related issues of identity formation, political demarcation, governance, accountability and much more ensues from this critique, it will suffice to say that a sense of historical rootedness with a critical response towards injustice in all political spheres has been the unifying strength of Sahgal’s writing, and the problem of neocolonialism has been addressed in them. Through a fiction, with its inbuilt irony and directness of prose, an anti-fundamentalist stance, a commitment to freedom and rooting for human dignity, the author cautions against the neocolonial instincts of brute political ambition and self-consuming avarice. The suggestive titles of two of her novels *Lesser Breeds* and *Rich Like Us* are a cautionary fictional bridge between exposed colonial practices and the imperceptible neocolonialism of vulgar capitalism. The former is borrowed from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Recessional” which suggested that the lesser breeds were the “new caught sullen devil and half child meant to be tamed and ruled; the latter, *Rich Like Us*, is an ironically suggestive title, echoing the enticing invitation of Western capitalism to the underdeveloped Third World to fit into a mindless, soulless rut of globalization.

Clearly, the situatedness of the novels of Sahgal is self-evident from the literary embrace given to the political agenda of an inchoate nation, vibrant in its idealism; the disillusionment that followed soon after, and henceforth, the diverse directions that it took. Without any pretence of belonging to a class higher or lower than her own, she wrote fearlessly about hegemonic gender relations, decadent cultural practices, and the implications of changing political ideologies as they impinged on the multi-religious and pluri-cultural
Indian experience. Arguing for the circumstantial reality Said writes, "My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted." Worldliness, the ground on which Said's cultural theory proceeds, persistently remains the base of the realistic narratives on which the aesthetic imagination of the writer unfolds without much symbolism, ambiguity or even experimentation in technique. It is the affiliation of the text to the historic and social experience of man, with its unique varying situations, which draws the critic towards its locatedness; it is also the writer's unalterable reality which remains a source of tacit assumptions and meaning for him/her. Sahgal, in her fiction, has ventured only so far as the realistic locations and the myriad lived and inherited, conditions of her experience motivated her, and thus, keeps reality as real as could be.

Through a compelling delineation of the closing chapters of the colonial empire, momentous nationalism, inevitable cultural exchange and the Gandhian phenomenon in Mistaken Identity and Lesser Breeds and her bold depiction of the fallouts of autocracy, sati, corruption and neocolonialism in her polemic Rich Like Us, Sahgal most certainly "spoke truth to power" in her characteristic insightful manner. Her fictional treatment of the subject-matter intends to bring about change and she clearly understood that all reform must trickle down from the controlling agencies of power. Said, too, debunks the notion of true knowledge being fundamentally non-political: "No one is helped in understanding this today when the adjective 'political' is used as a label to discredit any work for daring to violate the protocol of pretended supra-political objectivity." Orientalism 10. Sahgal is persistent in her effort to do full justice to the proximate connection to political power which destiny provided her with, and the writer has energized this effort with her ethical alertness and literary commitment. The foreboding commentaries in three of her prescient novels, This Time of
Morning, A Situation in New Delhi and Rich Like Us bear witness to the fact that the author had her fingers on the political pulse of the country. Sahgal does not leave politics unattended as a serious concern in her entire oeuvre, even briefly.

The decision to write in English, the language of the centre to the margins, seems to be more for reasons of personal choice than a deliberate anti-colonial stance, for the writer reflects: "I did not take a conscious decision when I began to write for a living, that English would be my medium. It happened that way because I had the reading and reference for it over a large number of years" (Point 26). The authorial responsibility of adapting the language to suit the representation of the Indian ethos and milieu did press on her creative process, but owing to, both, the syncretism and hybridity, of her consciousness, and the social circumstances and engagement of her characters, the language has been very naturally appropriated. The writer’s impressive mastery of the language makes it well attuned to the mental makeup of her characters and is well tailored for her fictional settings. Clearly, there are no perceptible signs of defiance, abrogation or subversion of the normative usage of British English. Although the stereotypical and myth-making tendencies of language had been unmasked, language was still not a fiercely debated issue in postcolonial studies in the profusely creative period of the author’s literary career. A multi-linguist to the core, tutored the Russian language by none other than Vladimir Nabokov, Sahgal refused to consider English language or for that matter, any positive cultural exchange, as the monopoly of a single race, and has consciously empowered it with an ability of expressing, with flair, the modern/postmodern Indian predicament in all its complexities.

The adoption of the form of the European novel to express indigenous realities is now interpreted as a retaliatory political position taken by anti-colonial novelists, for the paradigmatic moment of anti-colonial counter-textuality is seen to begin with the first indecorous mixing of western genres with local content (Leela Gandhi 150). Although
Sahgal was well-versed with the reading and writing practices of the Western novel, the author’s creative and critical experience also drew sustenance and support from the age old, rich native mythological and critical traditions. Clearly, Sahgal did not relinquish the English language and the European novel merely on account of their being Western cultural paradigms or literary constructs. A re-reading of her texts refutes the charge made by Aijaz Ahmad in his critical text, *In Theory*, that English language is an elitist tool and the language of bourgeois civility used in subversive ways - the wit and irony in the texts under study mostly targets the hypocrisy of the rich class. Her appraisal of some aspects of the Western civilization in an open minded exposition exudes a confidence in the enduring assimilative spirit of the Indian culture and not a rejection of it in any manner.

Her fiction seems a continuous effort at overcoming the paradox of cultural identity which steadily moves towards a resolution through the celebration of a fluid, hybrid identity. Having lived through the unique defining moments of colonial history, assimilating the clash and collision as well as the mingling and merging of two disparate cultures, her sensibilities were shaped by the scientific rationality of the West and the inherent sanctimonious archaic Indian rootedness. Sahgal herself confronted the reality of these diverse influences when she stated that as an Indian she was a mix of cultures and influences of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, of the East and the West (Point 91). Perhaps Sahgal’s art is the blossoming of those cultural ambiguities which Ashis Nandy calls the psychological and metaphysical defenses against cultural invasion. Gaining and maintaining seems to have been the strategic mantra of the colonized Indian civilization for protecting itself against the patriarchal cultural hegemony of imperialism. It protects itself against proselytizing by projecting, the idea that the Indian is compromising; he has a fluid self definition; and is willing to learn the ways of his civilized brethren unconditionally, provided such learning is profitable (Intimate Enemy 104).
The overlapping cultural experience of Sahgal has broadened her vision to include a vast variety of characters of different nationalities, various settings and mind-sets with diverse ethnic sensibilities in the world of her aesthetics. Her intimate brush with oppression and sacrifice in the course of the anti-colonial liberation struggle rather than seeping her poetics in a paranoid nationalism gives it an affirmative force of self-criticism. The rubrics of her Indianized multiculturalism are well established in the intellectually and politically sophisticated novel *Rich Like Us* when the personal history of Rose, an Englishwoman, becomes the metaphor for the cultural intercourse between two politically opposed nations and runs parallel to the story of the deep dilemmas of the Indian bureaucrat, Sonali’s, bewildered soul.

The upbringing and convictions of Sahgal made dogmatic polarization impossible in her thought process and so, also, her fiction. Her novels *Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds* are ruminative reality-checks giving multifarious insights into situational engagements of the colonial era. Tracing the identity of the culturally hybridized hero, Bhushan Singh, to the notion of “collective selfhood”, intrinsic to the identity of India itself, Sahgal observes, “India] has to me been a unique proposition based on the most civilized human instincts - a sort of meeting place of the human race, where the search for identity has worked itself out by and large, peacefully and creatively through different traditions” (Point 48) There is an echo of this sentiment of Sahgal in the appeal made by Edward Said to the deeply embedded arrogance in the imperial psyche towards cultural rationality:

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalistic and imperialistic enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences are rapidly coming into view and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of
identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism. (Culture xxviii).

A fine humane strain that runs all through the sprawling structure of her fiction goes a long way in establishing the fact that Sahgal was a fortunate beneficiary of the East-West encounter. Her description of the life of Nehru as lived in ‘two-plus-one cultures’ applies no less to her own; a life that has taken in the nourishment of Western culture and provided it to the firm binary roots of her nativity. The absence of a defensive belligerence about any cultural fixity in Sahgal’s fiction is probably what Nandy broadly sensed as the sustaining mystic essence of Indian culture: ‘The pressure to be the obverse of the west distorts the traditional priorities in the Indian’s total view of man and universe and destroys his culture’s unique gestalt’ (Intimate Enemy 73). Readers have benefited from the ethical, secular and liberal views the author has persistently laboured to sustain. Some of her stories advance through female consciousness - critically aware of their mysterious ontological predicaments and contested cultural terrains - fusing the domestic and the political as theorized by Foucault.

The postcolonial connection is an inbuilt truth and reality of Sahgal’s fiction and her writings remain open to shifting, manifold postcolonial interpretations. Sahgal’s approach to life has been flexible and open-minded and she believes in adopting the creative, beneficial and relevant aspects of new as well as traditional forms of thought as per the historical needs of humanity. It is not easy to confine her within the theoretical boundaries of any particular school of thought although in a predominant manner her writing can be understood an effort to prevent the death of the political author. A little wary of overstretched theoretical analysis, but keenly aware of the dynamism of life and the unstoppable flow of ideas, Sahgal’s comment in 1989 is central to her idea of growth, flexibility and
assimilation: “If anyone wants to fit me into a tradition, it is the tradition-in-the-making they will have to settle for” (Point 95)."