

Existential Despair and the  
Socio-Political Crisis in Nayantara Sahgal's  
A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of Degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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*Dedicated to*

*My Father*

## **A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T**

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Prof. H.S. Gill for his supervisory skill and untiring patience that enabled me to present this dissertation satisfactorily and to the best of my ability.

I am grateful to the writer, Nayantara Sahgal, for her words of encouragement and comments on her own creations.

I have been constantly inspired by Research Scholars and Faculty Members of the Centre of Linguistics and English who have given me encouragement and assistance.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

This dissertation entitled EXISTENTIAL  
DESPAIR AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CRISIS IN NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S  
A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI, submitted by Neeta Singh,  
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New Delhi, for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY,  
is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in  
part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.  
This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the  
award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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## C O N T E N T S

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A copy of Nayantara Sahgal's address at the Writers'  
Meet - 24th February 1987.

I have two kinds of writing experience. I am a novelist and a political journalist, and this is a combination not calculated to promote sanity or peace of mind. These two disciplines pull in opposite directions and require very different methods at work. As a journalist I must keep in touch with the World of fact and data. As an artist I must lose touch with it in order to create a World of my own. I am not sure that I would have been able to cope with this contradiction were it not for the fact that my central concern both in fiction and journalism is the same. If I have a recurring theme it is freedom - human, national, personal, and increasingly feminist.

Fiction is my abiding love, journalism my conscience, and there has never been any question in my mind of abandoning one for the other. A conscience is a troublesome thing. Mine has compelled me to comment forcefully on political trends and events. As a citizen of a country that is still struggling to lay the firm foundations of its democratic institutions, and to establish a tradition of civil liberties, I have not been able to stand by in silence when I have seen these under attack. But I have in a sense been able to unite my love affair with my conscience through novels that function within a contemporary political framework, and deal with, a glittering aspiration called 'Indian'. I can best express what in my worlds of writing mean, to me by a quote from Sartre: for a long time I took my

pen for a sword; I know we are powerless. No matter,  
I write....."



## INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal's novel, A Situation in New Delhi, is a conscientious work of a political novelist who endeavours to examine the interplay of politics at different levels in the social system. The essential crisis in this text stems from the struggle for power between the victimisers and the victimised; the overpowerful and the overpowered; all significant actors in the theatre of action.

However, the text is not constructed upon one concrete situation as the title suggests. There are a number of situations that trespass upon each other, each creating a dilemma infested with politics. The text contains within strong opposing forces that require careful scrutiny.

There are issues that highlight a state of passivity on one hand and provocation on the other. Passivity for the conformists seek and desire no solution having exhausted their will to fight the system. Unjust acts have formed a ritual in their lives, to which they happily surrender to by showing no reaction. On the other hand there are conscientious individuals like Rishad, Devi and Usman Ali, who in their individual capacities, oppose the injustices within the system.

The system is like a vicious monster which 'swallows' its victims with tremendous force. There are very few like Rishad who dare to retaliate. Rishad's aloofness is in actuality, an act of silent rebellion. Son of the Education Minister, Devi, he is trapped into a circle of politics both inside and outside the University from which he finds release only in the jaws of an accidental death.

The writer is able to create admirably a powerful situation of romance and rivalry, love and hate, trust and distrust, in a world dominated by politics. The world of politics is a world of conspirators, of divided opinion and artful diplomacy where one is lavish with both praise and attack upon each other.

The text begins and ends with Calvert ruminating on Shivraj's death. There is double significance here. Shivraj is introduced to the reader through the eyes of Calvert, an earnest admirer and close associate, who is also a brilliant writer and who embarks upon writing a book on Shivraj as a personal tribute to him. It is also the classic age-old East-West encounter where an Englishman <sup>is</sup> completely besotted by a selfless Indian like Shivraj who is more than a political figure.

Though Shivraj remains a passive being throughout the text, he influences the lives of his loved ones by the invincible memory that he leaves behind of himself. At different critical junctures there are strong, oblique references to Shivraj by the writer who employs him as a critical device to link the India of the past with that in the present. The significance of the time element in the text cannot be undermined. Time is an important ingredient in the novel where past linkages trespass upon the pulsating, rhythmic moments of the present. Life's previous rhythms are solidly re-captured creating in turn a new era of deep-rooted sentiments and passions.

In this dissertation an attempt is made to understand "A Situation in New Delhi" at three levels.

The first level is the syntactic or the syntagmatic level. This level deals with the order in which the author has presented the sequences of the reflections of the narrative. This level brings into light the narrative logic in the structure of the narrative.

The second chapter of our dissertation is a mode of presentation of the internal architectonics of the text. The narrative is studied in terms of its focal points of significance which

deal with a specific existential situation. The internal coherence of the text is realised by the kaleidoscope of events seen in the Semantic Light.

In the last chapter we have tried to understand the text in conceptual relation with other texts of the same author. We have also endeavoured to pay close attention to the textual significance in the narrative.

For without an extremely close reading of the text, the kind of reading that has been demonstrated in our syntactic analysis, semantic relations and the mediatory or pragmatic role of a given discourse, the text cannot be deciphered either in its whole or in the parts which constitute the whole.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

In this chapter the text is unfurled to us in the syntactic order. This is the order in which the author has presented the sequences of the reflections of the narrative. This order is imposed on the text by the author. The kernel sentences examined in this chapter in the narrative are thus constituted in the same order of sequence as presented by the author.

As the narrative unfolds the text cultivates its own order of significance. This is realised by chief signifiers that mark the advent of symbolic events beginning with Shivraj's death. We see a perturbed Englishman Michael Calvert lamenting the death of his friend and thus introducing himself to the reader. As the text further advances we are informed of Michael's career as a political journalist and his revisit to India after a span of ten years bringing into light the significance of the time element in the text.

The other incidents that have been carefully scrutinised and which are symbolic in the structure of the narrative are (a) the rape of Madhu on the University Campus (b) the student demonstration (c) resignation of Usman Ali the Vice-Chancellor and Devi the Education Minister; (d) Rishad's death and the crumbling of the movement.

All these incidents coalesce to mark a 'situation' that is not within individual control. They highlight the existential plight of the protagonists as they battle with their nerves to confront the situation. Violence acts as a pervasive symbol in the text and is analysed in different categories of human behaviour. The text nurtures no concrete solution for its depicts with realism the conflicting situation in the country in its totality.

1. The first chapter focuses on Shivraj who has left behind him an invincible memory. We visualise him as a man who is an institution by himself, a powerful personality. Our impression is gathered from the narrative thrust upon us by the author through Calvert.

The chapter begins and ends with the impact that Shivraj's death has upon Calvert in England. Emotionally scarred by two dismal marriages and actively reminded of Devi, Shivraj's sister, he decided to leave for India to write a book on Shivraj.

### Problematics

As we analyse the problem situation of the first chapter the opening sentence presents itself with an element of intrigue.

1. "Shivraj was dead. Michael Calvert saw the news immediately he unfolded the newspaper - not in a banner headline on top that was reserved for British Calamities - but thick print halfway down the page under an astonishingly alive picture."<sup>1</sup>

Shivraj occupies a pivotal role in the text. The opening sentences focus on him and so do the closing lines of the text. The irony of the situation is that though Shivraj is dead and gone from the world he leaves behind him an invincible memory. The words "an astonishingly alive picture" brings forward a visual effect. The word "alive" is thus in direct opposition to "dead" creating an intrigue about the man.

2. "There isn't going to be another like him in a hundred years."<sup>2</sup>

We get a glimpse into Shivraj's disposition through the eyes of Michael Calvert, an Englishman. This sentence suggests a 'deepening mystery' about the man Shivraj and points towards

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1. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', London Magazine Edition, 1977 Ch.1, Page 5.

2. *ibid*, Page 6.

his endless record of achievements. This is a functional unit for it contains the kernel of the narrative structure.

3. 'Yes, I did hang up, thought Michael in a spasm of anger. Of course, I hung up. This is my day of fierce mourning and it should bloody well be yours. We shall never see his like again!'<sup>3</sup>

Michael's sentiments here are internalised that explode in an outburst. For him it is a day of fierce mourning and at a time like this, he resents even telephone calls that appear as intrusions to him.

"We shall never see his like again." In his mental frame Calvert sees Shivraj as an idealized political figure, an institution by himself. He is definite in his exaggerated esteem of Shivraj, certain that such a man was never likely to be born again. Both his lamentations and his concrete esteem for the man build up a level of expectation and the proposition grows further with Calvert telling his publisher John Drexel that his next work would be on Shivraj for which he would return to India.

4. "John treated this announcement with moderate enthusiasm. He believed in distance and detachment in a biographer. Preferably he liked the subject to have been dead a few hundred years."<sup>4</sup>

John Drexel's attitude is in binary opposition to that of Calvert. The words "distance" and "detachment" reflect this.

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3. *ibid.*, Page 6.

4. *ibid.*, Page 7.

There is comic irony in the last sentence where he prefers the "subject" to have been dead for a hundred years. The phrase "hundred years" crops up again, but here the context is different. For Shivraj it is a matter of involvement, for Drexel it is merely a method of assessing the "subject" where he prefers the subject to have been dead for a few hundred years.

5. "We call so many leaders unique," said John skeptically, 'In what way was Shivraj unique?'<sup>5</sup>

The reader of the text here breathes a sigh of relief. At last through a dialogue, we get a concrete image of Shivraj's uniqueness as perceived by Calvert. The entire discourse is amazingly simple but it unravels the complexities of the social system as well as within the human disposition.

6. "He was just - himself - and that was what he presented to the public. That was what he gave to policy, as well as to close relationship. May be Western policy-makers thought him enigmatic because he wore no disguises. And the communists of course have no use for the contemplative view or vision."<sup>6</sup>

This outburst contains within it a set of implications. Shivraj can be visualised as a humanist who had the courage of his convictions, who inspite of his ideologies gave importance to relationships. These qualities set him apart from the cut and dried politician of any decade. The element of intrigue about him gets slightly eroded. Calvert's fingertip sensitivity also comes to light.

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5. *ibid.*, Page 8.

6. *ibid.*, Page 8.

7. Time supposed to put everything into perspective, apparently played tricks of another kind with personalities such as his enlarging and sharpening images.<sup>7</sup>

We have the authorial tone present here through Calvert's ruminations. Time is an important ingredient in the text where past linkages serve to enhance the present moments intermingling at odd junctures. Calvert is reminded of Shivraj's sister Devi, after ten long years. His mind is now sensually active as he is reminded of her and also of the two divorces that he had undergone.

8. Her marriage to Michael had disappointed her sorely. She had expected publicity, prestige and a certain amount of well arranged culture when she married a known author."<sup>8</sup>

These sentences attempt to examine the conflicting emotions in a marriage relationship. Lydia his first wife is a seeker of affluence, who cannot understand the formidable reality of a writer's work and after being disappointed with Calvert, disappears leaving him for an oil company executive. We are told by the writer that during Lydia his drinking had blossomed into epic proportion. His 'vague hope' that he might carry Lydia with him to 'some creative excess' had also faded out. The incompatibility among the two is vividly brought out indicating the natural complexity of human relationships.

9. "With Nell there had been good possibilities. He thought about them as he went up the stairs. He had lived half a life these ten years, except for his writing."<sup>9</sup>

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7. *ibid.*, Page 10.

8. *ibid.*, Page 11.

9. *ibid.*, Page 13.



Calvert's broken relationship with Lydia and Nell had left him with emotional scars. With Nell the connection in spite of the divorce, continues, for which he is slightly thankful. His writing is his actual passion which never deserts him. The brief mention of "ten years" sums up an important period of his life. Now, it marks a point of departure as he prepares to leave for India.

II. This chapter focuses on the principal characters, Devi and Usman whose lives are unmistakably interlinked. The incident involving the rape of Madhu on the University campus by the student of the same University can clearly be viewed as an act of social deviance. The chain of events that follow this incident is far more consequential in nature. The expulsion of the three students guilty of this act, results in a massive demonstration by the University Students demanding withdrawal of the expulsion. Further, a mob of forty or fifty students assault Usman Ali, the Vice-Chancellor, injuring him in the eye. Devi as the Education Minister, is vastly perturbed at the turn of events and dashes off to visit Usman. It is Usman who takes the 'situation' in his stride and controls a half-hysterical Devi.

Devi then pays a visit to the rape victim Madhu out of personal concern, sensitive to her plight. She is relieved to hear her talk even though in monosyllables because previously Madhu had lain "disintegrating under shock" refusing to speak.

#### PROBLEMATICS

10. "She felt acutely the plight of the jobless young, but a boiling rage filled her at the barbarism of rape on the campus, a helpless young girl, probably injured for life."<sup>10</sup>

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10. *ibid.*, Page 20.

As a woman, Devi is extremely sensitive to Madhu's plight, in a society that discriminated so openly between man and woman. A raped woman in Indian society is afforded little or no help. Instead she is ostracized from society if not openly condemned. Madhu's condition becomes severe as the text advances in uncovering real life situations.

11. "What in the world will I do there? Besides, tht kind of marriage is just organized rape."<sup>11</sup>

Rishad's views on society and life are very well defined at the age of nineteen. In this 'situation' he declines to accompany his mother, Devi to Pinky's engagement party. Rishad's deliberate aloofness is in fact an act of silent rebellion. He abstains from opening up with the rich and superficial, who are busy amassing wealth, obvious to the plight of the other classes.

Also he is averse to the kind of arranged marriage where wealth begets wealth, a clear evidence of which was Pinky's case.

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11. *ibid.*, Page 25.

III. Usman Ali, the Vice-Chancellor is projected as a scholar, a man with an excellent sense of humour, who is also patient and compassionate by nature. He is seen deliberating over social issues, that are infused with politics.

Once again Shivraj is brought in as an oblique reference. Usman tells us that Shivraj had the gift of putting things in perspective. This is yet another personality trait of Shivraj, being disclosed, making his "uniqueness" appear more credible.

This chapter also focuses on the rape victim Madhu and the severe 'hallucinations' she undergoes as a result of the assault upon her. Her family is vastly ashamed of this incident and she is left loveless, to face the world and her private trauma.

We also get a glimpse into Usman's conjugal life. In Usman's eyes his wife Nadira did not figure in the central concerns of his life, being barely compatible with him at the intellectual plane. He finds her problematic as a wife but durable as mistress material.

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PROBLEMATICS

12. "He felt a peculiar grief at the memory of the man, not at his death, untimely though it had been, but at the passing with him of some vital human essence."<sup>12</sup>

Shivraj has created a forceful impact on all his close associates. Usman here is not mourning Shivraj's death but the passing away of that era that had responded so beautifully to Shivraj's morals and leadership. In contrast the situation in the country in the present is dismal.

13. "Revolutions if they had any meaning meant putting oneself into the crucible of change. Revolutions went on."<sup>13</sup>

Usman Ali is one of the few individuals whose revolutionary zeal is an inherent part of his disposition. The need and desire for change indicates his futuristic concern for society. Usman does not view established positions as signs of competence and authority but as 'power blocs' in the country. What was necessary in his view was a pragmatic method to deal with situations, whether political or non-political.

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12. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi' Chapter 3 page 28.

13. *ibid.*, Page 30.

IV. This chapter focuses on the sheer display of opulence at the Puri household during Pinky's engagement party. The extravagant life style of the upper crust has been revealed with minute details that have been examined meticulously.

The chapter in essence is one on family ties and social obligations, significant features of our prevailing social system. The endless hustle and bustle in the Puri household reminds Devi of her own frighteningly small unit of two people. In contrast a big family like the Puri's always performed the function of cushioning one against shocks. A sense of alienation overcomes Devi, accentuated by Rishad's absence at the function.

We witness the past treading upon the present once again as Devi receives Michael Calvert's letter announcing his arrival in India.

#### PROBLEMATICS

14. "Yes and don't they look like the cat that swallowed the canary now they've betrothed her to three banks and a brewery. Vijay isn't sending her back to University now. Yesterday's trouble gives him an excuse not to."<sup>14</sup>

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14. *ibid.*, Chapter 4, Page 38.

This sentence is yet another exposition on wealthy families entering into marriage alliances with each other. The Puri family is only following the 'norm' in conducting their daughter's marriage. However, it is money that determines the status of the individual specially amongst the upper crust. Also Pinky being forbidden to go to the University by her father is an example of traditional authority reigning supreme in the Puri family.

15. "He watched her shrewdly, 'You'd better advise him to have the police. These are't Shivraj's times.'"<sup>15</sup>

The reference here is to Usman Ali, Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University and the incident on the campus that had resulted in an assault upon him. The emphasis here however is on 'Shivraj's times'. Vijay's father is firmly stating that in the present situation there was need to be alert and opt for security arrangements in anticipation of trouble, for the Shivraj era was over. The past once again clashes with the present highlighting the state of affairs in the country.

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15. *ibid.*, Chapter 4, Page 38.

V. This chapter provides us with an insight into the ineffable bond between Shivraj and his sister Devi in the past, and the intimate relationship between Michael Calvert and Shivraj, which results in Michael writing a book on Shivraj after his death.

It is Shivraj's speech at Pahalgam in Kashmir valley that influences Calvert deeply and in fact proves to be the turning point in Calvert's life as it leads him into an intimate, life-long association with Shivraj. The political scenario in the country is unfolded before us where the spirit of independence now symbolized a new era. We get a glimpse of the real India studied with quiet dignity and tolerance through the eyes of an Englishman. Calvert's return to India after a span of ten years is significant for it provides the Englishman with a changed vision of the country and its paradoxes.

#### PROBLEMATICS

16. 'Shivraj had been a political animal, but a man with interests too, from the earth's crust to astronomy; with friends not only followers. It would have been a pity to confine him to a political platform hung with an ideology.'<sup>16</sup>

The text gradually unfolds before us glimpses into Shivraj's personality. Here he is once again seen through the eyes of a loyal and close associate, Michael Calvert. Calvert

is of the opinion that Shivraj was not only a political man who loved political cheers but a man of diverse interests and talents. A man who himself took to writing and who had proved an inspiration for him. This sentence is significant because it acquaints the reader closely with Shivraj, revealing facets of his personality.

17. 'And now that Shivraj was dead Michael began to see him as part of a race - descendant of the great migration that journeyed through the Indus Valley into the plain.'<sup>17</sup>

Through the eyes of Calvert, the writer here clearly romanticizes Shivraj's disposition. In strokes the writer is unfurling before us various facets of Shivraj's personality. It is also reiterated that Shivraj's death has had a tremendous impact upon his close associates, particularly Calvert.

18. 'After a while he told her, all the noise and heat and colour get stamped into your brain, an indelible violent photograph that, was impossible to wipe out,....'<sup>18</sup>

Calvert here is referring to India while conversing with his divorced wife, Nell in London. His empathy with the sights and smells that surround him in India is brought out in this

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17. *ibid.*, Chapter 5, Page 53.

18. *ibid.*, Chapter 5, Page 55.



passage. His decision to return to India ascertain his enchantment with the land inspite of its many failings. The bond exists both as a concrete reality and also as an abstraction.

VI. This chapter is a commentary on the impact of the prevalent social injustices in the system. It also highlights the revolutionary streak in Rishad, the Education Minister's son, who chooses to live within a permanent state of self-exile,

Rishad as the silent rebel indulges in the cult of violence ardently followed by him and his gang. They are ironically governed by a code of conduct. This cult of violence the writer tells us had to be "clean, cold and disciplined." The passion for justice is strong in Rishad. The method to achieve it, is however an act of individual choice. His life is determined by a series of contradictions. His family background brings him into direct confrontation with a body of political elites. They are ironically, as helpless as him in dealing with the state of affairs of the nation. But he chooses the door to violence, affected deeply by incidents bordering on injustice.

A very particularistic example is the plight of the rape victim, Madhu. She as an 'injured animal' is afforded no sympathy

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from society. The hallucinatory effect of her 'tormentors' holds her in a perennial grip of panic. Her family chooses to be oblivious to her mental agony. Instead they keep strict vigilance on her, anxious to get her married off. Here the situation is a social one. It is ultimately her family which drives her to a state of frenzied despair, culminating in suicide.

### PROBLEMATICS

19. "The better-off class branded alien by him though he belonged to to -- left everything wide open, a mark of its casual overlordship in a country, a city where no one had challenged the hoary status quo."<sup>19</sup>

Rishad stands both as a non-conformist and a threat to the existing social system. Ironically, though he belongs to the "better-off class" he is devoid any sense of belonging to this class. The word "challenged" is significant. Here it refers to the city's upper crust with its unchallenged status quo. However, it provokes a self alienated Rishad into opposing the social hypocrisies concealed in the system.

20. 'She had been in terror of meeting her tormentors again, but they were known devils she could recognize and hide from, if they were still around. She couldn't from the unknown face and hands of the marriage to which they would deliver her.'<sup>20</sup>

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19. *ibid.*, Chapter 6, Page 57.

20. *ibid.*, Chapter 6, Page 61.

This sentence denotes the miserable plight of the rape victim, Madhu. Loveless and uncared for, she receives no sympathy from her own family or society for the injury inflicted upon her. Instead she is on the verge of being forced into marriage by her family which to her appears a far more agonizing aspect. Her family is intent upon saving their 'reputation' by hunting for a husband for her. This kind of situation is typical in an Indian social setting where a rape victim is condemned rather than given proper sympathy and protection.

VII). We witness the blossoming of the friendship between Rishad and Skinny Jaipal. Aloof and courteous, Rishad <sup>S</sup> an outstanding student impresses Skinny deeply. Skinny as her name implies, is a blown twig of a girl who recruits herself into Rishad's gang. The cult of violence that the gang propagates gains momentum. They have launched a kind of mini-revolution with the anticipation that it would succeed and bring forth a new government.

The ideal constructs of the young on which their aspirations for a revolution is based, has been beautifully captured in this chapter. With her imaginative skill the writer weaves a mutual

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exchange of ideas denoting distrust of the system into a sensitive discourse.

### PROBLEMATICS

21. 'They would be people who felt a recoil from the waste and affluence the country could not afford, hatred at the contrast, determination that these must end.'<sup>21</sup>

"They" in this sentence refers to the recruits Rishad has in mind for making their movement a success. It also pertains to the ideal construct Rishad has in mind for the recruits to be eligible. The quest is for an egalitarian society which seems an impossible dream-like task.

22. "A loneliness filled him the loneliness of not enough others to share a belief with. The people in his environment were like tribes and clans walled in by their fixed ideas, reacting in predictable blocks."<sup>22</sup>

Rishad here is in the throes of existential despair. He is totally distraught by the peoples' state of passivity. He feels hopelessly alienated for there are very few who have the courage to fight the chronic maladies in the system.

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21. *ibid.*, Chapter 7, Page 67.

22. *ibid.*, Chapter 7, Page 70.

Also the utter complacency of the people concomitant with their spirit of surrender, is not so much a silent discovery on Rishad's part as a well-nurtured fact. Rishad's existential despair multiplies, leaving him with a sense of further alienation.

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M9

VIII. The dinnery party at Devi's place thrown primarily to welcome Michael Calvert, turns into a symbolic event. The past comes alive in flashes with periodic references to Shivraj and in particular the ideals he had stood for in the world of politics. In Devi's circle, there is an animated discussion on politics and its dominant effect in their lives. For once Rishad withdraws from his shell, making his presence felt as a young intellectual in the company of all these earnest seekers for justice.

O, III, 3, N27: 9 (Y)

In this circle of intellectuals, the only exception is Nadira, Usman's wife who appears deliberately remote and detached. For Nadira, life is to be weighed in terms of lucrative posts and achievements; the kind of attitude, that stands in direct opposition to Usman's. Usman as an idealist gets severely irked

Nadira makes it abundantly clear that he ought to have refrained from accepting the post of the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University for the University did not like a Muslim to be in charge. This fundamentalist notion displays her narrow vision in life and the irrational side of her disposition.



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PROBLEMATICS

23. "You have been caught in a trap all your life", she said, 'The fatal charm of Shivraj - is that any reason to remain here now? He's dead. And what did you get from him while he was alive?'<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to note the reference to Shivraj once again. For Nadira, Usman's wife Shivraj is just an alien being who has influenced Usman's life drastically. It is her desire to leave India and settle abroad for a more cushioned existence. In addition, her caustic remarks on Shivraj only serves to further infuriate her. The fact that Shivraj's death had made a powerful impact cannot be overlooked. It is a vital ingredient in determining the turn of events in the characters lives as the text unfolds.

24. Devi had pleaded, knowing his views, 'Its different now, Usman. I never thought I would join a government. Now its an opportunity, to be constructive, to do something.'<sup>24</sup>

Devi and her circle of friends are equally disenchanted with the socio-political setting. These sentences display Devi's constructive approach towards finding a remedy to cure the socio-political excesses by means of personal involvement. The motive is to strive for improvement in the given social order. Usman proves

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23. *ibid.*, Chapter 8, Page 82.

24. *ibid.*, Chapter 8, Page 83.

to be a firm anchor in this quest for improvement in the social system by accepting the post of Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University. This action further cements his bond of friendship with Devi.

25. 'He put ten years into sentences surprising himself with the less person he emerged. Until this moment he had thought rather well of himself.'<sup>25</sup>

For Michael Calvert the return to India is like homecoming. The rediscovery of the land for which he has both love and esteem, turn it almost into an exhilarating experience. He is given a warm welcome by the circle of intellectuals in the city that includes Devi. Thus the intimacy between Michael and Devi is revived after a span of ten years. "Ten years" occurs repeatedly indicating the significance of the time element in the text. The sentence 'He put ten years into sentences... emerged' beautifully expresses the recapitulation of past events with one stroke.

IX. This chapter is significant for it brings us closer to social reality. It mirrors the plight of the rape victim Madhu. In utter despair, Madhu turns to Devi for help. Apart from her private trauma of being branded as a rape victim, it is her family which is responsible for her increasing misery. She is

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25. *ibid.*, Chapter 8, Page 86.

virtually held a prisoner at home to be married off to the first man willing to marry her in such a 'condition'. Devi is impelled to discuss Madhu's case with Calvert, sensitive as she is to another woman's plight.

The chapter also discloses the workings of the young gang of terrorists of which Rishad is a member. However the cult of violence that they indulge in, soon begins to have grave repercussions.

Their leader Naren falls chronically ill, unable to lead the gang any more. There is no other member sufficiently equipped to replace him. The movement, lacking organisational skill and a planned method of attack, is soon on the road to collapse. The 'calculated 'destruction' begins to destroy them, instead.

#### PROBLEMATICS

26. 'She told him in between about Madhu who had arrived, driven by God knew what desperation at her house before breakfast yesterday to beg Devi to prevent her marriage.<sup>26</sup>

Here the situation mirrors the concrete social reality as opposed to Rishad's existential dilemma. Madhu, a victim

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of rape is being forced into marriage by her family to save their face from the disgrace she has brought upon them. It is shocking the way in which her family is indifferent to her mental agony.

As a sensitive woman, Devi cannot help confiding in Calvert on Madhu's serious plight, another tortured woman in society's formidable hands.

27. 'And their activities were getting looser, not so well planned. A dangerous amateurishness had crept into the campaign.'<sup>2</sup>

This is one of the kernel sentences in this chapter. The 'calculated destruction' that this gang had begun to follow soon starts to destroy them. The movement lacks a strong centre and suffers from organisational skill with a leader too ill to lead. Their revolutionary zeal begins to wane, leaving them further alienated.

X. This chapter is segregated into two powerful sections. The first section is a summation of the mental anguish shared by Naren and Rishad over the dismal failure of the movement they had so confidently begun. The movement they realise now lacks organisation as well as support. Also the order of ethics

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27. *ibid.*, Chapter IX, Page 98.

on which it has been based, begins to crumble. The gang's leader, Naren, is chronically ill, with only Rishad as a firm anchor beside him.

The next section witnesses an animated conversation on Shivraj between Sir Humphrey, the High Commissioner and Michael Calvert. The thought of an official biography being written on Shivraj annoys Calvert. In Calvert's opinion the man who had been assigned the job did not know Shivraj from the back of a bus. Calvert's indignance at this combines with a helpless fury over the pathetic state of affairs in the country. He arrives at the conclusion that whatever values Shivraj had embodied had certainly died with him.

### PROBLEMATICS

28. 'And the epochal sadness of Shivraj's death, and what had died with him, held them both.'<sup>28</sup>

The post-independent era had only succeeded in crumbling the moral values of the nation. Calvert discovers this upon his visit to India after a span of ten years. Absorbed as he is in comparing the present to the past that had produced a charismatic leader like Shivraj, he feels nostalgic over Shivraj's death and can take refuge only in his sister, Devi's company. Their embrace is significant for it is a magical reunion of lost love as well as a shared sentiment over Shivraj's death.

29. "So few of the 'great' had real substance, only reputation built on layers of froth ending in fame and riches and clever talk."<sup>29</sup>

Rishad, as the Education Minister's son, is forced to acquaint himself with the famous/glamorous whom he finds virtually hollow. In front of Naren, a Ph.D. from Oxford and a fighter for justice, conversations with them appear sterile. The writer has employed the contrastive technique here to point out the genuine passion for justice in reformers like Naren as opposed to the hypocrisy among the celebrities in society.

'Clever talk' is part of the game where the rich/glamorous cordially vye with one another. The motive is to work towards 'perfecting' their social image. They are oblivious to the country's diverse social problems. Rishad finds this entire spirit revolting. It is this kind of practiced self-centredness that irks people like Rishad and Naren into launching a movement.

XI. The prime expression of this chapter is the attack on the education system. The need for educational reforms is voiced strongly by the Vice-Chancellor, Usman Ali. Distraught by bureaucratic interference and aware of the serious lapses in the system, he discusses his resignation with Devi. The revolutionary spark ignited in Usman's mind is only too evident. In the present situation he is prepared to take "revolution to the streets" having felt

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28. *ibid.*, Chapter X, Page 111.

29. *ibid.*, Chapter X, Page 105.

that his post had not allowed him to be effective. He thus hands in his resignation to make cause with the students. However, unlike Rishad he does not advocate violence but a culture of resistance for a more stable order. It is Devi who realises the steadfastness of his purpose and in what appears to be a climactic move, tenders in her resignation, after Usman's document is hastily dismissed at the Cabinet meeting.

### PROBLEMATICS

30. "This whole document could relieve me of my past. In any case that is what I came to talk about I want to resign."<sup>30</sup>

This is a clear instance of a brilliant academician like Usman Ali provoked by the current situation, into resigning his post. He has prepared a document on revitalisation of the education system, to place before the Cabinet.

In a society where passivity has come to stay, it is a strong move on Ali's part. Usman is the individual who has the courage of his convictions to carry out his task for advocating reforms even after handing in his resignation.

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30. *ibid.*, Chapter XI, Page 115.

31. 'You can't, make a revolution in their air,' said Usman, 'It has to come from under the ground, under your feet, your own ground.'<sup>31</sup>

The non-conformist Usman Ali is also a practical realist who sees the danger of waiting for change to take place, without striving towards it. Pragmatic by nature, he is opposed to utopian thinking. The system in his analysis has to be tackled at its roots. To achieve this he is willing to coordinate his activities with the students and struggle for change.

XII. For Suvarnapriya Jaipal, the visit to the Education Minister Devi's house, is a memorable event. It is also a confrontation between women of two generations. They discuss amiably Devi's project for holding a dance drama.

A graceful **classical** dancer, Suvarnapriya in the text embodies optimism and verve as opposed to Rishad's cynicism and self-exile. In spite of their contrastive natures, there is a growing intimacy between them. Suvarnapriya totally absorbed in her classical dancing, basks in the glory of being recognised as an artiste. She is also an incurable optimist believing that it would take a long time for the system to be doomed finally.

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31. *ibid.*, Chapter XI, Page 115.

The attitude exasperates Rishad who is more intent on analysing the country's economic position than being content with its current situation. However it is Suvarnapriya who is able to break through Rishad's wall of reserve. In her company Rishad is able to experience the strength of a man-woman relationship.

### PROBLEMATICS

32. 'The freest life of all would be to belong to no one place and be related to no one in friendship or intimacy beyond a point.'<sup>32</sup>

This is precisely an existential situation that is largely guided by Rishad's chosen aloofness and self-exile. The visit to Suvarnapriya's house after having ransacked it plays upon his conscience. It also shows clearly the contradictions in Rishad's life. He is further stifled by their continued campaign of terror with a promising leader like Naren too ill to lead. Ultimately he finds himself in an inescapable situation, amidst existential trappings.

33. 'Suvarnapriya made a face,' Mrs. Gupta reads out notes. We copy.'<sup>33</sup>

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32. *ibid.*, Chapter XII, Page 121.

33. *ibid.*, Chapter XII, Page 126.

This is yet another reflection on the education system and the kind of teaching it proffers. Devi inquires about the method of teaching from Suvarnapriya on the latter's visit to her house. She is horrified to learn that the students are impelled to copy down notes. The copying-down of notes syndrome is still prevalent in the education system.

XIII. Devi, considered an icon of sensibility by her colleagues takes a decision that is to change the entire temper of her existence. The Cabinet meeting where the Prime Minister utters only enigmatic monosyllables, turns out to be brilliant farce. Usman's document on revamping the education system, is predictably dismissed.

Devi is quick to perceive the changes since Shivraj's time. She thus awaringly quits her Ministerial post.

It is an act of silent rebellion - an act borne out of individual disgust and indignance towards the functioning of the bureaucracy. Usman Ali and Devi are two individuals rebelling silently by breaking away from the clutches of the bureaucracy. As thinkers virtually 'groomed' under Shivraj's outstanding intellect, they can no longer ~~withstand~~ injustices in practice within the bureaucracy. They thus choose to revitalise their energies into

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opposing such a system in their own individual capacity.

34. "Everyone has a past," said Usman, 'and the past has a way of continuing into the present. We can't at some point say its over and done with.'<sup>34</sup>

The time element has been given significance throughout the text. The past encroaches upon the present, signifying events further. Here Usman Ali is emphasising the same, adding that we cannot delink the past from the present.

35. 'She turned to him and said with a smouldering anger,' 'And I want yours. But that's given to her. You are quite ruthless about not giving her up.'<sup>35</sup>

This sentence speaks volumes of Nadira's possessive nature. Nadira is baffled by the intimacy between Usman and Devi. Trapped in her own sphere of narrow-mindedness she makes no efforts to treat Devi as one of Usman's intellectual friends. The result is a friction with Usman in their conjugal relations.

XIV. The party at the Puri's residence is a symbolic event. Suvarnapriya Jaipal is enamoured by the glamour/affluence while

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34. *ibid.*, Page 136.

35. *ibid.*, Page 136.



Rishad merely get bored with the 'situation' he is placed in, of having to 'survive' the party. At the party the smooth and the sophisticated vye dangerously with each other to make their social presence felt but it is Skinny with her natural charm/talent who catches the attention of the producer actor Sushil.

Rishad is disgusted at the producer-actor Sushil who grabs the opportunity to, kiss Suvarnapriya, his 'new-find'. Rishad's anger is symbolic for it leads to the couple's first major quarrel, culminating in a reunion.

Suvarnapriya's spontaneity can be charmingly juxtaposed to the contrived behaviour of the upper crust, who are constantly engaged in an earnest bid to impress their worth upon each other. The world of affluence, spilling with affectations and connivance has been mirrored beautifully in this chapter.

#### PROBLEMATICS

36. 'The contrast between Skinny and the party, between Skinny and the covetous tinsel world, seemed immense.'<sup>36</sup>

The writer has deliberately employed contrastive images to bring forth visually the glaring differences between the middle

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36. *ibid.*, Page 140.

and the affluent class. Skinny has the producer-actor Sushil floored with her natural charm and talent. However Sushil is just an opportunist in the tinsel town who amidst flattery, grabs an opportunity to kiss Suvarnapriya.

37. 'It was disgusting,' repeated Rishad furiously, his vocabulary failing him.'<sup>37</sup>

This is the first instance where Rishad's control and containment cannot prevent him from exploding at Suvarnapriya. He is revolted at the sight of the old producer, Sushil kissing her. The fact that he had already become possessive about her dawns too late on him. However, the stormy scene ends in a quiet reunion between the two as they accept each other as lovers.

XV. The twin concerns in this chapter are that of violence and marriage. It is an eye-opener for it proves that violence can beget only violence and not afford a solution. Rishad falls a victim to the same cult of violence that his gang and he advocate. He is killed in the cinema-hall, the site chosen to be destroyed in a blast. Rishad upon realising the futility of their acts of violence rushes to the spot to stop the gang from such a hideous act. But fate conspires with the offenders, resulting in Rishad's

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37. *ibid.*, Chapter 14, Page 144.

death. Also a bright intellectual like Naren dies from undiagnosed fever and festering wounds. Rishad's final act of attempting to save the 'situation' (that of innocent lives getting lost) is a kind of redemption for his past activities. His death in certain terms is almost heroic, as he loses his life in a bid to save the rest.

The other social concern of the writer is with regard to marriage. Arranged marriage is considered sacred and just, a widely accepted social phenomenon with only thinkers like Rishad and the rape victim Madhu to protest at by their eloquent silence. Quite rightfully the writer tells us that there is a tribal fanaticism about girl-disposal in the country. Also money plays a decisive role in such marriage contracts determining the status of the individual. The crowning example of such an alliance is an affluent Pinky to be wedded to a young tycoon of her parent's choice.

38. 'Tazi said, "I bet they'll marry me to some clot who hasn't got two rupees to his name. We don't have Money ourselves."<sup>38</sup>

The fact that money determines status cannot be overlooked in a social system like ours. Pinky's marriage alliance is based

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38. *ibid.*, Chapter XV, Page 148.

on money. Here her friend Tazi is supremely conscious of lack of money in her own life. How marriage and money get interlocked is beautifully demonstrated by Pinky's marriage alliance.

### PROBLEMATICS

39. 'Before five more seconds passed he must leave the hall. The seconds passed and he waited, muddled all sense of time and judgement dropping from him in his organised determination to stop them.'<sup>39</sup>

Rishad becomes a victim of the same cult of violence that his gang and he have propagated. After Naren's death, in an emotional frenzy, Rishad rushes to stop the gang from blowing up the cinema-hall, realising the futility of their actions. He gets trapped in the cinema-hall trying frantically to save the 'situation'. But time conspires against his move and within a matter of five seconds he meets his death as the explosives burst.

XVI. The metamorphic changes in the lives of the central characters reflect again the 'politics' of the situation. Devi and Usman both resign from their posts not to escape from their responsibilities but to build up a culture of resistance against

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39. *ibid.*, Chapter XV, Page 152.

the prevalent injustices. Rishad's accidental death is significant for it reveals what has so far been concealed. It indicates the fury and helplessness of the young impelled to take recourse to violence as a means of protest.

Also although Michael Calvert's book on Shivraj has been passed he is impertinently told of flaws in his work on Shivraj by the Joint-Secretary. The comments of the Joint-Secretary are unnecessary but it is one occasion on which he can use both his 'power' and 'position' over Calvert.

The chapter ends on a note of quiet optimism. The kind of emotional strength that Calvert derives from the company of his intimate friends, Usman and Devi reinforce his belief in mankind. He feels that Shivraj is still alive in their presence, carrying the touch of freedom everlastingly.

#### PROBLEMATICS

40. 'She bent inhaling deeply, exaltation possessing her as she invited the bitter smoke into her lungs and let the fire reach up and catch her clothes and hair.'<sup>40</sup>

The visual image of the fire is forcefully presented

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40. *ibid.*, Chapter XVI, Page 157.

here, signifying death. It is the ultimate salvation for Madhu, the rape victim. Madhu who has been virtually made a captive by her family members and forced into the jaws of marriage, is impelled to take refuge in the safe hands of death. It releases her from all the heaped insults/torture thrust unsparingly upon her. Societal pressures have crushed her desire to resist and rather than live like a ragdoll amidst societal trappings, she prefers to embrace death.

41. 'Perhaps the strongest thing in human life was influence, transmittable though one life-time or the ages. For a moment Michael saw Shivraj as he had first see him.....And Michael thought, perhaps we've been in too much of a hurry to say he is dead.'<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note how the text begins and ends with Calvert's ponderings on Shivraj, a man for whom he has earnest admiration, a man who had sacrificed much for the country. The influence of Shivraj is like a magical spell pervasive throughout the text. A character who is dead has been brought alive most effectively by the writer by oblique references that are both strong, sentimental and thought provoking. In the physical sense Shivraj is dead but the impact that his death has created leaves

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41. *ibid.*, Chapter XVI, Page 165.

him as alive as ever in the eyes of all those who esteem him.

C H A P T E R

II



## CHAPTER - II

### SEMANTIC CORRELATIONS

This is the constituting process which demonstrates the sequence of the emergence of significance in the narrative. A literary text constitutes its significance not only in its sequential order but also in establishing semantic relationships. This chapter studies conceptual oppositions of significance in the narrative which go beyond the syntactic order.

This chapter endeavours to analyse the production of semantic relationships in the existential light. The order of realism that the author creates is realised via the chief signifiers that determine the socio-political crisis in the social system. The voice of protest embodied by the protagonists at different junctures signals the nature and enormity of the crisis. The crisis is not a one-day affair. It is the result of the cumulative tensions within the social structure that has been demonstrated affectively by the writer.

This chapter is also an effort to examine the different social trends in a state of disharmony that generate conflict. The sociological themes of (a) Individual versus society (b) Tradition versus Modernity (c) Private versus Public have been dealt with in terms of conceptual oppositions. These are used as paradigms to sensitise us towards an exploration of the human psyche and the

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social environment ,

II.

I.a.i. The lives of the four protagonists -- Devi, Rishad, Usman Ali and Michael Calvert are intertwined in a unique manner. Against the background of social hypocrisy their drama is unfolded. The courses of their action intermingle; each is placed in a situation of crisis.

The situation in New Delhi is ~~not~~ a singular one that affects the lives of the characters in the text. The crisis is felt in flashes at odd junctures -- (a) upon Shivraj's death (b) the demonstration by the students at the University (c) Madhu's rape (d) Rishad's death.

These events precipitate an inner crisis too, the crisis of an individual trapped amidst social pressures. At length we shall investigate the existential despair of the characters whose lives are intermingled with each others but who feel strangely alienated at times, where they cannot share the burden of their consciousness with others.

II.

I.a.ii. Rishad, son of Education Minister Devi is one such individual whose deliberate aloofness is a sign of silent rebellion. He embodies the voice of protest of the enraged youth, contemplating a new future. We see his life wrapped in a series of contradictions that overlap each other.

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Paradoxically, he is impelled to live the life of one of the privileged while championing the cause of the underdog. He imposes the state of self-exile upon himself which is his existential condition. At the same time, his gang and he adopt the cult of violence as a means of protest.

Ironically the cult of violence becomes an icon of hope and regeneration. The gang and Rishad seek refuge in it to escape the existential predicament. It is essential to focus upon the sense of alienation that haunts Rishad. We see his aloofness in paradigmatic opposition to Devi's hectic participation in social affairs. His silent image has two fronts : one of surrender and other of resistance. Both are in conceptual opposition to one another. The silent act functions as a shield to curb the inner violence in his disposition. The inner violence is manifested through the cult of violence but the kind of violence that is carried out in sheer silence.

'This cult of violence had to be clean, cold  
and disciplined, unaided by motive, by drugs

or mental aberration.'

(A SITUATION IN NEW DELHI - PAGE 58)

The activity that he resorts to in pledged secrecy signifies both (a) his individuality (b) the distance that he maintains from his mother, Devi. For it is only on Rishad's death that Devi learns of his terrorist activities.

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II.

I.a.iii. The events at the University -- Madhu's rape followed by the student demonstration are both symbolic of the degeneration in the social system. The demonstration acts as a catalyst for further chaos and human destruction.

Rishad takes it upon his conscience to justify the demonstration held in protest against the expulsion of the three students. 'It's hard enough to get a job with a degree and without one its impossible.'

The central focus here is on mass unemployment, a feature that perturbs Rishad greatly. It marks the beginning of his sensitivity to the insensitivities of the age.

The existential continuation of Rishad's protest can be located in the method of violence that he and his gang adopt and more importantly enough the sense of failure concomitant with it.

"This was the violence of the sane with a  
passion for justice. To build a new world  
the old one had to be razed to the ground...."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 2, Page 19.

2. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 6, Page 58.

Rishad and his gang are aware of the possible dangers in such an enterprise. Their overvaulting ambition born out of existential despair to design a new world, produces a temper that cannot be controlled.

II

I.a.iv. It is only when Naren the gang leader, succumbs to his death from undiagnosed fever and fettering wounds that Rishad comes to terms with the stark realization that "the movement so promisingly begun had collapsed."<sup>3</sup>

Death is a chief functional unit in the narrative. It discloses the tendencies of the protagonists - their dream, their ambition, their struggle and finally the inevitable failure leading to a near-suicidal condition. Through death Rishad and Naren are bound in a paradigmatic structure.

II.

I.a.v. As we analyse the syntax of Rishad's behaviour we realise that it was his desire for change in the social order, for a different kind of sensation that led towards such an escapade.

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3. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 10, Page 104.

The choice of providing justice was narrowed to practising the cult of violence adopted by the gang. At this point the author displays "energetic logic"<sup>4</sup> which fills us the structure of the narrative. Such a logic, based on alternatives i.e. Rishad's choice, grips the character at moments when he makes an important decision.

We see a further instance of this "energetic logic" when Rishad rushes to the cinema site to prevent the explosion and gets killed accidentally in the process. Rishad operates in the same semantic axis of ordeal as Naren who are both embraced finally by the "jaws of death".

## II.

I.a.vi. Rishad displays a unique accomplishment while inviting his own death. Chastened by his experiences after facing Naren's end, he realises the futility of their enterprise. There is now a sea-change in his perception. Now there is a humanitarian concern for others. This is the propelling force that drives him to prevent human destruction by his visit to the cinema-site. The act is heroic for it reveals repentance and positive realisation of human life and potential.

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4. Roland Barthes, Barthes, Selected Writings (ed. & translated) by Susan Sontag Ch.1: Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", Fontana Paperbacks, Great Britain, 1983, Page 271.

"When they had broken up last the group leader had insisted that the tempo must be kept up. Rishad pleading for more time, until Naren was better got outvoted. He got to his feet, certain he must stop them before the act."<sup>5</sup>

II.

I.a.vii. The movement is an index of Rishad's passion for justice. This is what works out eventually a profound change in him. The movement signifies both a social protest and private trauma. We witness the protest in both creative and destructive terms. The creative urge to create a new social order is appreciative. But the silent killings are the hallmark of destruction. The destructive spirit exhausts itself leading to the rejuvenation of humanistic concern. Both are significant correlates based on the choice of pattern of survival in a dissatisfactory social system.

II.

I.a.viii. The dynamics of the movement though secretive indicates the effect in personal life. Skinny Jaipal, Rishad's only woman friend takes to it breathlessly like a sport. She has irrepressible charm and energy, some of which is directed in aiding the gang, beginning from destroying her own house. The seed of rebellion is fierce in her. She aids Rishad in the task of destruction. !

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5. Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 15, page 150.

"He pulled open the door. Between them they hauled saris off hangers, tidy piles of clothes off shelves. She fetched scissors from the dressing table. He used his knife. Twenty minutes later when they stood over the shambles the girl's face give Rishad a shock. She was transformed, her cheeks flushed."<sup>6</sup>

This concrete action is a significant feature based on an existentialist choice. There is a triumphant feeling in her<sup>1</sup> after the act, of having done justice. It leads towards a bond of intimacy between Rishad and her. From just a female recruit in the gang, she is transformed into Rishad's lover. In this co-venture she can prophetically be seen in the same semantic axis of ordeal as Rishad.

II.

I.a.ix. We witness, however, the creative potential and expression in Skinny Jaipal as she continues her classical dancing with great fervour. Both features merge to show a creative enthusiast. She is not projected as a nihilist but as a non-conformist. She thus carries her individual image with no regret for her passion in joining the gang in its operations. In the text she is portrayed as the most vibrant female character who structures her life based on her own decisions. In contrast is Madhu's life like-death where as a rape victim she is afforded no sympathy and commits suicide.

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6.Nayantara Sahgal, 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 6, Page 59.



II

1.b.i.

The rape of Madhu is not just the rape of an individual but the rape of the entire system. "Rape" is a significant feature in the narrative. It is a synecdoche of the larger crimes perpetrated in the social system. As the text unfolds, Madhu's rape leads to her pathological state and finally the act of suicide. The signs of destruction are shown in a syntactic order of significance. Madhu's self annihilation is the hallmark of protest. It is the act of conscious individual against the social injustice and the manner in which they are thrust upon the individual.

'She bent, inhaling deeply, exaltation possessing her as she invited the bitter smoke into her lungs and let the<sup>7</sup> fire reach up and catch her clothes and hair.'

Here death again operates as the chief functional unit in the narrative highlighting the plight of yet another seeker of justice. Madhu's act is also born out of an existential dilemma. Her family thrusts the proposal of marriage on her head to 'escape the situation' of disgrace. Rather than succumb to social pressures she heroically invites her own death. In summation, Madhu's is that voice in the wilderness that is unheard by society till her act of suicide strangles her own voice.

II

1.b.ii.

Madhu's contrived death can be seen in conceptual opposition to Shivraj's. Shivraj the protagonist who never makes an appearance in the text but whose death has created a forceful impact. There are strategic references to his death disclosing facets of his brilliant personality. This is a critical device employed by the writer. The purpose is double-fold - (1) it paints a full portrait of Shivraj the man and the politician, and (2) it juxtaposes the past with the present resulting in their inevitable mixture.

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7. 'A Situation in New Delhi', chapter 16, page 157.

II

I.b.iii.

It is interesting to note that the text begins and ends with Shivraj who is dead. The social tensions multiply only after Shivraj's death has been referred to indicating a break with the past. The aura of the past and Shivraj's times is brought into focal significance by yet another protagonist, Michael Calvert, Shivraj's biographer.

' It has been a strange, unhappy day. I've discovered Shivraj is dead.'

Michael Calvert's revisit to India produces its own order of significance. He is not only disenchanted with the setting in the present but also haunted by memories of the past and more significantly his liaison with Shivraj.

II

I.b.iv.

Calvert's observations on the country's political life in the present and his reminiscences of the past combine to solidify the internal coherence of the text. For the text is a commentary on political life in the past/present and its impact in daily surroundings. It also takes into consideration an outsider's dilemma with the Indian paradox : the hypnotic spell that the land casts on Calvert.

'And now that Shivraj was dead Michael began to see him as part of a race - descendant of the the great migration that journeyed through the Indus valley into the plain.'

As we see the kernel section in a psychoanalytic perspective we are sensitised to an English man's perception of a great political figure and his descentancy. This prepares our expectations for a greater narrative development. The mystery and the intrigue developed in this kernel section is the author's stylistic field. The little details of description adhere to this field thus obtaining a centripetal effect.

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8. 'A Situation in New Delhi', chapter 10, page 111.

9. 'A Situation in New Delhi', Chapter 5, page 53.

'That thread of almost mystical attachment to the land, its rivers and hills, ran through many of Shivraj's writings, even the most mundane of his speeches.....'<sup>10</sup>

These small details act as signifiers that influence Calvert in his reconstruction of an individual portrait of Shivraj within the pages of his book.

II

l.b.v.

The narrative vacillates between the past and the present creating a fusion of the two. As the narrative develops there is a stress on the romantic alliance between Devi and Michael Calvert. This romantic situation is a concrete reality in conceptual opposition to the existential condition faced by other protagonists.

'The years in London had done little to free Calvert of Devi's bewildering charm. Her Indian beauty is still a marvel to him as he remembers her - 'and he could think of nothing except the look of pansies her eyes had, a dark-bright, brown-purple look, a look utterly impossible to mix up with political negotiations....'<sup>11</sup>

The image here is both striking and significant. Calvert is mesmerized by Devi's eyes. They have a metaphorical significance as the eyes have been likened to the look of pansies. It also signifies the notion that Devi has lingered on in his memory for years.

Now back in the present the departed lovers reunite only to be confronted with a situation based on chaos and destruction. Together Devi and Calvert recapitulate Shivraj's political ideologies and the lost era. But even he had been brought under tremendous pressure and had died of ill health. Devi recalls nostalgically,

'They wanted to get more of their men into party positions and the cabinet to speed up the revolution as they called it.'<sup>12</sup>

10. 'A Situation in New Delhi', chapter 5, page 53.

11. *ibid.*, chapter 5, page 48.

12. *ibid.*, chapter 9, page 93.

We are introduced here to the dynamism of politics in the political arena. The apparent struggle for power within any political setup is a concrete reality that the writer conveys with her literary entrepreneurship.

II

l.b.vii.

The dynamism of politics also embraces into its fold the bureaucracy and the bureaucratic cliches' that are monitored by political manoeuvrings. Calvert aghast at the idea that there could be some obnoxious interference by some ministry on his book of Shivraj. He blurts out in an emotional frenzy,

'....This censorship racket is new. Censorship was never part of their tradition.'<sup>13</sup>

Calvert's belief in an alien tradition is the hallmark of his patient understanding of culture and tradition.

II

l.b.viii.

In the text ~~the~~ elements of tradition and modernity fuse together. They signify the severe contradictions prevalent in the social system. The difference in attitude of a rich socialite like Veena Puri and a much educated Devi towards their offspring can be seen in conceptual opposition to one another,

Veena Puri extrovertish by nature and an immense socialite will tolerate no other proposition but an arranged marriage for her daughter Pinky.

'Her in-laws are very conservative. They don't want one of these smart new-fangled girls', she tells Devi at the engagement party.

Veena Puri embodies the contradictory voices of the Indian social system.

The writer captures the contradictions in the life of the upper crust effectively. The projection of modernity is a mere superficial mask camouflaging the inner tendencies to submit to traditional authority. The differences in perception serve to highlight the social crisis. This is manifested through the student demonstration that creates a crisis in the narrative.

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13. 'A Situation in New Delhi', chapter 10, page 107.

I 1.c.i. The student demonstration is not a surprising event in a democratic set-up like ours. But the intentionality of the demonstrators reveals in essence (a) their growing frustration and (b) intolerance with the status quo.

The demonstration acts as a catalyst for physical violence. Violence is a pervasive symbol in the text. Metaphorically it can be viewed as a contagious disease that spreads its tentacles into the vitals of the system. In this incident this kind of violence is the mob violence in direct opposition to the cult of violence, (as indulged in by Rashid's gang) but that which is based on contrived order.

I 1.c.ii. Usman Ali the Vice-Chancellor is injured in the eye when the mob unleashes its fury on him by means of physical assault. But he is imbued with a great sense of endurance. This can be viewed as the Chief signifier that guides his personality. He is real revolutionary who wishes to take 'revolution to the streets'. It is therefore not a startling revelation when he resigns his post of the Vice-Chancellor to make cause with the students. Usman's phenomenal re-birth takes <sup>place</sup> at this point.

I 1.c.iii Usman's action is based on Gandhian idealism. This is symbolic, for the violent demonstrators by his humble action are transformed into peaceful assemblies. A clear metamorphosis has taken place in the narrative. The narrative logic thus conveys the idea that while violence is born out of despair non-violence is born out of strength. This is exemplified beautifully by the peaceful gathering of students towards the approaching end of the text :

'And Usman knew at once how he, responsible for the lives and consciences he had summoned must begin his speech..... A roar of voices rose in agreement as he raised both his hands for their response.' 14  
It is Usman who succeeds in advocating a culture of resistance.

The imperativeness of this task contains within it the desire for change by means of a peaceful method. As we analyse the syntax of Usman Ali's behaviour we realise his revolutionary potential. This is exemplified however by a constructive approach towards combating the injustice in the system. By making cause with the students he convinces them of his co-operation. In this co-venture they are seen in the same semantic axis of ordeal as Usman Ali.

II 1.c.iv. The students and he are not two separate entities as the narrative earlier dictates. By making cause with the students he wins their confidence and support. Thus they are in same semantic axis of ordeal as Usman Ali.

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14. 'A Situation in New Delhi', chapter 16, page 159.

Usman's manuscript for educational reform is a kernel signifier in the latter part of the text. This manuscript that the Cabinet declines and Michael Calvent's manuscript of his book on Shivraj symbolize the need for a new society but one which in essence is a continuation of the old.

II.

I.c.v. In the text the oppressiveness of the weather is an engulfing symbol closely representing the oppressive political conditions. For Rishad the rain's refusal to come pouring down is a 'constant reminder of this in-between state, neither life nor death', in which many people lived. The existential portrayal of life is demonstrated effectively at this point by the writer.

There are other micro-symbols like the air-conditioner which breaks down and Devi feels that 'all the sovereign forces that bring change and mellowness in the course of time have been cut-off like the air-conditioner.' Devi's expressive disillusionment is a sign of existential despair. She feels palpably the drawbacks of the system. This sentence is suggestive for it reveals to us her keen sense of observation and brings to light her sensitivity.

II.

I.c.vi. Simrit's fingertip sensitivity brings to light her disposition. The central female protagonist, she emerges as the icon of sensibility in the text. She too however is caught in the same grip of existential despair as her son Rishad and Usman Ali. Her relationship to her son can be viewed in paradigmatic opposition. As the Education Minister she fulfils the role to the best of her political energy and drive. Rishad in opposition joins the Naxalite movement to release his fury upon the system but in total secrecy. Her sense of endurance enables her to accept calmly the news of Rishad's accidental death and his terrorist activities. However the onslaughts

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of the system propells her to make an individual choice and she submits her resignation to the Cabinet without looking back.

II.

I.c.vii. The decision to quit the Cabinet occurs after Usman's manuscript for educational reforms has been rejected by the Cabinet. The manuscript serves as a Kernel unit in the text. She realises the futility of their fight with the system to embrace changes. This concrete action is a significant feature based on individual choice. In their desire to bring about educational reforms Usman Ali and Devi are held in an intense paradigmatic relationship.

Their respective resignations indicate their individual choice. Rather than submit to the oppressiveness further, they act gallantly to persevere still for reforms without occupying bureaucratic positions. The quest for reforms can be seen as a chief signifier in the structure of the narrative. The author displays the contrastive technique by juxtaposing Rishad's method for reforms by means of violence with Devi's cool and collected decision to aspire for them peacefully. In this venture they are seen in the same semantic axis of ordeal.

II.

I.c.viii. The female recruit in Rishad's gang, Suvarnapriya Jaipal is another non-conformist who questions the traditional mode of existence. Wrapped in an emotional relationship with Rishad she is aware of its effects in a society riddled with gossip and speculation. 'The appalling nerve of me, she though astounded at her boldness, tearing down a public thoroughfare clutching a man.<sup>15</sup> Skinny's emotional liasion with Rishad enriches her in terms of knowledge and opens up the gateway to their mutual passion : 'It was the first time he had used her name and he said it knowing it mean beloved... but nothing ever would take the place, in joy and discovery of this night.<sup>16</sup>

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15. Chapter-12, Pg.123.

16. Chapter-14, Pg.145.

As an individual she defies the the social norms engaged in a deep-rooted relationship with Rishad and with no regrets. Their passionate involvement is a Chief Signifier as it interlocks them in a mutual bid to aspire for building a new order by means of the cult of violence.

She stands in conceptual opposition to Pinky, daughter of a wealthy socialite who is to marry "three banks and a brewery". Pinky is the embodiment of a meek submissive woman who is too much in love with comfort to challenge the marriage alliance organised by her mother. She surrenders to the 'situation' portraying a total contrast in attitude of a young educated woman in society as to that of Suvarnapriya Jaipal.

## II.

I.c.ix. Devi is the only other woman character in the text who embodies the spirit of non-conformism by proving a challenge to the traditional mode of existence. A widow with a tremendous personality, she conducts herself with dignity loved by both Michael Calvert and a much-married Usman Ali. The close bond of intimacy between the three sees them in a paradigmatic relationship.

The forces of the past intermingle constantly with the present in the text. Devi had turned down the offer of marriage with Calvert pleading her duty to her brother Shivraj. Now in the present upon Calvert's revisit to India, she welcomes him with open arms: 'Oh Michael, Ofcourse I had regrets. But I was obeying something deeper. It was stronger than loving you.'<sup>17</sup>

Their reunion after a span of ten years is symbolic, It is the recognition of the love bond between two individuals cutting



across barriers of country, religion or occupation. The enormity of this love bondage is revealed the night they desert the party, at Puri's place to seek solace in each other's company. 'Their hands touched her eyes had a look of pain and pleading that told him, nothing stood between them any more.'<sup>18</sup>

The relationship with Calvert is a full-blooded one based on mutual love. However we must not overlook the role of Shivraj who occurs as a Chief Signifier in the text. Shivraj is the centripetal force around which the text revolves. It is upon Shivraj's death that Calvert revisits India to write a book on him and in the process is re-united with Devi. Calvert is disenchanted with the present political culture in India, His observations indicate this as also his personal experience with the bureaucracy where he is confronted with the notion of censorship with regard to his manuscript for his book on Shivraj. The manuscript is a functional unit in the text. It symbolises the love and regard of a writer for a politician who was his close friend and also the passing of an era. The striking imbalances in the system reflected in the present serve to disillusion Calvert severuly. It is an existential despair structured on remis-ces of the past.

This pattern of disillusionment is also reflected by Devi. Aware of hypocrites within the Cabinet she steers clear from their internal politickings. Devi's role of the non-conformist is an act borne out of individual choice. After Ishwar's death she does not lapse into the role of the weeping widow as per society's expectations but thrusts all her energy into her political career as the Education Minister with a desire for concrete reforms. In this she is aided by the brilliant academician Usman Ali, whom she persuades to accept the post of the Vice-Chancellor. Their common aspiration towards reforms can be seen as a signifier that energises them into combating the system. It also throws them into a close emotional harmony.

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18. A Situation in New Delhi, Chapter-9, Pg.95.

'The act of love had never been so simple, fulfilling an unconscious yearning in himself to know her better, deeply, as alone a man and woman can know each other.'<sup>19</sup> It is Usman too who has helped her out of the gloom after Ishwar's death. 'He had helped to restore that lovely pride, the assurance and aristocracy of her.'

II.

l.c.x. The closest emotional bond she had ever shared however is with her brother Shivraj. The writer makes this the focal point of significance in assessing the emotional nature of her relationships.

'What she missed was the sense of values Shivraj had planted like roses with his two hands. It was their fragrance...that had bound the country together in a unity, not any hidebound principle or rule from a book.'<sup>20</sup>

The existential continuation of this idealism can be located in her decision to quit the Cabinet. Usman Ali another idealist who had modelled himself on Gandhian principles, also tenders in his resignation. In this co-venture they are seen in a common semantic axis of ordeal.

II.

l.c.xi. Usman's idealism is however put to use as is also Naren's, the leader of the terrorist gang. In their methods to revamp the social structure they stand in paradigmatic opposition. Usman after his manuscript for educational reforms has been rejected by the Cabinet makes cause with the students, the prime intention being to "take revolution to the streets". He embraces hostility in order to overcome it.

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19. Chapter-3, Pg.29

20. A Situation in New Delhi, Chapter-4, Pg.42.

'...he did not belong to the breed that needed power in order to do things... Usman hankered for a village past, for another form of government, one that didn't build up into a formidable state apparatus. He would build down, with maximum power to the small community. How else, in India, would exhausted resources, human and natural ever recover their strength ?'<sup>21</sup>

Naren's method to combat the injustices stands in conceptual opposition. Naren's is the case of the silent martyr who advocates his principles of revolt till the very end of his existence. Apart from unleashing a campaign of terror in the Capital he goes to live with the Untouchables as part of the enterprise to mould them into an organised group to fight for their rights.

Naren's mission contains within it contradictory impulses that are in binary opposition (a) the campaign of terror and (b) service to the Untouchables. These are significant correlates that determine his mission plan. Summing up Naren is (however contradictory) that selfless devotee of justice who gives his life for the cause of his mission.

Rishad is directed by Naren to have him buried at the quarry site as one of the quarry workers. This death Rishad realises would go unnoticed and unnumbered. Death occurs again as a Chief functional unit in the narrative.

'What Rishad saw was the stark beauty of Naren's life, all its meaning inscribed in the living wounds on his back.'<sup>22</sup>

This self-annihilation that leads Naren to a torturous death is a significant feature. The impact of his death upon Rishad is

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21. A Situation in New Delhi, Chapter-8, Pg.83-84.

22. Chapter-10, Pg.103.

forceful. At this critical juncture, when the gang loses its leader Rishad realises the futility of their violence. This cult of violence is finally made public when Rishad in a heroic attempt to prevent the loss of personal lives at the cinema-site chosen as the target for explosion, dies an accidental death at that very site. The private and the public worlds thus coincide sharply in the structure of the narrative.

II.

I.c.xii. It is imperative then to indicate the symbiotic nature of the private and the public worlds. In the text they merge strongly. There are apparent clashes but none can exist independently of the other. They are bound in a paradigmatic relationship.

Madhu's rape followed by her suicide is not a mere isolated event or of just private concern but a social issue demanding public attention. Madhu does not commit suicide in a day. Harassed by family members who negotiate frantically to get her married ignoring her private trauma and instead holding her virtually a prisoner at home, she rises above all these social forces to embrace death. Madhu's plight is that of any other rape victim in the country, strictly ostracized and unsympathetically dealt with. Her act of suicide signals her voice of protest.

Death occurs as a chief functional unit as emphasised earlier. Rishad's death is yet another episode which discloses facts about his private existence. He belonged to a gang of terrorists who had begun a campaign of terror in the city.

'The facts about Rishad's death were clearer since Priya had told Devi what she knew, and yesterday the police had come with Devi's sheets, taken from the body of the terrorist they had been searching for.'<sup>23</sup>

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23. Chapter-16, Pg.161.

As the truth is unfolded in front of her, Devi bears the shock bravely. Rishad's secret operations (though introduced to the reader) are finally made public.

The centripetal force in the text, Shivraj, is the unforgettable political figure of the past whose influence on the public is transmitted through generations. Shivraj's unique intellect does not prevent him from reaching out to the masses. He is conscious of the fact that he is a public man and has to live up to their expectations if not surpass them. Calvert first encounters Shivraj in Kashmir Valley talking to its local inhabitants.

'He came across it in the open, a man in white talking to what seemed like a sea of people on the undulating hill terrain.'<sup>24</sup> It is during this confrontation, that Calvert is enchanted by Shivraj's modesty and humility. In his private life Shivraj is an icon of intellect and perseverance.

'Michael wondered what were history - making events and what were not. Shivraj on the public platform swaying the crowd, or the light he had left among his friends ? ...There were eras and characters in history in whom public and private became one.'<sup>25</sup>

The authorial tone is significant here, in the last sentence.\* The author's conscious recognition of the two worlds comes to light. In any social system the public and the private issues get entwined generating conflict. Given this it is up to the individual to rise above the inner dynamics of such patterned existence that any system proffers. The author reflects this in the text through the voice of protest of the protagonists.

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24. Chapter-5, Pg.46.

25. Ibid., Chapter-16, Pg.161.

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CHAPTER III  
PRAGMATIC AXIS

We shall endeavour to understand this text in conceptual relation with other texts of the same author. No text is constituted in a void. A literary discourse emerges from a certain ideological field which imposes on the text the logic of its constitution.

Sahgal's major contribution to the art of fiction in Indo-English writing is the genesis of the political novel in its present form. Her main contribution thematically has been her deep involvement and concern with politics. It is also a humanistic concern where the crevices of political life are appropriately revealed.

- III.(i) In Storm in Chandigarh the political and the personal concerns run parallel to each other. Vishal as the protagonist is at the beginning the outsider and spectator. As the text unfolds he participates in a situation of crisis as his involvement grows. The division of characters is predominantly into two kinds - those who are driven by mania for power and those who are possessed by humanistic considerations. These two divisions merge to a large extent and are together opposed to the Establishment. In Storm in Chandigarh the political atmosphere instead of stabilising/improving deteriorates further. The building of Chandigarh symbolised a new beginning. But soon the atmosphere gets tainted by a host of opportunities. Jit feels that the
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architects 'couldn't find the right breed of human beings to inhabit their perfect blueprints.'<sup>1</sup> Vishal Dubey who is happy to be freed from the narrow confines of Delhi is introduced to a delicate political confrontation. Gyan Singh is trying to exploit religious sentiment by linking the issue of language to religion. His instigation is a threat to normalcy of life. No one is willing to take a stand against it which excites Gyan Singh into misusing his political position. Violence takes the form of political blackmail. Violence, Dubey felt was the joint product of the aggressive and the inert, a way of life, a sign of urban discontent. Sahgal shows skillfully how politics in such a situation virtually degenerates to a clash of personalities.

- III.(ii) The situation of Chandigarh is not one of tension but of paralysis. The political **deadlock** in Chandigarh is a reflection of the state of affairs in other parts of the country. Men like Shivraj (A Situation In New Delhi) belonged to the past and now there were very few who felt any involvement in wider issues of national growth and interest. The political mood and intrigues are bound to affect private values. Dubey's advice to Harpal not to submit to Gyan Singh's threat is an attempt to curb the political excesses of the time.

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1. *Nayantara Sahgal, Storm in Chandigarh, 1969, Orient Paperbacks, Pg.49.*

It is a risk Dubey is conscious of but there are greater risks ; the prospect of the machinery of two states running down at the behest of one man without any kind of stand against him and that a man who believes and correctly, that he has only to call the tune. There is no room for such men among us. Let us take a risk.

(Pg.206 'Storm in Chandigarh')  
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The very act of having made a stand by Dubey's advice is consequential in nature. It restores Harpal's confidence leading him to desire change in mode of government's functioning. Dubey's own stand against Inder is made in the same spirit to check aggression. When Inder is hit by Dubey, Dubey feels a 'a kinship with Harpal... and with Saroj, another kind of victim' (Pg.214). The symbiosis between the personal and the political worlds here is complete.

In asserting his choice for having taken a stand Dubey reveals his own true nature of resisting injustice.

'But it was, he knew, what held him to anything, a feeling stronger than loyalty for a concept larger than the country. He supposed it could be called love for the very act of living.'

(Pg.74, 'A Storm in Chandigarh')  
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III. (iii) In Storm In Chandigarh and The Day In Shadow Sahgal moves to a better integrated plot. When the novel opens Vishal Dubey leaves Delhi to come back to it in the end. The period of self-analysis occurs in Chandigarh where he in capacity of a bureaucrat is put to trial. Exposed to criticism both at the personal and the political levels, he clashes with Inder and senior colleagues in the Home Ministry. In the process he oversteps himself in both the roles but this overstepping in actuality can be seen as a moment of triumph as he battles injustices.

The Day in Shadow indicates a situation where the parallelism between the two worlds is further strengthened. Raj Garg is confronted with Sumer Singh in the world of politics and Som, both men of 'a kind with no human differences between them.'<sup>2</sup> At the political level the different orders contrast sharply. Sumer Singh's approach is representative of the government's stance while Raj Garg represents an order that strives for a clean democracy based on revaluation of merits and demerits of the system. Raj like the older Sardar Sahib takes long-term projects into consideration, dedicated to the task of nation building, while a powerful Sumer Singh is engaged in boosting his own ego. In this light what perturbs Sahgal is the fact that the challenge

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2. Nayantara Sahgal, 'The Day In Shadow', Bell Books, 1971, Pg.222.

in public life has not been met ostensibly either by the people or their leaders. Ignorance or indifference cannot delimit the responsibility of either category.

**III.**(iv) In A Situation in New Delhi, political consciousness is a clear significant feature. The story is set in the mid-fifties. The political happenings of two decades have been telescoped into less than half the time. Thematically the concern is with the meaning of revolution and the ways of bringing it about. The novel opens dramatically with the news of Shivraj's death and concentrates on the political situation arising out of it. The Cabinet comprises of mediocrities who lack imagination and enterprise. They are men, Devi feels who had 'never done anything with their hands, or had any collision with real life' (Pg.15). They are preoccupied with the idea of progress rather than with progress itself. As a gesture of respect to the dead leader Shivraj, Devi is taken into the Union Cabinet. She feels queerly alienated amongst the 'new aristocracy' who advocate a political culture based on power. In her private life she is aware of the distance between herself and her son Rishad, who joins the Naxalite movement to arouse the public conscience through the shock of violence. He does not realise that violence like power can be come an end in itself.

- 1.(v) If Rishad takes religiously to the cult of violence to Sumer Singh in 'The Day In Shadow', power is the only goal and he is prepared to achieve it ruthlessly. The country's tradition and morality has no impact on him.

'Politics, programmes moved outside it. Those were, the tools. Power was the goal within.'

! (Pg.130 'The Day In Shadow') .

- 1.(vi) The retreat from Gandhism gains momentum in The Day In Shadow. The official policy is inclined towards a Soviet alliance indifferent to the country's future. The new breed of politicians are unscrupulous like Sumer Singh, a threat to democratic and moral values. Singh is interested only in his political career. He leads a life of double standards- anxious to maintain his image, of a successful politician, Sumer Singh's concern is only with the 'cheer from the crowd, any crowd' but in large numbers and is careful not to take unpopular steps. Som is oblivious of his wife's sufferings. All his relationships are governed by material considerations. He exploits people ruthlessly and to his own sheer advantage. This is abundantly clear when he throws up his job to start a business with Lali but later abandons him to switch over to a partnership with Rudy Velter. Initially distrustful of Velter he in order to satisfy his rising ambitious caters to every whim of Velter's to get his collaboration. Simrit's withdrawal from his world
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of fluctuating loyalties does not perturb Som. But Simrit is unhappy ruminating over the waste and destruction of human life. This is captured sensitively by the writer when Velter and Som are busy celebrating a deal about the manufacture of armaments. Simrit is vocalic at this juncture;

'.... children in their cradle should fear men like you.'

(Pg.87 'The Day In Shadow') |

The realization of Simrit's withdrawal comes to him through their physical relationship. Even there he functions as an insensitive being. He cuts her off remorselessly only to divorce her, cutting off all avenues of finance to her and instead overburdening her with taxes. The heavy tax payments are not an oversight; the settlement reflects his ethics :

'...Money had been a part of the texture <sup>of</sup> her relationship with Som, an emotional, forceful ingredient of it, intimately tied to his self-esteem. Money was, after all, a term of pride, even of violence.

(Pg.60 'The Day In Shadow') |

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This move towards dehumanization is part of the social change in modern times. In Som's case it is the complete case of a dehumanised being.

III.(vii) In her novels Sahgal puts forward the notion that the threat to moral values was felt<sup>1</sup> by the sheer impact of a counter philosophy. This was an attraction called Communism which appealed to a vast number who felt strongly victimised, Communism Kailas realises, had

'taken to itself the ecstasy of the mystic, the rapture of the poet, the crusading ardour of the zealot and transferred them into the stuff of battle.'

(Pg.27 'This Time of Morning') )

However this kind of spirit crushed the democratic processes.

III.(viii) In A Situation in New Delhi it is Rishad who falls a prey to such a 'situation'. The gang and Rishad persevere to build an Indian utopia - for the poor and the downtrodden not realising that violence in the long run was self-defeating for the panic and fear it created. It is Usman who realises the futility of this method. The only kind of communism acceptable to him is a native Indian Communism with its inspiration drawn from the Indian heritage. The attainment of freedom was not a terminating point for 'revolutions

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did not end but simply continued...' Usman's Gandhian courage to lead a new revolution is borne out of the spirit of non-violence that he wishes to employ as a method.

- 1.(ix) In Sahgal's earlier novel, Storm in Chandigarh, it is Vishal Dubey who is sensitive to the passing away of an era of Gandhian ideals:

'Gandhian politics had also meant open decision, open action. No stealth, no furtiveness and therefore no shame...'<sup>3</sup>

In each successive novel the retreat from Gandhian ideals in the contemporary political culture is more final. The dedication that Gandhi had demanded is lost in self-interest and power. Power is used by the politicians to further their own political future and aspirations.

- 1.(x) However a complete break with the past is not feasible. It would be disastrous if a revolution attempted to do so for then it would be utopian-like and out of touch with reality. Sahgal is of the opinion that 'the rulers who do not understand our history go terribly wrong and even grotesque in judgement and action.'<sup>4</sup> In The Day of Shadow Sahgal shows how the people in power are the wrong kind

3. Storm in Chandigarh, Pg.239.

4. Jasbir Jain, Nayantara Sahgal, Chapter-II, Pg.29.

of people who believed that it was *time*,

'to throw away sentiment, the weak, worn-out liberalism of the past, time to bury Gandhi, and write a new page of history.'

(Pg.186)

It is Usman in A Situation in New Delhi who refutes this possibility. The past could not be destroyed,

'sooner or later it flowed back, and in spite of its accusers, it did not prevent the people from learning new things.'<sup>5</sup>

The official rejection of Usman's manuscript determines the real crisis in the novel. It is only then that Usman resigns and tries to provide effective leadership to the young.

In her major works including autobiographical ones the need for resurrecting the social structure has been a fairly dominant theme. In A Situation in New Delhi the Imperativeness for educational reforms forces the situation to crystallise into a crisis that has been meaningfully explored both at the political and the non-political level.

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5. A Situation in New Delhi, Chapter-3, Pg.27.

CONCLUDING REMARKS



In all her novels, Sahgal stresses the need for morality in political life. However, that does not bind the writer to any definite political ideology. Concomitant with this is an universal concern for human values. Her work has a strong realistic base and reflects the changing values of society caught in the grip of chaos and corruption.

In A Situation in New Delhi we have made an effort to examine the different social forces in a state of disharmony that eventually lead to a socio-political crisis. Sahgal's corrosive disillusionment with the present structures of power is amply reflected in this text.

The writer also impresses upon us the fact that a presentiment of future time is necessary for a writer's complete vision of life. The writer's message of the interesting possibilities of individual if not collective resistance is made crystal clear. Amidst a situation beset with conflicts, a true fraternity of love and oneness is also portrayed with enormous sensitivity and literary skill. Sahgal's high degree of social consciousness comes across to the reader admirably and in full light.

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