Chapter IV
A Fictional Reservoir of Political Realities

If they could return to life, *the geniuses of pure politics*, the *fatalia monstra* recorded in histories, would be astounded to learn what they have done without being aware of it, and they would read of their own past deeds as in a hieroglyph to which they had been offered the keys.*

(Benedetto Croce quoted by A.G. Noorani, *Jinnah and Tilak*)

Politics was a natural literary inclination as well as a pre-ordained childhood reality for Sahgal. The writer has witnessed India cross over the historic threshold of 1947 on the shoulders of her personal heroes, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, from slavery to freedom. She faced the wrath of her cousin, Indira Gandhi, during the Emergency period. Mrs. Gandhi later cancelled Sahgal’s ambassadorship to Italy too. Having basked in the affectionate environment of generosity and intellectual vibrancy at Anand Bhawan, the complete reversal in her cousin’s attitude after the demise of Nehru, came as a setback for Sahgal. The fact of the matter is that what came as a personal blow to Sahgal, became a political nightmare for millions of Indians - the story of Sahgal got intertwined with, and became representative of, the narrative of the destabilized nation for some years. During and after the authoritative spell of the 1970’s, Sahgal became, for a brief period, pro-active in politics and participated in electioneering for the Opposition, but was quick to realize that the principles she came looking for had vanished. The power seekers in the Opposition played manipulative and exploitative games with the mangled mix of her ethical compulsions and her famous family discord. The face of politics in India had changed. Gradually, Sahgal steered herself towards the role of a creative intellectual and an involved political commentator.
Sensitive and alert to the slightest wisp of a political wind blowing in any part the
nation, she entrenched her novels in the contemporaneous socio-political events and captured
conflictual cultural swings in an effort to bring forth a realistic picture of a fast changing
society. Politics remained a constant engagement, for intellectual as well as empirical
reasons, although her approach to it underwent changes, ebbing towards a fine line of
maturity and relevance. Initiated into the familial discourse of politics by a virtual multitude
of national legends, Sahgal is the only member of the clan to have responded to this vital
legacy with a cerebral and creative panache and her work, as Rumina Sethi notes, is
underpinned by a deeply felt critical examination of the politics of her times, a struggle
where words and action combine to produce a deep sincerity and a dream for a free India
(Revisiting).

Having significantly contributed to the evolution of the political novel in post-colonial
India, Sahgal on a closer analysis seems to aesthetically embody both the text and the critic
(to use the words of Edward Said's key literary text The World, the Text and the
Critic) in her fiction. Among the aesthetic concerns of Said is his passionate advocacy that
the intellectual must refrain from creating a kind of self-consuming artifact; idealized,
essentialized and instead empower the text with affiliations that it remains a special kind of
cultural object with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence quite its own
(148). For Said the written text has a material presence, a cultural and social history, a
political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts
(33). Many of Said's contemporaries have taken a political stance on significant issues and
Harold Pinter's popular acclaim on the reception of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 is
indicative of how within the public domain the synthesis of culture and literature with
radical politics has a receptive and appreciative audience (Talat Ahmed 2). Living/writing
out the Saidian vision, in a fractious postmodern scenario, Sahgal too, is persistent in her
oeuvre to establish a connection between her literary world and the political realities of the times that shape it. For a post-colonial writer like Sahgal, known for concretely imagined situations related to the here and now of lived experience, ‘worldliness’ is a crucial consideration - it opens the revelatory doors to historical realities, pitches in her opposition to injustice, and highlights her unashionable but steady commitment, to exploring the ineluctable political influences in the human predicament.

The lopsided representation of the social, cultural and political history of the repressed colonized people is now being recovered by the ‘voyage in’ method of critical reading of literary texts and this has generated a new energy in postcolonial discourse. Said’s idea of ‘contrapuntal’ reading of texts, to recover their concealed histories and to establish the counter-points to canonical meanings, is derived from music, and being a classical music aficionado, he explains it thus in Culture and Imperialism: ‘In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work’ (59-60).

Sahgal’s novels maybe contrapuntally read, to know ‘what else is going on in the text’ but the merger of a writer and a critic in her literary temperament seems to make her work contrapuntally written. Taking into account the amalgam of complexities prevalent in India - the political disparity, social stratification, the religious diversity, gender issues, the economic divide and mingled histories of the colonized and the colonizers - the author narrates an inclusive tale with polyphonic voices blending into the symphony of humanitarian strain. Sahgal ‘frames all cultures by their inherent hybridities and pluralisms and has shifted the whole debate to ‘redefining of universal parameters by extending the meaning of freedom to all human relationships as they work across race and gender’ (Jain 132). An
overview of Sahgal’s works suggests that her fiction is clearly not filiated to the canonical hierarchies of English literature but is also not a representative case of the empire writes back narrative which remains more or less focused on digging out and reinterpreting colonial history – it has worked out its own dynamics linking the regional and political to the universal and humanitarian.

Political awareness is an in-built mechanism and the stabilizing consistency of Sahgal’s thought process. She has reiterated the application of politics as the most forceful reality of human existence in numerous interviews, addresses, seminars, commentaries and, of course, her fiction. In this section, three novels, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) and *Rich Like Us* (1985), each with a visibly deep connection to contemporary Indian politics, will be taken up and examined within the parameters of postcolonial discourse in totality and the Saidian influence in particular. While *Storm in Chandigarh* handles the messy aftermath of the three-fold division of the North Indian state of Punjab, with some of its areas being attached to the hill state of Himachal Pradesh, and the carving out of the new state of Haryana out of it in 1966, *A Situation in New Delhi* crystallizes the conundrum confronting the Indian nation after Jawaharlal Nehru’s demise in 1964, and the almost simultaneous rise of Naxalism, a nihilistic decadence eating into the marginalized sections even today. Chronologically moving forward towards the transformed personality-based politics of the 1970s, *Rich Like Us* primarily enunciates a threat to political freedom from the authoritarian tendencies within, and to economic stability from the neo-imperialistic forces without.
I

Storm in Chandigarh

Language, territory and the changing idiom in politics

é the general liberal consensus that true knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not true knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.

(Said Orientalism)

A clash of personalities, that’s what politics, has degenerated to. There are no issues left, only squabbles.

(Sahgal Storm in Chandigarh)

A manifestation of the recurring global design of fragmentation or Balkanization in the form of demand for linguistic provinces rocked the foundations of the Indian nation which had just been divided on the basis of religion. Whatever the pre-independence commitments of the Congress party were, its leaders were now apprehensive that this might encourage the further break-up of the Union, although, as Ramachandra Guha writes in India After Gandhi, Once Nehru conceded Andhra [under immense pressure of Potti Sriramulu’s fast] and set up the States Reorganization Commission, it was inevitable that the country as a whole would be reorganized on the basis of language (198). The demand for the state of Punjab with a Punjabi speaking majority by the Akalis, was a problematic category of its own as it brought along with the claims of language, the religious aspirations of the politically conscious Sikh community. Positive about the strengthening of the secular state, Jawaharlal Nehru, in the best interests of the community, probably wanted to prevent the creation of an Israel type nation surrounded by hostile neighbours further destabilizing the entire subcontinent. It is this turbulent, recent phase of history that Sahgal has fictionally encapsulated in Storm in Chandigarh.
To give the novelist her due credit, the dangers of communal disharmony foreshadowed in this early attempt, erupted with a blazing insanity in the successive dark decades, consuming in its fire the very Prime Minister who recommended the threefold division of the state of Punjab in 1966. According to some historians the earliest seeds of communalism were sowed in the Hindu-Sikh community by Mrs. Indira Gandhi by wrongly confirming the completely false returns of the census of 1961, when in a tendentious move, most Punjabi speaking Hindus gave out Hindi as their mother tongue. Hukam Singh, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, who was appointed the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee to look into the matter of the Punjabi Suba in 1965, by the Prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, had this to say: If the Punjabi Suba had been demarcated simply on a linguistic basis and not on the false returns of 1961, there would not have been any extremist movement. (qtd. in Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs* 2: 301). The cultural aspect of the insecurities faced by the Hindus has been put into political perspective by Gopal Singh in an argument that cannot be refuted: By disowning Punjabi as their mother tongue they have become rootless and have alienated themselves from the culture, history and society of Punjab, thus leaving the Sikhs to claim Punjabi culture and Punjab history as their own. (294). It is her complete unease with the politicization of language and culture that young Sahgal has addressed in this early work of fiction.

Based in a city that symbolized the journey to recovery after the Partition, and now reflected the uneasy truce between the two states whose joint capital it was, *Storm in Chandigarh* intertwines the turbulent politics of the region with the infidelities of the bourgeoisie, hitting the reader with an impact of a thunderbolt. Adopting an impenetrable intransigence Gyan Singh, the Chief Minister of the state of Punjab, is all out to confront his unwitting counterpart from Haryana, the state just carved out of former Punjab. He gives a call for a region wide crippling strike to highlight the urgency of his state's demands relating
to boundaries, state capital, water and electric power. The onus to diffuse the crisis is now on a committed civil servant, Vishal Dubey, specially appointed as the liaison officer between the centre (Delhi) and the two state governments. After failing in his persistent efforts to get the two leaders to the negotiating table for an amicable solution, he eventually succeeds in diffusing the highly volatile situation, by advising the Haryana chief minister, Harpal Singh, to take some unexpected, slightly aggressive risks and precautionary measures. The strike would not only have affected the region by paralyzing its lifelines of power, production and transportation but, also, in the long term threatened the nation’s unity.

Encouraged by the well placed confidence in him of his principled mentor, the Union Home Minister, representing the old guard politicians, Dubey manages to break the speed of the political storm only to raise a fiercer social one by getting embroiled in a controversy of passion and romance with the wife of a local businessman, Inder. The institution of marriage seems to question its own existence, probably not having evolved fast enough to meet the feministic aspirations of an assertive and conscious modern Indian woman. The four intensely described couples- Saroj and Inder, Mara and Jit, Gauri and Nikhil, Vishal and his deceased wife Leela do not hassle themselves much with the gravity of commitment of the nuptial ties and quite casually lighten themselves of the baggage of fidelity. The home-spun micromanaged gender politics is juxtaposed against the more visible clash of state politics; nevertheless it is the breakdown of inter-personal communication which is common to both apparently disparate crises. The intentional inflexibility of his political bosses in the crisis ridden states makes Dubey reflect on the implausible, but strangely true, similarity between the personal and the political:

The Home Minister had been wrong. This was not a taut situation. One could come to grips with stir, an agitation of some kind - and there had been plenty of those - but what could one do with paralysis? He was reminded
incongruously of the long brooding silences during his marriage, the hours when he had felt trapped in helplessness and had wanted desperately to cry out, *Talk to me* (37)

The mechanical imposition of an ultra-modern design on the pasture lands at the base of the Shivalik foot-hills, famously called Chandigarh, bred an innate coldness and indifference in its settlers, quite unlike the generation-to-generation bonding taken for granted in the organically evolved Indian towns. Ironically, the country which had been uniformly administered by the colonizers was a welter of separate, sensitive identities, resurrected after independence (15). Chandigarh, the location of the text, is a unique but controversial joint capital of the newly formed state of Haryana and that of Punjab, freshly re-divided twenty years after the gruelling partition of 1947 (16), in addition to being a Union Territory as well. It becomes an apt symbol of modernity and the associated values of postmodernism, wherein wholesome communication is on the rocks and this breakdown coincides symbolically with the lack of public transportation in the city, pointed out by Dubey on his arrival, *There seemed nothing in the way of public transport serving a city so spread out* (28). Again the loneliness within gets reflected in his graphic descriptions of the flora laid out in vacancy: *The line of flowering trees down the middle of the dual carriage-way looked decorative and fragile, struggling to make an impression against the sprawling emptiness* (28). Chandigarh was destined to nurture a narrative of new nothingness, laden with social stress and snobbery.

In a country where even villages, let alone towns, have myths, histories and legends woven around them, Chandigarh, with its futuristic Corbusier design and layout did not fit in organically into the Punjabi cultural mould. On the one hand the psychologically traumatized, displaced, dispossessed Indians after Partition found solace in the newness of this fascinating novelty where they *made new beginnings, built their homes, struck roots* (161), and on the
other, for the culturally entrenched it was a revolution too sudden which produced “peculiar results.” Gauri, a modern art connoisseur and socialite, on her first visit to the city from Delhi, when questioned by her dedicated Chandigarhian friends, ridicules the superimposition of the avant-garde European architecture on Indian rusticity and landscape:

“Well she began helplessly, “full these ramps and things. It’s a bit preposterous.”

“But Gauri,” puzzled Saroj, “you’re so keen on modern things. You’re always opening modern-art exhibitions. I thought you had love this.”

“That’s quite different, pet,” said Gauri “a revolution in architecture,” said Jit, “and what’s more a revolution in people’s thinking.”

“That’s just it,” said Gauri “revolutions are so sudden. And they have such peculiar results. Now why on earth has that funny-looking thing like a funnel been stuck on top of the Legislature?”

“The High court volunteered Mara unasked, “is one of the most magnificent and dramatic buildings I have ever seen.”

“Well I haven’t seen it yet,” Gauri conceded, “but Mr Justice Anand who used to be here said it was positive hell inside. Hot as blazes in summer and freezing in winter. And they hung the most bizarre looking things they called ‘tapestries’ on the walls.”

“Those are Corbusiers,” said Mara reverently.

“The fact is - we aren’t ready for Chandigarh!”

(159-160)

A dream city meant to remain apolitical ironically becomes the arena for flexing out political muscle - a strange incongruousness exists between its architectural splendour/tasteful maintenance and the political agendas / activities it is destined to witness.
as a result of its tripartite status. Jit Sahni, having been pushed out of Lahore, makes a fresh start in this new city but is soon bitter enough to comment on it. Residents' attitude, don’t like a lot of the buildings here but there's something fearless about the whole idea. Only the people haven't measured up. The architects couldn't find the right breed of human beings to inhabit their perfect blueprints (51). As a matter of fact, it is not just the people, but the politics of narrow vision that putrefies the creations of great imagination. The very birth and identity of this city is seen as embroiled in controversy and politics.

Sahgal rationally analyses that men had always wanted power over each other’s minds and religion had been the only one weapon in their hands. The text comes out against the abuse of religion, language and ethnicity by power stalkers for fuelling the sentiment of fragmentation among regional populations. The bloody mix of politics and religion, the partition of India, when the very foundation of this country’s belief, that religion was a private affair, torn up (148) remains a constant reference point and a historical warning, against using the manifestations of personal thought and belief for usurping political power, which had sadly gone unheeded. Dubey’s reflections on the further mutilation of Punjab as a result of robust political inveighing done by venom spewing hate-mongers to arouse popular sentiment is seeped in a spiritual pragmatism of sorts:

They had carried out their butchery, taken the body of Punjab and resolutely carved it up again, ostensibly in the interests of the Punjabi language. Yet there was something sinister at the root of Partition mentality and those who upheld it. Mankind’s journey was towards integration, not the breaking up of what already existed. Punjabi would have flourished without partitioning the state further. What possessed men to stamp their name, their brand, their ego on every bit of God-given soil that came their way? (30)
The urge is towards redefining the political culture by a wishful surgical removal of the vicious growth of short-sightedness, parochialism, greed and humbuggery to bring about a deep, intelligent sense of commitment and perspective to serve not just the nation but humanity on the whole.

Although written some years before the Emergency, a foreboding tone of disillusionment pervades the novel marking the disintegration of the big vision of its makers. The impatience with the system is unequivocal in the introspection raised by Harpal Singh, the Chief Minister of Haryana, “What motivated the men in politics today, merely power? The lot of them should resign - grow vegetables - and let others who could love their work take over.” (149). In no manner an iconic leader, having seen the light of success only with the help of the shadowy murderous strategies of his bete noire Gyan Singh, Harpal Singh still seems to have spared some bits of his conscience from being devoured by the booming political avarice around. His deliberated silence as an eye witness to the cold-blooded murder committed and nauseatingly justified in the name of his political war remains the biggest question mark on his otherwise rational political sense of justice; however torn apart he remained within:

There was a conversation he carried round with him for years, ever since the murder in the hutment. It began: “What happened to that man? Was anything done about him? And what became of the woman?” It had never been put into words [nothing] blotted out the memory of the woman he had not championed because he had wanted to be elected. (44)

Gyan Singh, CM, Punjab, conversely symbolizes the vulgar seekers, wielders and abusers of power ubiquitously infesting the health of the evolving Indian democracy. Khushwant Singh objectively records this lamentable decline: “With no clearly defined economic, social and political objectives and no strong loyalties to the parties they belonged
to, personal advancement became the chief motivating factor of the Punjabi politicians (History 307). Physically towering over people, Gyan Singh used his confidence and crude wit to manipulate situations, as he once wriggled out of a situation by dwarfing Dubey when he sensed the danger of being cornered, with a charming folklorish statement like, “In Lucknow it takes as long to say ‘adab’ as it takes us here to roll up our sleeves and build a factory” (74). A restaurateur, Hansa Ram, although adversely affected by the CM running a brothel in the same building on the strength of his political muscle, pragmatically endorses his acumen and swears by his authority: “There was no doubt about it, he was a man alright. He could keep law and order and even upset it if he wished. Unquestionably a leader” (184).

John Meadows, the relentless missionary who took Gyan Singh under his wing, impressed by his mechanical prowess and focus, had unwittingly prepared the ground for a tumultuous leadership completely ignorant of the raw ambition of the megalomaniac that his protégé was:

The missionary had tried to instill the boy with conscience but Gyan had been bred in turbulence where honour had more meaning. He knew that manhood depended on it and all important choice flowed from it. Conscience was invisible, hidden under layers of bafflement and doubt. Honour like prestige was public. It was a badge, an insignia of hardihood; the sign of a man’s standing in his community. (119)

Ensconced in the political driving seat of one of India’s most well defined cultures and agrarian economies, Gyan Singh had shown early traits of obnoxious opportunism as the driver of the last vehicle, “the devil-driven bus,” to leave a severely riot-hit area in Pakistan at the time of Partition. There were people running away from funeral pyres that had once been their homes crying and clamoring to get into his bus but:
There was nothing in his appearance and manner to suggest that the town
behind him was a death trap and the people surrounding him were fleeing for
their lives. He might have been about to conduct a sight-seeing excursion. He
did not seem to hear the pleas or see the frantic, fumbling fingers untying
coins from of grimy saris and dupattas. He was briskly selecting the better
customer, the merchants who had been able to rescue their money boxes from
the wreckage of their homes. (33)

Gyan Singh had sunk into the deepest abyss of evil, when he brightened his mercenary
prospects in men’s pathetic haplessness in the partition madness, and sensed business even
in the desperate profession of prostitution. He later donned the persona of a merchant,
selling dreams of political identity, in the post-colonial territorial mélange. The vision of a
Sikh Utopia, in the mind-space of the bruised and piqued Sikh masses, was resuscitated
post-partition with the demand for Punjabi Suba. Khushwant Singh in his comprehensive
account of the history of the Sikhs, mentioned above, writes, “The demand for the Suba
was in fact one for a Sikh majority state; language was only the sugar coating.” (292).
Sahgal has attempted to blend the decline in political ethics in general, with the belligerence
of the state leadership, in the portrayal of the character of Gyan Singh.

The self-advancing opportunist replacing the visionary in post-colonial Indian politics
is evident from Gyan Singh’s gratitude to the stroke of good luck when the language issue
had blended in his mind with his religion. But how could it ever have been
otherwise? (145). It contained enough propagandist possibilities to swing the collective
radar of the masses in favour of division, leading to the further mutilation of whatever
remained of a once organic Punjab. Likewise, he continued basking in the windfall of
narrow divisive politics convincing the masses with the audacity of an inverted genius
blazoning an equally fantastic legend. (122). His appeal was a blend of truth and
imagination with the lure of a revival of a practically twice-truncated vanished Punjab to its past glory as a land of five rivers. The eminent historian Bipan Chandra in his compilation, *Essays on Contemporary India*, mentions perceptive observers having warned about the spread of communalism in Punjab in the 1950s and 1960s, and pressing an argument against communal assumptions, warns against the subtle, innocuous covert methods used, rest one indirectly provides secular legitimacy to elements of communal ideology (162). School education can be an important ideological tool. When questioned by the media on his strange plan of starting religious instruction in schools in his state, Gyan Singh delved into the charitable missionary experience for a perfect demagogic reply: I have spent years listening to and repeating the Lord’s prayers in Christian mission schools. No one had said This is a Sikh boy. He should be exempt (145). Surely, it was his morally barren way of thanking the missionary for taking him in as an orphan.

Majority communalism inevitably leads to fascism, while minority communalism leads to separatism or separatist sentiments (63), writes Chandra in the same analysis. Restless after the division and re-organization of Punjab along linguistic lines, Gyan Singh now harbours the dream of a Sikh nation and accordingly starts religious propaganda. Quite evidently, he is a prescient fictional incarnation of an ambitious regional politician threatening to challenge the cohesiveness and coherence of the nation. After a significant, although theatrically riddle-ridden talk with Gyan Singh, Dubey is quick to realize the scale of the political aspirations of the CM and makes the following assessment: Gyan had stepped onto the heights below which lay a kingdom. A sense of imminent peril gripped him. It was Delhi, not Gyan, that needed warning if India was to stay united (76).

It is Sahgal’s deep insight into political issues and sharp analysis of history that makes her works almost accurately prophetic. Her perception of motives behind the hocus-pocus raised for public consumption by politicos is fairly discerning. In 1981, when the religio-
political forces in Punjab turned increasingly secessionist rather than secular, the Sahgalian insight was echoed by the political scientist Paul Wallace in *Political Dynamics of Punjab* as he wrote, "language, religion and regionalism combined into a potentially explosive context," and this led to unprecedented happenings in the Hindu-Sikh chapter of Indian history. This force of regionalism beginning to sweep the country was timely contained by some amount of fairness in its democratic practices and has now evolved into a more sophisticated form of power negotiation called coalition politics. The regional parties justify their existence only vis-à-vis an opposition from the Centre - the Centre and the States are perpetually sweating it out in a political wrestling match for the health and vibrancy of the democracy. Not surprisingly, Gyan Singh uses this provision to stir up the emotions and prejudices of the people of Punjab on the issue of sharing the Bhakra canal waters and the centre in its turn leaves the capital city of Chandigarh, built for Punjab, hanging as a bone of contention between the two states, keeping its interventionist powers intact.

Adhering to the trademark “Nehruvian” prose - crisp, lucid, precise and eloquent - Sahgal pokes the reader through the perceptions and reflections of Vishal Dubey, an officer with an elegance, if that word could apply to character and pattern of living tailored to fine sensitivity, placed in an anomalous bureaucratic position wherein he proves his acumen to the hilt. Belonging to a creed of civil servants to whom “service had been principally, incredibly a service” his thoughtful observations on the changing priorities of his colleagues reflect an increasing lack of commitment in the cadre. He deplores the emergence of an even more suicidal tendency, that of obsequiousness and sycophancy, towards the self-serving political masters in the once crème de la crème in the country. To trace the trajectory of this freefall, one could begin high-up with his first mentor, Trivedi, from the old upright crop that had walked in the hot sun, swallowed the dust and sand of
miles of countryside, and come to grips with problems they would not have known existed\(77\); step down to Prasad, the Chief Secretary of Haryana, a sharp \textquoteleft practised administrator\textquoteright transferred back to Delhi on request, where the \textquoteright experience and grasp from all over the country\textquoteright converged to be \textquoteright dissipated at cocktail parties and official receptions\textquoteright and resolved itself into \textquoteright clever dinner conversation and later into the standard sophistication of a diplomatic assignment\(69\); and finally down below to his colleague, Kachru, Cabinet Secretary, who after the Home Minister\textquoteright death, completely changed stance not for \textquoteright principles or convictions but nauseating hypocrisies\(247\). A majority of the civil servants matched step with unscrupulous politicians and cast away the onus of taking the country from \textquoteleft servitude to freedom\textquoteright.

The progeny of a nation that had pioneered an exemplary war of independence, on being stirred into political awareness, seems to have gradually forsaken issues of national interest to get embroiled in the selfish battle of individual gains. It is impossible not to think back about the leadership and the Indian people-hood around the independence era with awe, when the Chief Secretary, Prasad, frustratingly sums up the indifferent attitude of his countrymen: \textquoteleft I can\textquoteright t understand it when people talk of a revolution taking place in this country. Who would think of joining anyone else\textquoteright revolution? Everyone\textquoteright too busy with his own little upheaval. We are a nation of leaders…\textquoteright (68).

*Storm in Chandigarh* is the nascent, caterpillar stage of Sahgal\textquoteright full-winged imaginative creativity, but it sparkles with the freshness of ideas, enamouring naiveté of colourful characterization, urgent topicality and has the early bearings of the writer\textquoteright analytical prowess and ethical imagination. In the wake of the victory of parochial politics on the lingual issue in Punjab, Sahgal forewarns against fuelling-up the combustible communal ideology and retrogressing to fundamental religiosity in the era of green revolution.
There are some misconceptions about historical facts which are passable since it is a work of fiction. But the following observation in the novel about Gyan Singh makes a direct reference to real political events in India: 

More fateful was the conference that had carved out the new state of Hariyana (sic), giving him the leadership of Punjab. It was a truncated Punjab, but his to rule. He had gone to Delhi to argue for a state where the Punjabi language would have a place of pride, and astonishing he had been given it. He wondered if the protagonists of Pakistan had been equally astonished, even dismayed, when a country had been dropped in their laps (142). The historical recordings of the frustrating struggle for the Suba involving Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Hukam Singh, Sant Fateh Singh, the suspended IAS litterateur Kapur Singh, Darshan Singh Pheruman, Justice Gurnam Singh and many others from overseas are contradictory to this assessment. Guha's observation, too, substantiates the fact of the exasperating fight for the Suba: It had taken twenty years of almost ceaseless struggle to compel New Delhi to constitute a Sikh majority province within India (557).

There are silences and gaps on the issue of the discriminatory treatment meted out to the proponents of the Punjabi Suba and the betrayal and hood-winking by the Centre in the final dispensation of the promises initially agreed upon. Sahgal does not touch the issue of the unfair linguistic enumeration done considering the large post-partition tehsil as a unit rather than the village, and the systematic alienation of the Sikhs in the 1951 and 1961 census in which following the intense Arya Samaj campaign, Punjabi Hindus disowned Punjabi as their mother tongue (Harji Malik 36). A.G. Noorani had, then, made a startling observation on Mrs Gandhi's intransigence, manifest in the bizarre terms proposed through a commission: The tribunal Mrs Gandhi envisages will necessarily have the terms of reference unheard of in the entire history of boundary-making in the world. It will have to be directed
explicitly to ignore the basic, universally accepted principle of contiguity (Illustrated Weekly). Hukam Singh, the former speaker of the Lok Sabha, revealed in 1983:

In her dealings with the Punjab and the Sikhs, Mrs. Gandhi practiced a kind of duplicity more becoming a small-time politician than a farsighted statesman.

While appearing to concede the Suba, she first deprived it of its capital Chandigarh and then made its transfer to the Punjab conditional on the Punjab giving up Fazilka and Abohar, which were predominantly Punjabi speaking, to Haryana, even though they were not contiguous with it (Indian Express).

The Sikhs on their part fought all the wars for the nation and the Sikh peasantry suspended its agitation and rallied to the support of the fighting forces in the 1965 war against Pakistan. It is this smoldering fire of the built-up angst, which gets easily fanned from time to time to suit different political motives, that goes without representation in the text.

Nivedita Menon in her essay, Between the Burqa and the Beauty Parlour gives an in-depth analysis of the diverse nuances of postcolonial nationalism by juxtaposing the self-regarding fixations of cultural nativism against the irresistible liberating homogeneity of globalization. The reader gets a sense of the complex dynamism of change, with every possible niche of the nation releasing conflictual energies and the monolithic structure of the nation being maintained by more than the melody of patriotic songs. Bringing forth various pluralistic influences involved in the concept of nation-building, Menon de-romanticizes the notion, high-lighting its inherent hegemonic tendencies and revealing the compulsive oppression involved in keeping it one piece:

No project of nationalism is ever completed - it is [merely] frozen at some point or the other through a coercive apparatus backed by the sanction of violence that prevents the further articulations of other voices or identities with similar aspirations — whether in the United States, India, Bosnia or
Rwanda the discourse of xenophobic and jingoistic nationalism is audible in full volume and the nation-state’s repressive face is very much in evidence towards the dissident and/or marginalized voices within it. (223)

Due to the strategic position of Punjab as a border state and the religious identity of the Sikhs, the Indian Government eyed with suspicion the otherwise legitimate demand for a Punjabi speaking province. Finally it acceded to the demand but not in all geo-political fairness. Nehru was, in principle, in favor of a multicultural society living in a harmonious exchange and Sahgal has throughout endorsed this view. In retrospect, may be the state of Punjab has lost much more than it has gained, by taking the demand to its logical conclusion, as Sahgal has portrayed. But what has been misrepresented is the view on the other side - the centre riding roughshod over the inexperienced Punjabi leadership and mishandling the situation, sometimes a bit slyly. The high profile, politically aware characters in the novel are tight-lipped about the linguistic re-organization precedent set by the formation of the Indian states in the fifties on the basis of the following languages: Oriya, Telegu, Tamil, Malyalam, Kannada, Marathi and Gujarati.

Over a period of time, the appropriation and assimilation of regional languages/cultures into the main-stream Indian culture through "constructive channels" has been carried out with astute political planning, veneration and reward-ceremonies to strengthen the unity of the nation. Moreover, the Indian psyche now appears at ease with a dual sense of identity. *Storm in Chandigarh* is a social artifact of an era of tribulation within the Indian boundary, lamenting the political onslaught on the primordial Indian tradition of syncretism and cultural layering. Said surveys the misfortunes of post-colonial nationalism in *Culture and Imperialism* and like Sahgal, deplores the infinity of pretexts on which humanity can be divided:
True, there has been a disturbing eruption of separatist and chauvinistic discourse, whether in India, Lebanon, or Yugoslavia. In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place, and if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one’s voice, all we would have would be the din of unending strife, a bloody political messé.

In the case of Punjab, Sahgal sees no unmanageable contradictions in the centre-state relations or aspirations. When the knots of culture are unfastenable, where is the question of imperialism? It remains to be seen if political statesmanship will prevail and history in the coming times will lay the matter to rest.

II

A Situation in New Delhi

The descent from “rational romanticism” to romantic irrationality

Nehru has all the makings of a dictator in him. From the far north to Cape Comorin, he has gone like some triumphant Caesar, leaving a trail of glory and legend behind him. Is it his will to power that is driving him from crowd to crowd? His conceit is already formidable. He must be checked. We want no Caesars.

(Jawaharlal Nehru [pseudonymously], Modern Review 1930)

The postcolonial debate on nationalism has grown fast and in diverse directions. It has in fact out-run in pace, the growth of the young nation-states, with its bulk of reductive formulations, cynical skepticism and sweeping generalizations. Quoting the succinct observation of Gabriel Kolko, “Having won the war, they proceeded to lose the peace,” to build her argument, Tamara Sivanandan has incorporated Marxist and Subaltern theorists in her discourse to bring out the excoriating stance adopted by the academia towards post-colonial nationalism. While Partha Chatterjee is quoted as arguing that anti-imperial
nationalism can, in fact, become a panacea for not dealing with economic disparities, the need for social transformation, or the capture of the state by the national elite (56), Aijaz Ahmed, at a given point is less tilted to his Leftist posture, and concedes the subjective nature of various nationalisms in the Third World: whether or not a nationalism will produce a progressive cultural practice depends, to put it in Gramscian terms, upon the political character of the power bloc which takes hold of it and utilizes it, as a material force in the process of constituting its own hegemony (55).

The “power bloc” which “pirated” (to use a term of Benedict Anderson) the concept of European nationalism for the anti-colonial struggle in India, in all objectivity, after assuming the country’s leadership in 1947, did a commendable job of policy-making, planning and organizing the unimaginable mess of decolonization and partition. The nation was blessed in the selfless line-up of its iconic leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad among others. The balance struck between socialistic and capitalistic thought by the nation builders stood the country in good stead when most nations were destabilized by the economic crisis in 2008-2009. Patrick French, the English historian, with good reason, makes the following political prophecy in his recent book: “India is a macrocosm, and may be the world’s default setting for the future (xii).

* A Situation in New Delhi, is a retrospective throw back to the zeitgeist of this momentous era of statesmanship and a lament at the loss of one of its illustrious stars, Jawaharlal Nehru. The novel at times struggles to avoid the pitfalls of affective fallacy in its effusiveness, as the loss was also a deeply personal one for Sahgal, but it mostly narrows down to a clear stream of judgment (9). In any case the writer’s idolatry remains justified, for Indian as well as World history have given out a clear well-deliberated verdict on Nehru-both have taken him in their smug embrace to escort him to the club of a select few.
Generally crediting the Nehrus as being one of the best examples of adaptation and assimilation of British India, Shiva Naipaul in his posthumously published book, *An Unfinished Journey*, sums up with a sharp assessment: Only in Jawaharlal Nehru, conspicuously the most erudite, cultured and gifted of the clan, did the emphatic westernizing strain in the Nehrus escape caricature and bear its noblest fruits. In Indira Gandhi, Nehruvian modernity betrays degenerative symptoms. Having committed the nation to secularism, socialism and democracy, Nehru strained hard to achieve the goals against all odds and kept the administration of the state clear of nepotism, dynastic politics, corruption and self-enrichment. The indiscriminate assessment of post-colonial politics by Western commentators and subaltern/leftist critics as degenerate and directionless is far from objective - to suggest that the western educated leaders of these young nations donned the native garb merely to unite their countrymen in the anti-colonial struggle to later continue the domination and exploitation of the people begun by imperialism in an indigenous form is misconstruing the hapless compulsions of history to discredit postcolonial nationalism (Shivanandan 57). In reply to Andre Marlaux’s description of Nehru as the *un-English English gentleman* or similar epithets like the *last Englishman in India*, Sahgal, in her recent work *Jawaharlal Nehru: Civilizing a Savage World* adds a refreshingly non-theoretical perspective:

No facile category fits Nehru...In his own mind there was no unbridgeable divide between the Occident and the Orient. One had had the opportunity to industrialize and prosper, and the other had not, and the gap would close in time. Most significantly, his involvement with India - through actual journeys over the length and breadth of the country, and his vividly imagined journeys into her past had an impassioned ingredient that kept its hold on him.
The shift in politics, from nationalism to opportunism, that was beginning to sprout in the firm political surface of a still settling nation, was reined in by Jawaharlal Nehru, with his unblinking focus on the high goals the nation had set for itself, but it erupted like a volcano after his demise. A re-creation of the circumstances, through a semi-autobiographical consciousness in the novel, has palpably frozen a water-shed event of contemporary history in Indian writing in English. Michael Calvert, the British biographer of Shivraj (read Jawaharlal Nehru), had dwelt enough on leadership to realize that a ‘leader’s death plus-one-minute created new circumstances in all but the stablest societies’ (54). A close friend, the Vice-Chancellor of the Delhi University, Usman Ali, quietly laments the loss of Shivraj, a leader who ‘had the gift of putting things into perspective, who worked hard to reestablish the nearest thing to a republic of virtue’ (80), to assemble the broken fragments and lighten up their possibilities (20), who insisted on using his mind, not chewed and half digested bits of other people’s (8). Mostly a eulogistic portrayal of Shivraj, the Prime Minister of India, whose death is the sad take off moment of the novel, through the reminiscences of his sister, Devi, a Minister in the Union government, and her friends, Michael and Usman, it is also an insider’s view of the transformational twist in the political ethos of the country then onwards.

The stark difference between the Nehruvian and the post-Nehru eras is apparent in the prevalent linguistic currency - the awe-inspiring words like leader and leadership have been replaced by the common-place, so to say even derogatory, substitutes like politician, politicos, CEO (chief executive officer), politic, real-politic, etc. in our daily parlance. A Situation in New Delhi is highly relevant in contemporary times for it highlights this contrast and draws attention to the paucity of statesmanship in the nation. Shivraj, who ‘had never learned to make a political speech, or to trim his sails by the exigencies of politics’ (6), was a ‘unique human being, a kind we rarely, if ever see in politics’ (8), who ‘went to prison the
way a monk goes to a monastery\textsuperscript{(51)}, ņever had a purely personal life which to him was a priceless possession\textsuperscript{(87)}, and had wanted to live long enough for ņfree institutions to become part of the soil, become a way of life and thinking, that no future could destroy\textsuperscript{(93)}. The vast range of his interests - flora, landscapes, history, literature, art, writing and traveling - made him ņcomplex, as any final simplicity is the end result of so many processes\textsuperscript{(8)}. Yet, caught up in the ņveritable haemorrhage of here and now, he humbly admits to his Rumanian sculptor, Jaroslav, in a reflective moment: ņThere is no human being on earth as ignorant and uncultured as the professional politician\textsuperscript{(75)}.

The new establishment that took over, the avant-garde, ņa glutinous mass of verbiage that abounded in clichés\textsuperscript{(28)}, got busy with aggrandizing itself to loom large over the common people and the rift between the state and the masses widened. Sensing the insensitivity at the core of governance, Usman pours out his fears to Michael, who is hell bent on immortalizing the legacy of Shivraj: ņThe great and growing power of the state threatens to engulf us. We ņll never be properly self-governing in this country until we vest power in little units, in people at the base\textsuperscript{(80)}. A corroboration of his views comes from the British High Commissioner in Delhi, Sir Humphery, who sharing his assessment with his compatriot, Michael, objectively observes that ņthere a general drift in the direction of more controls over news papers, films, books and so on, more censorship, though it isn\textsuperscript{o} defined\textsuperscript{é}. They want a more homogeneous outlook\textsuperscript{(106)}. The baton of Sahgal\textsuperscript{o} political philosophy has been passed over by Vishal Dubey from \textit{Storm in Chandigarh} to Michael Calvert in \textit{A Situation in New Delhi}, who understands the beauty and the mythical strength of the cross-cultural traffic in the ancient stratified civilization and feelingly interrupts his host to comment, ņHomogeneity was never a value here\textsuperscript{o}\textsuperscript{(107)}.

The post-Nehruvian era was a politically and economically unstable period for Indian democracy primarily due to the abrupt breaking of ties of the new order with the old, a
sudden disregard for principles and commitment, and an over-emphasis on projections and unrealistic programmes. Devi’s reverie on the change of guard in New Delhi is a lament on the glorious bygone era of politics:

She glanced at the youngish faces of this generally well-dressed, well-groomed, well-heeled Cabinet and compared it with Shivraj’s Cabinet colleagues who had been older, untidier, worn Indian clothes, and, it now struck her, had been each an individual. Impressive personalities, some of them, sticking out like sore thumbs over disagreements on policy, cantankerous at times as if they had tooth-ache and thoroughly familiar with their subjects and all the prickly practical problems connected with them. (129)

More than just undoing the effects of the practical, well-planned welfare policy of Shivraj and his team for new India, the nouveauï politicos, Ŧattractive, intense and ungrownŒ believed that Ŧone hypothesis, unshakeable, unquestionable, could be true for all timeŒ and as a result a Ŧclass war they had blithely begun simmered in the streetsŒ (16). The reference is to the Naxalite problem. Sahgal has treated with good critical insights and prescience, the uprising of the Naxal Movement in the 1960s in the eastern parts of India, which as per the Research and Analysis Wing report has now made inroads in twenty out of a total of twenty-eight states. Intricately weaving it with the other significant happenings in the Delhi University, as a consequence of the derailed schemes and policies of the former Prime Minister, the writer judiciously comments, ŦShivraj’s successors, playing at revolution, have set the clock back dangerouslyŒ (16).

Without mentioning, too blatantly, the words, Naxalite or Naxalbari, which refer to the far-left communist radicals or the militant communists inspired by the political ideology of Mao Zedong, Sahgal is one of the very few writers to have intellectually and creatively delved into the controversial aspects of this terrorizing movement lacking all faith in
parliamentary democracy. The far-sightedness of the writer, in warning the intelligentsia and as well as the government, of the dangers of the volatile romance between a rigid ideology and impressionable youth, is apparent when we take into account the sporadic re-appearance of this “people’s war” with a renewed gusto in the present times. The Indian Government openly admitted in 2010 that the rising menace of Naxalism is the biggest threat to the nation’s security. As reported in the 14 April 2010 issue of Outlook, the Naxalities, in the largest assault in the movement’s history killed 82 security personnel in a planned attack in April and 61 people in two subsequent attacks that year.

The war seems to be getting out of its “class” framework and the focus on the social hierarchy of the movement is an important aspect of the novel. Patrick French points out the paradoxical stance of cause: “In the largest Maoist attack yet, eighty-two police jawans, or constables, were murdered in an ambush in Chhattisgarh because they were “class enemies”; every one of them, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, came from a poor family.” Ramachandra Guha notes that the sympathizers of the movement like the Swedish writer, Jan Myrdal, were hopeful of the Chinese movement finding its Indian counterpart, and thus keeping in view its ideological links, the “long term aim of these radicals was the overthrow of the Indian state.” Wholehearted commitment of the government to infrastructure and delivery of welfare schemes to the homeless/landless, as a remedy to subdue the spark of violence caused by the friction of idea and economy, is the clear sub-textual message in A Situation in New Delhi.

The various facets of this undercover revolution are unveiled through the happenings in the life of Rishad, Devi’s son, a brilliant student of History in the Delhi University. It is a historical fact that the brutal and irrational methodology of seeking justice, propagated by this school of thought under the tutelage of Charu Majumdar, caught the imagination of the impressionable youth, especially the urban elite. The Jadavpur University, Calcutta;
Presidency College, Calcutta and St. Stephen's College, New Delhi became the hotbeds for the propagation of the revolution in the sixties. Ironically, the purest idealism was instilled into the cadres to justify the most inhuman of acts they were motivated to commit. A rehearsal of the lesson on panic, “an artist’s creation”, through the stream of consciousness of Rishad, alarms the reader to the mesmerizing, almost poetic effects of ideological prose:

This was the violence of the sane with a passion for justice. To build a new world the old had to be razed to the ground. The way to do it was through a systematic creation of panic. Panic to chaos to ruin. And out of ruin open revolt and power. Only then could a new social order arise. Not Utopia. (58)

Rishad had alienated himself from the privileged class, to which he belonged, to challenge the “hoary status quo” of casual over-lordship over the country’s resources by a few. The bitterness of the youth towards the leadership at the helm is so intense that Rishad, who had lived his life so close to the bone of high aspiration and endeavour since his birth (18) was transformed into a calm, controlled, contained young man totally non-committal to the issues of his high profile life, surreptitiously engaged in living out his pledge to a “sober, calculated destruction” (67). Like many other intellectually sensitive Delhi University students, his social conscience had been smitten and he felt a “recoil from the waste and affluence the country could not afford” and abhorrence at the contrasts that existed around him. Having spotted the “uncorrupted core” with mouldable possibilities in Suvarnapriya Jaipal, “Skinny”, a first year student of History Honours in the university, whose house and neighbourhood had been randomly picked by the cadres for raising terror, Rishad explains the futility of hoping for any deliverance from misery and poverty from the political class to her:

Politicians, whatever their political colour, and whatever they piously said, got fat from office. They would never banish the contrasts; never in ten thousand
years build an equal society. How could they, when they were products of the rot themselves, of caste, of vested interests and stinking old ideals? (67)

Preaching the thoughts instilled in him he educates Skinny further by reminding her that "there is no room for philosophy where there is hunger and terrible inequality. The only way that will not work is with words. There have been enough words. We have to act." (66). Sahgal goes into the intricacies of the Naxal Movement - its fool-proof enrolling, scientific training, calculated planning, flawless execution, omnipresent perils, the do-or-die commitment and most touchingly the nihilistic thought process of the revolution. The Maoist pride in brute killing, so repulsed by the reader, is a historically corroborated fact: "The Naxalites had their own Lal Sena (Red Army), whose members were trained in the use of rifles, grenades and land mines. They also had their safaya (clean-up) squads, whose marksmen were trained to assassinate particularly oppressive landlords." (Guha 619). The novel dwells on the paradoxical nature of this shock therapy which extinguishes life to illuminate it.

Rishad, had chiefly worked in organizing sections of workers in a quarry, fixed in their "time-stopped existence and stone-anciency rooted in the immovability of the quarry, the massive inertness of the poundage and tonnage of rock they mined and broke and lifted in monotonous head-loads over monotonous hours." (97). His mentor and role-model, Naren, a product of the best school in India, of Harvard and Oxford, with an "intricate map of burns on his back" the raw rebellious ridges with angry pulp in between, dies in stupefying heat in a shabby room, in dirt and decrepitude, with a multitude of mosquitoes, flies, mildew and vermin for lack of medical facilities. The sad waste of brilliance, promise and uprightness at the alter of a nihilistic, irrational, clandestine and erratic movement is brought home by the unfortunate loss of the life of Rishad in a cinema hall, in a hand grenade.
explosion carried out by his comrades towards the end of the novel. The movement is portrayed as the self-defeating, self-annihilating black hole of civilization.

In this realistic exposition of Naxalism, Sahgal has managed to create the purity and beauty of human life, its infinite possibilities, its mind-boggling achievements and irrepressible imagination, ill-fatedly harnessed to the rarefied brute idealism of an undercover organization. There is an echo of the inevitable hierarchies inbuilt in the complex structure of power, allegorically explained in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* - the characters come back full circle to the very same process they amateurishly struggle to abolish to achieve their goals. This conversation between Skinny and Rishad conveys the futility of trying to do away with all forms of political authority and governance:

‘Will there be a government?’ she asked.

‘A government?’

‘After our movement succeeds.’

‘Oh. Yes of course. Eventually.’ (68)

Sahgal quietly prioritizes the idea of revolt over revolution - an open uprising of people - to express intolerance and opposition of political regimes to bring about positive change at the highest level. If revolution, as Rishad and his ranks believed, was a product of circumstances, not men then, questions Sahgal, ‘why didn’t these circumstances produce revolt?’ (68) The Gandhian philosophy remains the strongest strand of Sahgal’s political thought, and no revolution is more adverse to it than that envisaged by the Naxalites. The unsparing parochialism of the radicals is unacceptable to the authorial conscience; French, too, has traced an irreverence towards national leaders in the strategy of the Maoists: The revolutionaries turned against the class enemies of Nehruvian India; even poor Mahatma Gandhi was charged with devoted service to imperialism, feudalism and the comprador bourgeoisie (176).
The subtle juxtaposition of the Gandhian philosophy to Maoist ideology in the text makes it very relevant to the unfolding of events in present times. The unique philosophy of a non-violent revolt, as empirically proven by Gandhi at the social and political level, is being globally endorsed. Sahgal has thematically worked towards the meaningfulness and substantiality of an open revolt and it is heartening to witness its efficacy in the most unlikely of regions. The reference is to the recent "Lotus Revolution" of 25 January 2011 when a loose coalition of veteran activists and rookie protestors and millions of ordinary Egyptians united in harmony on Tahrir Square, Cairo, in popular uprising to sound the death knell of the iron reign of President Hosni Mubarak as reported in the 14 February 2011 issue of the *Time* magazine. These pockets of resistance culminated in a peaceful mass demonstration which shifted the balance of power not only in Egypt but most of the Arab world. The Sahgalian conviction that had been shaped by the positivism generated by the Gandhi-Nehru alchemy, has been appropriately reflected in M.J. Akbar’s observation on the peaceful outpouring of this historic revolt: “This is yet another Gandhian moment in world history…” Gandhi, in that sense has become the philosophical mentor of freedom from both, the emperor and dictator, in the arc between the Nile and the Ganges (The Sphinx 6).

While Sahgal has creatively condemned the dated philosophy of armed revolution, contemporary novelist Arundhati Roy has sympathetically endorsed the cause through her bold journalistic voyeurism and spirited activism - Roy actually penetrated the jungles in Central India to interact closely with the out-laws and came out in forceful support of their method. Contrary to Roy, French, who similarly interviewed various ranks of active and surrendered Maoists; police officers, constables; the socialist, K.P. Unnikrishanan; the iconic artist, Gaddar; the party publisher, a Doon school aluminus, Kobad Ghandy; and the Adivasis, concluded on the lines of Sahgal:
The portrayal of the Maoist conflict as an *Avatar* type of story—good people with bows and arrows facing down bad people with machinery, one atrocity paralleling or excusing another—was a romantic and spurious version of a complex reality. It was a fatal philosophy because it was the wrong tool. (188)

Sahgal has drawn attention to the fact that the ideologues of this revolution in the pockets of eastern and central India were upper caste Indians, like Devi’s son Rishad and his associate Naren. In the coeval scenario, French has reinforced the paradoxical composition of the so-called egalitarian crusade that Sahgal had highlighted much earlier on: ‘More than forty years after the campaign of strategic slaughter had begun, the Maoist super structure was composed of the same old types [upper class revolutionaries]… Only in the middle and lower rungs of the CPI (Maoist) did you find the people’ (189). While the insurgency examined by Sahgal was akin to an internal anti-colonial type of economy-driven movement, primarily with a localized assassination agenda, its twenty-first century incarnation is more in direct confrontation with the State. The corruption and inefficiency at the cutting edge, the devouring forces of globalization and the mining mafia have reignited the spirit of the cadres enough for Delhi to take cognizance of their woes. The invasion by the multinational companies and political big-wigs into mining areas and forestland has drawn capitalism into a close confrontation with fire-brand communism.

Sahgal’s fictional soothsaying and deep insight into the ethical infirmities of an apparently fantastic crusade enhances the contemporary relevance of *A Situation in New Delhi*. The communist movement the world over has got a political beating and its proponents are re-inventing themselves to fit into democracies and changing market economies. The well-known political analyst, Neelabh Mishra, urging the state to take the path of negotiation to reach its alienated citizens (by using rather than prosecuting, possible mediators like Binayak Sen), concedes that Vineel Krishna, a dedicated IAS officer rescued
by the tribals, certainly is a sensitive, pro-poor face of the state he serves. It's a face that the whole state and all its administration must show (44). On the footsteps of their Nepalese counterparts, the Maoists put up candidates in the Jharkhand Panchayat elections giving the democratic process a try. This turnaround is a hope that the deep conviction of writers like Sahgal, could change into reality, provided the state continues to create the environment for the repatriation of its out-lawed citizens. While French, having studied the revolution from close angles, is dismal of it for the lack of re-invention: Maoists relied on dead mantras (182), Sahgal is unequivocal in her argument: there simply cannot be anything good in store for humanity in a radical philosophy, which lacks the basic attribute humane

In this mid-œuvre text, Sahgal has juxtaposed three creeds of politicians in the transformational era of the 1960s. Firstly it is a political discourse on the fading luminaries, like the late Prime Minister, Shivraj, who had fought for the dignity, justice and freedom of his countrymen and worked tirelessly to permanently establish a democratic tradition with secular values and a welfare state with scientific leanings. His successors ushered in a perpetually worsening period of sycophancy, opportunism, hallow demagoguery and corruption in the government portals — a sad reversal of the vision and commitment which came quite naturally to the vanguards of the freedom movement. Lastly, it axes with subtlety and profound wisdom the doomed radical practitioners of a fatal social doctrine which has, by now, spawned a threatening sea of humanity in the infamous red corridor of India.

III

Rich Like Us

The capitalist call, social fixations and a political nightmare

If Nehruvian democracy was to be raped, who better to do the ravishing than the descendants of Nehru? They might even do it with some style.

(Shiva Naipaul The Unfinished Journey)
Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* is fictionalized history dealing with the “black summer” in New Delhi, a month after the declaration of Emergency rule in India in June 1975. The power behind this unfortunate autocratic spell was none other than Sahgal’s cousin, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Other than being consistently engaged with “speaking truth to power” the novel raises several other issues requiring deliberation and attendance: patriarchal hegemony, stigma of sati on female psyche, immature handling of free-trade, dangers of neo-colonization, genuflection in bureaucracy, nepotism in politics, elitist hypocrisy and the betrayal of the ideals of the national dream of free India.

The novel depicts with seasoned craftsmanship the simultaneity of a spectrum of affected lives during Emergency, but most strikingly, it is the story of Ram, an anglicized businessman and his second wife, Rose, a cockney memsahib who remains the “other” both in England and India. Sonali, the well-meaning high up in the Indian Administrative Service and Ravi Kachru, her colleague, one time ideological friend and lover, are the two contrasting faces of post-colonial bureaucracy. During Emergency Sonali pays a heavy price for holding firmly on to her principles and professional integrity, and finds herself demoted and inconsequentially posted out of Delhi, whereas Ravi Kachru, her former “comrade-in-arms” has a meteoric rise, owing to his cross over strategy and opportunistic game plans. The shades of black cast by the suffocating clouds of the oppressive spell are darkened by the likes of Dev, Ram’s son from his first wife, unscrupulous, incompetent, unethical businessman who rises to great heights as a new entrepreneur symbolizing the arrival of the “decadent” capitalist, abetting neocolonialism. The less aggressive voices have their harrowing tales to tell (some of them re-located in the present context): Sonali’s great-grandmother, forced into sati, desperately but unsuccessfully tried to escape the flames of fire in the presence of her much loved tender son; Mona, Ram’s first wife, caught in no-choice
circumstances of male promiscuity; Nishi, Dev’s wife, prisoner of her *nouveau riche* worldly-wise pliancy in spite of her innate goodness; her father, thrice victimized, by colonialism, partition and now Emergency; Lalaji, Ram’s father, the conventional no-nonsense patriarch; the handicapped beggar, the symbolic *subaltern* a man who couldn’t wipe away his tears and is a mute witness to the gruesome act of *silencing* Rose by the deafening dictates of ruthless power. The perpetrators of terror and curtailment of freedom, Madam and her son remain an invisible dramatic presence, affecting the personal and social scapes of Indian lives beyond imagination, creating a fear psychosis that validates the trickle down principle of the Foucauldian theory of *discursive practice*.

*Rich Like Us* is an ironic, allusive title, suggestive of the enticing beckoning of the western imperialist nations to the developing world to fit into a mindless, soulless rut of globalization. Mr. Neuman, the *new* face of colonialism in the opening paragraph of the narrative, while enjoying an elaborate dinner with Dev and Nishi, mentally recollects the briefing he had been given by an India expert before his trip: *We can’t blame them from wanting to live like us, it’s what makes them ready to buy what we have to sell* (1). The economic exploiters struck when Indian democracy was non-existent and the whole world skeptical about its future. Unfortunately, the power centre was willing to negotiate the thoughtfully worked out Nehruvian policy as evident from Mr. Neuman’s recollective stream-of-consciousness:

They are touchy about their resources and terms of collaboration. Applications take forever to process, even joint venture proposals. *Since the crackdown things are a lot easier.* And whatever the changes mean over there, as far as we are concerned their attitude is less doctrinaire about Indian controls and ownership. Partnership still is not quite on the terms we want it but it’s getting us further than we used to. Look at it this way, there’s vast consumer market
out there. If even two out of hundred Indians use what we manufacture, that’s a bigger market than a medium-sized European country. (4)

In its incisive policy analysis, prophetic commentary and political insights, the text deplores the continuity of colonial ideologies and discourses, both in the economic and political practices in the 1970s in India. The reverting back to the stringent colonial methods of subjugation and control, camouflaged by welfare policies lead to the declaration of Emergency and opening of the floodgates to consumerist forces creating islands of prosperity in the vast ocean of poverty as amply portrayed in the text. The problematized issues raised by Sahgal are an outcome of the “deformative-traces” of colonialism arriving in a fairly unrecognizable incarnation. The complicity of the western multinational companies like “Happyola” (the allusion to Coca-Cola is obvious) with the prime minister’s son and his cohorts is forcefully represented suggesting a green signal to self-aggrandizement through politics from the highest office of authority. The bold interrogation of economic and political power shifts for futuristic concerns ascertains Rich Like Us a space as an early anti-neocolonial text. Ella Shohat raises the requirement of critical thought truthfully addressing the concerns arising out of economic relationships between wealthy western nations and their poorer, albeit politically independent counterparts in her essay Notes on the Post-Colonial

The term Post-colonial when compared with neo-colonialism, comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power relations; it lacks a political content which can account for the eighties and nineties-style U.S. militaristic involvements and for the symbiotic links between U.S. political and economic interests and those of local elites. (31-32)
The indifference, in the materialistic thrust of market economy, to human suffering is nostalgically contrasted in the story with the fortified programmes of Nehruvian mixed economy that let both private and public sectors flourish side by side, so that, with the
patronization of Indian industry, even the "bumps and bubbles" in the indigenously manufactured glass, straightened out and "everything else under the sun became Indian too, including millionaires" (188).

For Sahgal, postcolonialism, as an enabling concept, it not bound by historical and geographical confines, but is inclusive of the marginalized white race, victimized by the repercussions of industrialization and colonialism the world over. The universal phenomenon of "power" operates only in the context of relational meaning, remaining the binary opposite of "disempower" anywhere and everywhere, at all times. The phenomenon of exploitation was not exclusive to the colonized world although it was more blatantly pursued here. The young Rose in England with "the electric effect of her unquenchable hair and whiteness" had tantalized Ram by turning down his sexual overtures, for she was initially for him a mere "chocolate shop pick-up talking to him like a social equal" (38). Her fiancé, Freddie, had just managed work in a bottle factory and her parents whose "future of security, of plenty, never seemed to arrive" (43) were forever worried about keeping their heads above the water. She speaks with a cockney accent, unfailingly announcing her unforgiveable status as the "other"—living on the periphery of English society. Ram rarely resists offering a linguistic tip to her cockney utterances:

- "I see I'll have to court you properly."
- "Ow do you mean, court me proper?"
- "_ly_" he corrected.
- "Oh you, teaching me my own language. What do you be teaching me next?" (39)

Postcolonialism as a story of the marginalized does not operate merely within the parameters set by race, colour and majority history. Escaping the class structures, poverty and alienation of English society, she reaches India as Ram's second wife. Not long before, she enters again, the domain of gender "subalternity" as Ram gets involved with another well-
connected, high class English woman, Marcella, who brought to mind pictures of fairytales of princesses guised as goose-girls, princesses in high pointed gauzy headdresses and tiny-waisted flowering gowns (74). Rose with her joie-de-verve, sparkling personality, business acumen and innocent candidness, makes a niche for herself by earning the deep respect of Lalaji, who once ostracized her, and making her peace with Mona, Ram's first wife, becomes a legend and not because English wives were rare (45).

Postcolonialism, in its parochial approach appears turned around on its head, with the articulation of the struggles of the white skinned people within the same imperialistic design. Particularities are not homogenized by oversimplification into a grand postcolonial narrative - Rose forms a complex moral alliance in spite of her race, with Lalaji, who could tolerate an Englishman in India because as a boy he refused to crawl on his belly as he passed by an Englishman, as ordered on a particular stretch of road, and so he whipping frame had been set up there and six boys had been tied to it and flogged, including Lalaji (41). The dynamics of the forces arising out of historical movements and their impact on human condition is the bed-rock of Sahgal’s writings, without any overt implication of the building up of colonialism as a conspiracy theory.

The point of intersection of gender degradation between the accident-cum-murder of Rose in 1975 and the suicide-cum-murder of Sonali’s great-grandmother as a sati in 1905 cannot be overlooked. Primarily the narrative exposes the fault-lines in the apparently fortified and much hyped Indian family setup, tracing the inhuman acts to the worldly economic objectives and draws attention to the unchanging, vulnerable condition of women. While Rose falls a prey to the collusion between the autocratic and neocolonial forces, the socio-religious hegemony of the patriarchy is answerable for the utterly shattering incident of sati much earlier. Ashis Nandy has ascribed the revival of sati in Bengal to the Britishers via the Brahmanical conduit and has drawn attention to the fact that Bengali Brahmans were not
merely religious leaders and interpreter of texts, traditions and rites but major landholders and financiers who were increasingly co-opted by the colonial system (Exiled at Home 7).

Grappling with the roots of this gory ritual, Sahgal evocatively traces the polymorphism and pluralism of Hinduism, a religion of immense antiquity with no traceable beginning, without a founder or church as uplifting as salvation and as destructive as slavery (Rich Like Us 148) as the theatre of this malicious tragedy. The cover-up story of Rose's murder as an accident of a white woman in a drunken state, fitting into a sweeping Occidental construct, verifies the ground reality that the script of gender politics continues to be written by men.

The narrative projects Indian cultural identity as an inevitable heterogeneity, the end result of many criss-crossing caravans, migrations and invading hordes (78), assimilating into its lived reality the historical bounties of each invasion. The overlapping cultures blended so smoothly into each other that if Ram was a Muslimized Hindu, Zafar was a Hinduized Muslim (77). The subtle undercurrents of the syncretism of Indian thought run throughout the text and are formally acknowledged in the dedication of the text which reads, To the Indo-British experience Rose for whom the Indian family was a frightening unshakeable permanence (76) finds her worse fears allayed in her warm inclusivity into it over a period of time. Colonized India continued with its characteristic on-going process of amalgamation of diverse cultures and during this period hybridity, although skewed, was not altogether a one-way traffic, as Lalaji recalls with animated zeal:

English names had become as good as Indian. C.F. Andrews, college professor and friend of Mahatma, editor B.G. Horniman who had taken off his English suit, put on a pyjama-kurta and joined the civil disobedience marches in the streets of Bombay and the English admiral's daughter, now Miraben, who had given up an admiral's daughter life for an ashram and a spinning wheel. (143)
Envisaging a significant role for a novelist, Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* contends that nations are imaginative and cultural constructs and the novel becomes a sort of proxy for the nation. By lending her realistic prose to the rendition of socio-political instability during the infamous Emergency with full conviction in *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal has once again contributed to the making of nation building. The text abounds in authorial comments that imagine this deep sense of belonging and community and aim at arousing the nation’s political consciousness at the crucial juncture:

> *We are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth, we do not see what we do not want to.* (24)

> *the kind of automatons we of the civil service have become are not expected to reply.* (27)

> *What if there is a collective will to cowardice, when men and women in their millions, a whole nationful, did cowardly deeds? Was there a way out?* (31)

Timothy Brennan refers to this diffusive sense of rootedness in his essay, *The National Longing for Form* as he observes that nation refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous - the local community, domicile, family, a condition of belonging. Sahgal’s sense of nationalism coincides with this consciousness of the growth and cohesion of an organically evolved community, a historically structured entity that prospers as a whole.

Arguing for the circumstantial reality of a writer, Edward Said clearly states: *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.* (in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 4). Sahgal’s unalterable reality was that she was the first cousin of an autocratic Prime Minister, but could not forgo her passion for truth and freedom and this worldliness.
remained a source of tacit assumptions and meanings for her. The author has carried forward the familial legacy of objectivity, rationality and political morality in the world of the literature, in contrast to her cousin, who is understood to have sacrificed it at the altar of opportunism and power in the world of politics.

Bereft of dense allusions and a multilayered mystique, the clear-cut prose is almost rhetorical in its commitment to the unveiling of the ugly face of the Emergency regime, and the subsequent invasion of capitalism in India. For Sahgal, politics and literature are inextricably bound and Rich Like Us, though not experimental in form, arrests attention for the intensification of socio-political themes to bring about change which must be initiated by the controlling agencies of power. Said too, debunks the notion of true knowledge being fundamentally non-political in Orientalism: 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 (10). The Emergency rule was a shock therapy given whimsically to an unsuspecting, healthy nation and the novel is a testimony of the grim scenario which finally alerted the national consciousness, and the nation collectively got ready to reject the suppressive forces, however, indigenous they were, in the first democratic opportunity it was given.

Hypothetically speaking, if Sahgal were a critic she would be a new historicist, not just for her realistic inclination and engagement with practicality, power and politics, but the almost unanimous corroboration of her fictional representation of Indian realities in general and the 1970s India in particular, by parallel readings of her texts with journalistic, fictional and non-fictional sources pertaining to the same period. No doubt a lot of media and writers buckled under pressure, but most testimonies of the brief spell of despotism that have withstood the test of topicality, truthful delineation and architectural brilliance are textual interpretations, in complete rejection mode, of the tyrannical spell. Reminiscing about the
conception of his award winning novel, *Midnight’s Children* and the declaration of a State of Emergency in 1975, Salman Rushdie wrote in 2006: “I understood almost at once that Mrs. Gandhi had somehow become central to my still tentative literary plans.” Three years after the publication of the book, in 1984, Rushdie faced the backlash, when Mrs. Gandhi, now back in power, filed a defamation suit against him for a rather tame personal sentence, a mere contemporary hot stuff, an odd choice of *casus belli* in a book that excoriated Indira for many crimes of the Emergency (His Own Mt. Sinai). Mrs. Gandhi lacked the moral conviction of defending herself against the gruesome atrocities committed by her palace guards and sanctioned by her in a court of justice, and therefore victimized Rushdie on a flimsy pretext.

Ramachandra Guha’s *India After Gandhi*, massively researched magisterial account of India’s rebirth, mentions numerous foreign media interventions and the international concern for the Indian political dilemma. However, the starkest message is sent by A.M. Rosenthal of *New York Times*. On his visit to India he sadly concluded: “Had Jawaharlal lived while Indira Gandhi reigned, the two would have been political opponents rather than allies (521). An Indian friend had added, “Indira in the Prime Minister’s house and Jawaharlal back to writing letters to her from jail” (521). The novel resonates with echoes of this autocratic nightmare and Sonali, Sahgal’s fictional alter ego, realizes the worst fears of the Indians when she observes, “the all too visible police, wielding tear gas and truncheons brought imperious rule and empresses to mind, waking me up to the fact that the democracy of Pandit Nehru, who had been dead ten years, was in deep trouble” (189). Sanjay Gandhi’s vulgarized family planning programme, slum demolition campaign in New Delhi, the Maruti project, the confusion between his views on free enterprise and his mother’s professed socialism, sycophancy and its growing importance in politics are critically analyzed by Guha, substantiating their foremost ironic representations by Sahgal in *Rich like Us*. 
The ideological propaganda made by Mrs. Gandhi through her party slogan: "Indira is India and India is Indira" just a few days before the declaration of Emergency Rule, gets reflected in the text in the helpless angry questioning of Sonali of those paying homage at the altar of power, "what was the country? It was she, who like the many armed goddess would be ever victorious (Rich like Us 191). To lend veracity to portrayal of India as a diseased, famished, violent and misled nation, school children carrying banner saying "She stood Between Order and Chaos" had been brought in trucks to New Delhi for the inauguration of the Happyola factory. Guha recounts quite a few such signs of a creeping dictatorship, including the above-mentioned slogan, coined by overworked government copywriters, painted on the sides of buses, across bridges and on outsize hoardings erected outside government buildings for gullible public consumption (India After Gandhi 495).

The Internal Emergency of the summer of 1975 was, hopefully, the last eruption of the colonial political legacy lingering on in India. It was also the manifestation of fear and insecurity Mrs. Gandhi felt with the rise of the J.P. (Jaya Prakash) phenomenon on the political horizon of India and the political confrontation between the two leaders finally scripted the missing pages of India’s pulsating, vibrant democracy. The following conversation between Nishi, a self-serving beneficiary of the free enterprise of "Madam’s son and her father, Kishori Lal, a man of unwavering values, is a fictional snatch of the ongoing national debate sparked by manufactured and misconstrued information given out by state agencies:

*They have got so jail happy, there were ten prisoners in cells where one used to be, stinking clogged toilets and not a drop of water.*

*That not true. They said on T.V. prisoners are being well-treated, and how would you know anyway.*

*They said on T.V. JP a raving conspirator, they need their heads examined*
JP is not even in jail, he is in hospital.

After they have finished with him he will be ready for his grave (Rich Like Us 91)

Eighty thousand people were arrested under MISA - the Maintenance of Internal Security Act - sarcastically called the Maintenance of Indira Sanjay Act by its victims. Political prisoners, of the highest stature, languished in jails like ordinary criminals giving rise to witticism like, ‘Mrs. Gandhi’s much vaunted socialism was at least practiced in the jails’ (Guha 498). As representations of the time frame in question, Guha’s historiography and Sahgal’s literary text, take the reader, in essence, to the same destination - a democratic nation under a precarious siege from within.

Sahgal’s own archival non-fictional work, Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power is a synthesis of journalistic precision, evidence-laden research and deep political insights. On being questioned about taking an oppositional position to a family member, and the one in absolute power at that, Sahgal replied:

It would have been far simpler for me to succumb to this mystique and live on it, but I have rejected it utterly where it conflicted with my own observations.

My admiration for my uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru, had little to do with the fact that I happened to be his flesh and blood. To my mind, he handled the titanic task with courage, grace and the last ounce of effort wrung from each day’s labour. He belongs to a much larger family than mine (xv).

The book was written under difficult circumstances and published in America in 1982, when Mrs. Gandhi was back in power. Whatever may have been the personal chemistry between the cousins, the book is objective and wide-ranging in its coverage of elections, constitutional amendments, and state of states, media reactions, shifts in central/state bureaucracy, fate of congress/non-congress politicians, peasants, labourers, industrial houses and an indispensable reservoir of information regarding the changing political persona of Mrs. Gandhi. Like most
texts pertaining to this controversial period, it documents the unbridgeable gap between the strangely fancy laden statements of Mrs. Gandhi and her political activities. My whole attempt is to create a society in which people do not need leaders(95) is her statement recorded on 13 March 1972, and an even more fallacious one followed on 12 August 1975:

The truth is that the police have had less work since Emergency than ever before(165).

Sahgal regrettfully notes, A heritage of devotion, waiting for her, changed in her hands to the public's awe and fear of her. Mrs. Gandhi missed the crux and essence of leadership in India. More and more her eminence had to be buttressed, arranged and safeguarded from natural political processes(185-186).

Bipin Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee in their monumental work India after Independence 1947-2000, without denying the irrationalities committed under this draconian rule have adopted a colonial line of reasoning by shifting the focus of the crisis to the ideologyless cadre, directionless leadership and the ill-organized J.P. movement. While the interrogation of Mrs. Gandhi's unwillingness to step down following the Allahabad Court Judgment on 12 June 1975 is not taken to its logical conclusion, the opposition plan, according to these historians, had all the hallmarks of a coup d'état(252). Since the indisputable over-arching reality of the happenings during Emergency is objectively recorded after empirical findings, the judgmental and psychoanalytical stances adopted by them in historicizing and exonerating public figures are insufficient to prompt a major re-reading of the novel against itself.

The present study notices a silence about the literacy programme, nutritional schemes and the plantation projects of Sanjay Gandhi's four point programme carried out by his acolytes with sycophantic zeal. His ideas probably became lack luster due to the coercion involved and the regimented manner of implementation of all his schemes and policies. There was a country-wide rejection of I will give you bread, you give me your freedom dictum by
the Indian masses. A large gap is also evident in the unequal literary space and empathy meted out to the two victims of male hegemony, Rose and Mona, the co-wives of Ram in the text.

Primarily a political narrative, Rich Like Us is meaningfully punctuated by the explosive repercussions of happenings on personal lives of its characters, largely articulated by the female consciousness of Rose and Sonali. The chronologically linear movement of the novel is brilliantly interpolated by the rhythmic oscillation between the present and past of Rose's and Sonali's lives. While the repression of other characters is sympathetically handled and adequately represented, the pain of Mona is given a taken-for-granted touch and her story remains untold. Mona being Ram's first wife, is central on the traditional pedestal of social acceptance, but gets fatefully marginalized in the matrimonial space of her life. On the one hand she is the scapegoat between a disciplinarian father, and Ram, his retaliatory son; on the other, she is no more than a foil to the projection of the reconciliatory and compromising nature of Rose. The treatment of her loneliness is surficial, projected through the loudness and eccentricity in her behavior; any mention of her is merely tangential, significant only so far as it upsets the world of Rose:

Mona's voice instructing servants hurrying between kitchen and backyard, directing the feeding of beggars once a week, the voice of the mistress of the house, who ever else might be in it. The week had another day when the mistress fasted for her husband's long life and prosperity. And apart from Mona's fasts and prayers, there were Mona's loud insistent tears. (45)

The rituals occupied her days, took care of her fateful victimization and meager companionship, and the mention of her loud tears is relevant to the text only for the initiation of a disturbing echo in the world of Rose. Subconsciously for Sahgal, Mona symbolized the conventional respectability and social binding of the Hindu marriage, and
may be there are some autobiographical knots the writer is unable to loosen in the construction of the text.

This critique, with recourse to recent theoretical developments, finds the novel to be a lasting literary imprint of the serious misconception of “I am the state” fixation in the mind of the 1970s predominant leadership in India, which subsequently manifested itself through temperamental and personality based politics. It exposes the orchestrated efforts of the state in superficially normalizing the repressive measures taken and the complete hijacking of the law machinery leading to far-reaching economic and social changes. The conflict between the erratic bout of curtailment of all kinds of freedom brought about by the impulsive release of the trajectory of dictatorial power, and the display of the Foucauldian power discourse collectively internalized by the nation after a century of political struggle, is inspiringly rendered. Sahgal has played her part, by alerting the nation, its leaders and readers, of the bad taste left by the making of an unsavoury slice of history.

The trilogy on post-colonial politics studied in this section freezes some landmark events of the nebulous Indian polity, realistically captures insights and responses in these crucial decades and dispassionately comments on the delirious flood of concomitant social change that ensued. Sahgal’s deep seated pragmatism bears the traces of what Meghnad Desai refers to as the “moderate, deliberative and consensual approach” of Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru to politics (Gandhi). An analytical scraping of political firmament of this fiction reveals that the regime of Indira Gandhi and degenerative traits in her personality remained central to Sahgal’s scrutiny of politics. There are subtle traces of a subliminal obsession of the author to fictionally crystallize the causative connection between the decline in political morality and the incumbents of power in that era. Sahgal’s ethical indictment of individualistic politics, notwithstanding the fact that it was also a personal one, stands vindicated as more and more voices join her in this assessment of contemporary politics with every passing day.