

Elliptic Feminism and Nationalism in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*

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Since its publication in 1985, Nayantara Sahgal's novel *Rich Like Us* has been overwhelmingly praised by critics as an insightful political fiction, winning for the author the coveted Sahitya Akademy Award (India) and the Sinclair Prize (Britain). Because the chief temporal setting of the text—from 1932 to 1975—encompasses both the Indian independence movement and its aftermath, leading up to and including the infamous political Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, and because it overtly treats questions of governmental policy, the majority of scholars have focused almost exclusively upon the novel's engagement with national politics, disregarding the implications of such a macro-narrative for the micro-narrative of gender. O.P. Mathur, for example, commends *Rich Like Us* solely as an exposé of the "objectives and functioning of the Emergency" and the "nexus linking politics, business, and crime."¹ More telling is Ramesh Chadha's emphasis upon the mutual exclusivity of Sahgal's national and gender politics as she asserts that "along with the political themes, [Sahgal] also portrays the modern Indian woman's search for individual freedom and self-realization."² Thus failing to analyze the negative relational links between the discourses of nation and woman, Chadha unproblematically describes *Rich Like Us* as a "feminist" text.³ Further, no critic has investigated the fissures that mark Sahgal's (ostensible) nationalist sympathies in the novel. On the contrary, Jasbir Jain praises it as a discerning "political biography," "the story of a country . . . [in which] the protagonist is India," and Shyamala Narayan admires the "social commitment and contemporary relevance" of what is "probably [Sahgal's] best novel."⁴

Opposing such conventional hermeneutic approaches to Sahgal, I shall attempt to establish that both her feminism and nationalism are marked by debilitating ellipses, which make her complicit with those very discourses—of patriarchy and imperialism—that she apparently seeks to expose and critique in *Rich Like Us*. Born into modern India's premier political family, the Nehrus, and brought up in a household in which female children did not feel the pressures of being female, Sahgal subordinates the woman question to the national question in the narrative. Ironically, but not surprisingly, her nationalist fealty is, in turn, complicated by her Western-style upbringing and education as well as her location within an in-

¹ O.P. Mathur, "The Nausea of Totalitarianism: A Note on Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*," *World Literature Today* 65.1 (1991): 69.

² Ramesh Chadha, "Nayantara Sahgal," *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, ed. Robert L. Ross (New York: Garland, 1991) 261.

³ Chadha 266.

⁴ Jasbir Jain, "Sahgal: The Novel as Political Biography," *Recent Commonwealth Literature*, eds. R.K. Dhawan, P.V. Dhanuja, and A.K. Srivastava (New Delhi: Prestige, 1989) 142; Shyamala A. Narayan, "Nayantara Sahgal," *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. Lesley Henderson (Chicago: St. James, 1991) 794.

ternational rather than a local literary arena, resulting in multiple thematic antinomies in her novel.⁵

In a 1988 talk entitled "Nayantara Sahgal on Who She Is," the author attempts to arrive at "self-discovery" from "the perspective of" *Rich Like Us*.⁶ Although at the end of her ruminations she remarks that she is a writer unfettered by her familial, class, and national ties—"I had . . . become a cheerful traitor to my origins," she says ("NS" 106)—Sahgal's portrayal of feminist and nationalist politics in the novel belies her claim. Her feminism undercut by her (masculinist) nationalist orientation, her nationalism compromised by her Eurocentrism, Sahgal creates in *Rich Like Us* a doubly alienated discourse; dissociated from the still oppressed Indian woman as well as the disenfranchised nonélite populace, she proves to be very much a product of her particular privileged heritage.

At first glance the narrative of *Rich Like Us*, with its focus upon two female protagonists, Sonali and Rose, and its general depiction of women's oppression, appears to champion the cause of women. But a closer examination shows that Sahgal, in contrast to such other contemporary non-Western women writers as Mahasweta Devi of India, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwi of Egypt, and Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria, subscribes to, rather than deconstructs, the prevailing nationalist paradigms, which work to the detriment of women's issues. Exhibiting only a limited commitment to charting female agency or to radically redefining women's roles, she states revealingly in a 1989 interview, "I have never written from any specific ideological viewpoint. If I have, I have a nationalistic viewpoint."⁷ It is precisely this "nationalistic viewpoint" that is responsible for Sahgal's erroneous conflation of the discourse of nation with the discourse of woman and hence for the partial silencing of the latter in *Rich Like Us*.

One of the key motifs that resonates in Sahgal's tale is that of suttee in its literal as well as metaphoric sense of the victimization of women for the aggrandizement of men. For instance, the *Ramayana* myth of Sita is repeatedly invoked to underline Rama's long mistrust and mistreatment of the goddess, which led her to actively seek death; Sonali's great-grandmother commits suttee to ensure her son's welfare at the hands of her brothers-in-law; Mona, Ram Surya's senior wife, in despair over his infidelity with Marcella, attempts to set herself ablaze; women laborers are kidnapped for sexual slavery by corrupt businessmen and policemen; and Rose, Ram's English junior wife, is murdered because she possesses too much knowledge about her stepson Dev's illegal undertakings. While such an enumeration of excesses against women at first suggests Sahgal's engagement with feminist issues, closer scrutiny reveals that the author's liberal critique of suttee is couched in a nation-based patriarchal language, which in fact marginalizes and oppresses women.

⁵ A graduate of Wellesley College, Massachusetts, Sahgal has served as a journalist for U.S., British, and Indian newspapers; a writer-in-residence at such U.S. institutions as the Radcliffe Institute, the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and the National Humanities Center, she has placed her work with Knopf, Norton, Heinemann, and Gollancz among other Western publishers.

⁶ Nayantara Sahgal, "Nayantara Sahgal on Who She Is," *Peace, Development and Culture: Comparative Studies of India and Canada*, ed. Harold Coward (Canada: Canada-India Conference on Comparative Studies, 1988) 95. Subsequent citations will be noted in parentheses in the text, after the abbreviation "NS."

⁷ V. Mohini, "Writer at Work: Nayantara Sahgal," *The Literary Criterion* 25.1 (1990): 65.

Collapsing women's issues into the larger realm of "politics," Sahgal noted in a recent interview that "it is very difficult to separate [politics] from real life in India as the reality of life is so political here where women are roasted alive on their husbands' funeral pyre[s] and are burnt to death for dowry."⁸ She thus discloses that, for her, women's experiences in general, and suttee and dowry murders in particular, are merely the grounds upon which she bases her criticism of national politics. The various representations of suttee in *Rich Like Us* are, correspondingly, oppositional on a macro-political level rather than specifically interventionist on women's behalves. For instance, the first reference to the Sita myth emerges in the context of a discussion on nationalist allegiances and is, significantly, voiced by a man. Relating his schizophrenia about being Indian and/or British to his dubiety regarding Hindu tradition, Keshav cites as an example of the debasement of the latter Rama's reprehensible treatment of Sita: "How am I supposed to know what's right for me to do—whose 'side' I'm on . . .—if even what we worship needs second thoughts," he exclaims.⁹ In another nation-based context years later, Rose wonders whether the wrongs of the Emergency can be explained away as acts of fate but concludes, "even if that's what it was—the powers who were supposed to know better sometimes being as vicious as they were, e.g. their barbarous treatment of Sita—of course it had to be fought" (*RLU* 219). Sita's tragedy is here reduced to a parenthetical remark to emphasize the corruption of a nation and a political system steeped in an oppressive religious tradition, thereby underlining once more Sahgal's appropriation of the legend for larger political ends.

In like fashion, the narrative intention in not only recreating Sonali's great-grandmother's suttee but also of recording two original nineteenth-century accounts of widow burnings is to interrogate the broader bases of nationalistic and societal corruptions rather than to investigate the particular religiocultural suppression of women. To this end, the women, undifferentiated in the main, are denied voices of their own, the nineteenth-century incidents of suttee recounted by male British observers and Sonali's great-grandmother's experience imaginatively recreated by her son. Furthermore, the positionality of the males is left unexamined. There is, for example, no questioning of the Britishers' emphasis upon the stranglehold of "superstition" on the women (*RLU* 126), their objectification of the suttees, or their assumption of gender inequality as a mark of Indian inferiority. Similarly, there is no criticism of Sonali's grandfather's condemnation not so much of the horrific practice of suttee itself but of the acquiescence of Hindu India which fails to question its own pernicious beliefs and practices. Offering the practice of suttee as an example of the equivocations of religion, he concludes revealingly, "I cannot believe in Hinduism, whatever Hinduism might be. Not because of such evils as *sati*, but because evil is not explained" (*RLU* 136).

Not only is the specific oppression of women thus reduced to a generalized instance of larger reprobation, but the narrative also condones Sonali's grandfather's conventional, sentimental male rhetoric, which casts the suttees as victims and the men, especially Vivekananda and others active in the Hindu Reformation,

⁸ Mohini 62.

⁹ Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (New York: New Directions, 1985) 60. Subsequent citations will be noted in parentheses in the text, after the abbreviation *RLU*.

as their saviors. Instead of portraying his mother as a self-fashioning subject, one who manipulates the practice of suttee and commits suicide as part of a "bargain" to ensure her son's inheritance, Sonali's grandfather casts her as a victim requiring the protection of Mr. Timmons. Further, it is in analogously androcentric terms that Sonali concludes her perusal of his manuscript, contemplating not the heroism of the dead woman but that of her grandfather, who, "unconscious of the danger to himself . . . fought savagely to kill his mother's murderers" (*RLU* 136).

Just as the suttee motif is evidence of Sahgal's hegemonic nationalism, so is her treatment of the Emergency a testimony to her disjunctive feminism. Although Indira Gandhi is not identified by name and does not appear onstage as a character in *Rich Like Us*, her presence permeates the narrative consciousness. From censure of the prime minister's nationalization of banks and a denunciation of her belief in "family rule," through a dubbing of her executive tenure as a "dictatorship" and an accession to "imperial power," to a likening of the excesses of the Emergency to those at Austerlitz and Dachau (*RLU* 155, 82, 156, 52), Sahgal repeatedly condemns her violence to the democratic process. While her criticisms of the Emergency are well founded, there are some troubling questions, posed from within a feminist perspective, regarding her treatment of Mrs. Gandhi in *Rich Like Us* as well as in its nonfictional precursor, *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power*.¹⁰ Why do both texts address the prime minister's corruptions primarily as a national—and, hence, ostensibly gender-neutral—leader and fail to consider the particular ramifications of her governmental policies upon women? Why does Sahgal neglect to examine Mrs. Gandhi's own paradoxical position as the most powerful leader of a country that disenfranchises its women in uncountable ways, as a female politician who, in historian Stanley Wolpert's words, was a "'third-sex' exception to a rule of village female servitude that border[s] on slavery"?¹¹ And why do both *Rich Like Us* and *Indira Gandhi* fail to investigate the prime minister's manipulation of her position as a woman to consolidate her political power?

Although her mother, Kamala Nehru, was an ardent advocate of women's rights, Mrs. Gandhi repeatedly denied being a feminist because, as she put it, "I always felt that I could do anything I wanted."¹² Her privileged upbringing—akin to that of her cousin, Nayantara Sahgal—unconstrained by her sex, also led her to underline her status as a *zoon politikon*, a politician without gender, claiming, "I don't think of myself as a woman when I do my job. According to the Indian Constitution, all citizens are equal. . . . I'm just an Indian citizen and the first servant of the country."¹³ Thus it was that the woman who was seen as synonymous with India did little to advance the cause of women.¹⁴ On the contrary, she noted publicly that motherhood was a woman's "highest fulfillment" and that the mythical

¹⁰ Nayantara Sahgal, *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (New York: Ungar, 1982).

¹¹ Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 366.

¹² Zareer Masani, *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976) 275.

¹³ Wolpert 210.

¹⁴ During her tenure as prime minister, Indira Gandhi failed to appoint even a single woman to her cabinet or to patronize any feminist group or movement in India; and none of her economic objectives outlined in her Twenty-Point Programme announced during the Emergency focused specifically upon women's upliftment.

Sita, self-sacrificing and loyal, was the exemplary Indian woman.¹⁵ Her belief, furthermore, that women's problems had no link with the specific oppression of women but with the general national problems of poverty and unemployment¹⁶ contributed to the declining status of Indian women in post-independence times.¹⁷ Only once in the narrative of *Rich Like Us* does Sahgal describe Mrs. Gandhi as a woman whose political power put her "beyond the furies all other [women] face" (*RLU* 73). And nowhere does she consider the prime minister's catachrestic exploitation of her identity as a woman—as Nehru's daughter, the Indian populace's "sister," and the country's nurturing (and widowed, hence sexless) "mother"—to strengthen her (masculinized) political position.

Just as Sahgal's omission of Indira Gandhi's simultaneous disavowal/ embrace of a feminist positionality reveals her own ambivalent feminism, so does her overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Mohandas Gandhi heighten her gendered nationalism. Although Mahatma Gandhi does not take center stage in *Rich Like Us*—as he does, for example, in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1937) and R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955)—Sahgal's laudatory references to him reinforce his image as a gendered national icon in Indian masculinist culture and Indo-Anglian literature generally. The minimal criticism voiced by the pseudo-Marxist characters of Ravi Kachru and the unnamed prisoner in jail regarding the collusion of Gandhi's pacifism with bourgeois capitalism is quickly overturned by Sonali and Kishori Lal. Sonali, in particular, serves as the author's mouthpiece, unstintingly praising Gandhi's actions, particularly his *satyagraha* [truth force, nonviolent] movement, his agitation for "human rights," and his commitment to the "new epic" of equality (*RLU* 100-02). What Sonali/Sahgal ignores in her eulogy to Gandhian nationalism is its inherent paternalism and associated reinforcement of some of the most regressive beliefs underlying Indian women's suppression.¹⁸

In portraying not only Gandhi but also the independence movement as a whole in patronymic terms that disregard the material impact of nationalism upon women, therefore, Sahgal betrays her élitist political upbringing, which considers nationalism to be a "unifying force" that transcends social, religious, and economic—as well as gender—barriers ("NS" 99). While she depicts inequalities amongst women and men in their private lives in *Rich Like Us*, she deems the fight for national freedom to have been one in which, neglecting stratifications by class, caste, and gender, all India's constituent groups fought equally for equality for all. As Rose observes, "[T]inkers, tailors and tradesmen . . . rich men, poor men, beggars . . . all sorts and classes of Hindus and Muslims" erased their differences and came together in response to Gandhi's call for civil disobedience (*RLU* 115-

¹⁵ Indira Gandhi, *My Truth*, presented by Emmanuel Pouchpadass (Delhi: Vision, 1981) 54; Elisabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey among the Women of India* (New York: Random House, 1990) 149.

¹⁶ Bumiller 149.

¹⁷ See especially "Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India" (New Delhi: Government of India, Department of Social Welfare, 1974).

¹⁸ See Vir Bharat Talwar, "Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi: 1910-1920," *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 232; and Ketu Katrak, "Indian Nationalism, Gandhian 'Satyagraha,' and Representations of Female Sexuality," *Nationalism and Sexualities*, ed. A. Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 397-98, 403.

16). Such statements are further evidence that, growing up in an intensely politically charged atmosphere, Sahgal absorbed "a sense of romantic, heroic awakening" in the nation, a sense clearly reflected in her admittedly "homesick," "nostalgic," and, one might add, (hegemonically) nationalistic novels ("NS" 99).

Sahgal's more direct attempt to ally herself with Indian women by declaring that *Rich Like Us* presents two "heroines" and no "heroes" is questionable as well. Her praise of Sonali and Rose as women who "were willing to risk the unknown, to make difficult, adventurous choices and to brave the consequences" ("NS" 102) is grounded in a historically male heroic vocabulary; and her ambivalent conceptualization and treatment—from a feminist viewpoint—of the two characters underlines once again Sahgal's paternalistic politics.

Having come to maturity in post-independence India, Sonali is offered as the type of the new Indian woman, an educated, professional, single female dedicated to the progress of her country, an ostensible product of the new constitutional equality accorded to all Indian citizens. "People like you, especially women like you, are going to Indianize India," remarks her father (*RLU* 24), further suggesting an integral link between national and feminist politics. A closer examination of Sonali's life, however, points up perhaps most unequivocally Sahgal's problematic stance on the woman-nation nexus. Despite her rejection of the "manacles" of marriage (*RLU* 48), Sonali looks to men, ranging from her father to Kachru, as both counselors and protectors: "I only blame Papa that . . . he gave me no advice. He could have said, You should resign," she says following the declaration of the Emergency, even though she herself is thirty-eight years old and a fifteen-year veteran of the civil service (*RLU* 157). In keeping with an androcentric view of Indian history, she believes that the most admirable national heroic figures are men—Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Jayaprakash Narayan. In complementary fashion, she reacts to her reading of her great-grandmother's suttee by focusing not upon the unsung fortitude of Indian womankind but upon those "[male] heroisms whose company [she, Sonali] was scarcely fit to keep" and praising those men—her grandfather, the man who resists arrest in Connaught Place, and the armless beggar—who were "not . . . passive before cruelty and depravity" (*RLU* 136). And, despite Sahgal's extratextual praise of Sonali as an "idealist," a "woman who had a conscience" ("NS" 101, 102), the textual evidence plainly suggests that her sole (nationalistically) heroic act is a compromised one. She resigns from the civil service not as a resister protesting the overthrow of the Indian constitution but as an escapist who cannot face her demotion and transfer from New Delhi: "I was a civil servant until I was thrown out, soon after the emergency began," she admits (*RLU* 232).

Not only, then, is Sonali's role as a committed feminist refutable, but Sahgal's paradoxical treatment of Rose as the suffering but stoic Hindu wife contests even more insistently any claims regarding the author's feminist politics, as it controverts all authorial asides about Rose's "rebellion" and fundamental "freedom" (*RLU* 53; "NS" 101). Declaring Rose to be Sonali's "twin soul," despite the differences in their nationalities and ages, Sahgal enumerates her many "freedoms": from British conceit, self-importance, a high-class accent, and the urge to look young and lose weight ("NS" 101). What she disregards, however, is Rose's utter lack of freedom as a woman. A Britisher knowingly married to a polygamous Indian, she

passively enacts her role as the Hindu *souten* or co-wife after some initial, feeble resistance. And just as she adjusts to Ram's legal and emotional ties to Mona, Rose reconciles herself to his continued philandering. She believes fatalistically that "nothing, nothing [can] be done about" his affair with Marcella (RLU 94); lives resignedly through her five-year separation from him as he mends his broken heart; takes him back without any outward protest; and nurses him through his final illness, all because she too comes to think of marriage as a "sacrament" as established by Hindu masculinist belief (RLU 55).

Just as Sahgal describes Rose in Hindu terminology as a "modern-day suttee" ("NS" 101), so does the narrative unambiguously establish her as a latter-day Sita: Rose is present during all the discussions of the Rama-Sita legend; she muses repeatedly upon the goddess's fate, even thinking about the mythical king as "the other Rama" (RLU 215); and she is murdered on the day after Diwali, marking the festival as a tragic one for her, just as it was for Sita. Thus Rose comes to embody not the "male" heroism that Sahgal claims for her but what she elsewhere oxymoronically describes as the "virtuous" and "active choice" of passivity among Indians—in itself a problematic Orientalist notion—which, according to her, offers "one's best chance of remaining whole" in a land where "invasion and re-conquest have been the pattern" ("NS" 105).¹⁹ Nonviolence and passivity were also the hallmarks of Gandhian *satyagraha*, especially as specific enjoinders to women. "To me the female sex is not the weaker sex," Gandhi noted; "it is the nobler of the two: for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge."²⁰ It is this strategic gendering of the ideal nationalist *satyagrahi* that Sahgal symbolically reproduces in Rose's person, casting her, ironically, as the most traditionally Indian of the female characters, erasing her autonomy as a woman so that she might become a "legend" to others, leaving them a "legacy" of her strength amidst adversity and her suttee-like self-sacrifice (RLU 41, 234).

Whereas on the one hand Sahgal's nationalist narrative complicates her feminist gestures in *Rich Like Us*, on the other hand, her nationalism is itself revealed to be elliptical, undercut as it is by her élitism and Eurocentrism. As Gayatri Spivak points out, the very concept of non-Western nationalism is a product of imperialism that merely changes geopolitical, territorial imperialism to neocolonialism.²¹ And, as Partha Chatterjee asserts, the non-Western nationalist bourgeoisie are additionally the heirs of Eurocentric and Orientalist thought.²² Sahgal's derivative and exclusive nationalism, clearly evident in *Rich Like Us*, underscores as well the larger, internal failures of Indian nationalist thought. Like Sonali/Sahgal, it is only the post-independence élite who could claim, "We joined [our past] seamlessly to the present. The civil service was part of the join. So were English, Parliament, Commonwealth and the Word of Lord Jesus Christ" (RLU 148). The novel, moreover, tells the stories primarily of higher caste, upper-

¹⁹ The seminal text analyzing Orientalist thought is Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

²⁰ Quoted in Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1986) 95.

²¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 245.

²² Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed, 1986) 1-53.

middle-class, politically well-connected characters, with only glancing references to those such as the laborers, tailors, and beggars, who make up the majority of the Indian population. And while the handless beggar's narrative is accorded fuller treatment, it is not rendered in his own voice but reported to the reader by Sonali and Rose. More disturbingly, his symbolic treatment erases his human specificity, casting him, like the suttees discussed above, as another die in Sahgal's "universalist" political discourse, an "ongoing reminder," in her phrase, of the "battered national myth [of] non-violence" and of "old and new poverty, of failures since independence" ("NS" 104).

Further, although there are multiple critiques of British (neo)imperialism in the novel—of racist practices during colonial times, of Britain's continued economic exploitation of the Third World, of its unscrupulous industrial pollution of distant shores (*RLU* 38, 12, 26)—these are problematized by both direct and indirect authorial observations glorifying European civilization. The dedication of *Rich Like Us* to "the Indo-British Experience and what its shares have learned from each other" complicates at the very outset Sahgal's claims of (autonomous) nationalistic fealty and establishes the colonial tenor of the text, which is particularly evident in the treatment of Sonali's character and the unequal ending of the novel.

Not only is Sonali's feminism equivocal as discussed above, but her nationalism is open to considerable doubt as well. The younger, iconoclastic Oxonian who cannot understand "why we [Indians] had to keep cutting and pasting Western concepts together and tying ourselves to them for ever" (*RLU* 101) is, later in the narrative, antithetically cast as a still-heteronomous subject. She studies India's Muslim heritage so that she can assist Marcella and Brian—handicraft and artifact exporters—in displaying and selling India to England once again; she is all praise for Dutch and English contemporaneous accounts of the Mughals, ignoring their imperial motivations; and she eulogizes Marcella in revealing colonial terms: "a translucence about her . . . belief her strength," she notes; "[a] flame is both. So was the civilization that had produced her, matchless in the Western world for its unbroken continuity" (*RLU* 233). Her reverence of the West jars with her claims of working to create a "new tradition," "independent," "Indian" (*RLU* 24); and she hardly convinces as one who "would settle for nothing less than the restoration of all our freedoms," as Sahgal eulogizes her ("NS" 101).

Marcella's prominent—and paradoxical—role at the end of *Rich Like Us* is yet another measure of Sahgal's ambivalent nationalism. Earlier depicted as a "husband-hunter" and an unscrupulous "enchanted" of men (*RLU* 90, 94), she is transformed at the novel's conclusion into Sonali's fairy godmother and Rose's stand-in as well as cast as a *deus ex machina*: her declaration that the Emergency will soon be over marks a symbolic "gift of the future" to Sonali and, by extension, to India, thereby precipitating the (seemingly) positive outcome of the novel (*RLU* 234). More curious and telling even than Marcella's metamorphosis is Sahgal's weighty flattery of her offhand statement regarding the Emergency as "the kind of catalysis that history arranges from time to time . . . perhaps to teach us that what we glibly call motherland or fatherland is, in small or large measure, the contribution of strangers" ("NS" 102). Her similar praise of Rose as "one of those strangers in our midst who have explained us to ourselves, who have seen us more clearly

than we see ourselves" and those, consequently, to whom "we owe" an enormous "debt" ("NS" 102) underscores her own Orientalism, while the larger conflation of Indian and British in *Rich Like Us*—both discursive and ideological—is evidence of her mixed allegiances, rooted in her genealogy.

Even as early as her first novel, *A Time to Be Happy* (1957), Sahgal articulated her *crise d'identité* through the protagonist Sanad: "It is a strange feeling to be midway between two worlds, not completely belonging to either," he confesses; "I don't belong entirely to India. I can't. My education, my upbringing and my sense of values have all combined to make me un-Indian."²³ Years before, Sahgal's uncle Jawaharlal Nehru admitted a corresponding unease about his split heritage: "I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere," he wrote in his autobiography.²⁴ Despite his insider-outsider status, Nehru, unlike Sahgal, recognized the discontinuity between the agitation for national enfranchisement and women's emancipation. "India will not be free until we are strong enough to force our will on England and the women of India will not attain full rights by the mere generosity of the men of India," he noted perspicaciously; "they will have to fight for them and force their will on the menfolk before they can succeed."²⁵ Years later, Sahgal continues to gloss over the disjunction between the Indian nationalist and feminist movements and to subscribe to a totalizing nationalism that, in R. Radhakrishnan's words, "achieves the ideological effect of an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse, [wherein] the women's question . . . remains ghettoized."²⁶

By writing a nationalist political narrative in *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal thus—perhaps largely unwittingly, but nonetheless decisively—proves complicit in the discursive oppression of Indian women. By writing from within the bourgeois nationalist ambit, she participates, additionally, in the silencing of subaltern nationalism. Finally, by extolling British over Indian civilization, she reveals the dual alienation—in its élitism and imitativeness—of her Eurocentric "nationalist" consciousness, so that Stuart Hood's remark that Sahgal is "not an Indian writer" but "an English writer working in a tradition which is hers by birth, education and class" takes on an added, ironic significance, reverberating beyond the formal to the politico-cultural, beyond the strictly belletristic to the ideological.²⁷

²³ Nayantara Sahgal, *A Time to Be Happy* (Delhi: Sterling, 1975) 151.

²⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom* (New York: John Day, 1941) 353.

²⁵ Quoted in Jayawardena 73.

²⁶ R. Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity, Parker 78.

²⁷ Stuart Hood, "Shadows," *The Times Literary Supplement* June 26, 1969: 676.