

Socio-Political Aspects In Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*

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Abstract: Nayantara Sahgal is a brilliant and most celebrated Indian historical English novelist. She is one of the writers who worked specially for the problems of educated women who live in urban areas. Sahgal also discussed about new predicament of women. In most of her works, She tries to recreate the political and social conditions of post Independence India. This paper is an attempt to discuss the theme of Socio-Political Aspects in Nayantara's novel *Rich Like Us* that explores the sufferings of post independence India.

Key Words: Predicament of women, Political and Social Condition of and Post Independence era.

Introduction: Nayantara Sahgal is the first Indian woman novelist in English who deals with political themes in her literary works. Her novels are an attempt to explore the new political aspects that is much inspired from Gandhism Philosophy and the disappearance of Nehruism on some extent. Lakshmi Sinha says "Sahgal's literary world, ...in a broad sense can be termed 'personalized fiction'. History, politics, autobiography and personalities intermingle in the novels of Sahgal."¹

Nayantara Sahgal Has a special place in Indian English novel writing. As a novelist, she has three decades' long experience. She is most dedicated writer who is most conscious about nationality. Nayantara Sahgal was fully dedicated to explore theme of urban women's plight or urban educated women issues. Other well known women writers of her time were Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. She was a lady who boldly talks about the struggles of educated working women and their political contributions.

She explains that “...each of the novels, more or less, reflects the political era we are passing through.”² She tries to explain politics. “...politics—if by that we mean the use and misuse of power—invades our lives every day, both at the private, domestic level and at the national level ...Political awareness is thrust upon us.”³

Interpretation: As a good writer she wrote eight novels which were the root for her personal identity as a novelist. In all her nobles, she emphasizes the value of freedom for the overall growth and development of an individual. Her novel *Rich like Us* (1985) specially explores the picture of Indians’ struggle during emergency in 1975. Sahgal also tries to disclose the impact of emergency over social life. It was the time when the love of freedom truly flourished. Many evils were taking place due to emergency. The forces were taking many steps to crush the violation. That became the causes of many new exploitation. M.L. Malhotra explains that “Politics and Mrs. Sahgal are cousins German or if a metaphor can convey it more forcefully, Siamese twins.”⁴

In-depth Analysis: *Rich Like Us* is a historical and political fiction which is set in New Delhi during 1932 in the mid of 1970s. It is a story of two female protagonist Rose and Sonali and their struggle in a country like India, which is struggling for social re-organization. This was the Noble which brought the novelist the most precious award named Sahitya Akademi Award. Sahgal directly explores and examines the misuse of power in the post independence India in her work *Rich Like Us*. This novel’s story is about an English woman named Rose who marries to an Indian in spite of cultural differences. This step of the protagonist takes her in many troubles and at the end she pays a heavy price for it, with her murder. This novel explores the ground reality of the contemporary India where leaders are working for equality and for the betterment of women. But ground reality was different.

Nayantara’s this novel urges and highlights the need of practical and intellectual approaches for the betterment of working women in the time of miseries. This novel takes its title from a brief meeting at the beginning of the novel that Dev and his wife Nishi have with a businessman named Mr. Neuman, who reflects that all he has been told

teaches him that if the poor of India would "do like we do, they'd be rich like us, yet seeing the poverty in the streets in person, he finds this hard to believe."⁵ *Rich Like Us* is a phrase introduced as a question, and continuing as such throughout the novel.

This novel presents the elements of suspense, fear and turmoil additionally; there are many other aspects in this novel. One side, rich are enjoying luxurious life and on the other side poor are living a neglected and oppressed life. Politicians were enjoying by making many policies and poor people were not in a position to understand them and oppose them. Sahgal with her patriotic feelings tries to expose the real condition of the political affairs during the emergency. At the time, when Indira Gandhi was found guilty in malpractice by the Allahabad High Court: This conviction made her ineligible for running for or holding any elective office for a period of six years."⁶ in this respect, opposition parties and press demanded the resignation of the Prime minister. So she uses her power and ordered to arrest the oppositions leaders and declared Emergency on the dawn of 26th June 1975. By the 28th and 29th amendments made to the constitution which exonerated her from impending legal charges and made her immune to arrests.

The Emergency period was a scheme devised to hide the allegations and continue the rule. The quote here will throw light on how a democracy was converted into a dictatorship at the behest of the Prime Minister. "The country had been in a mess, people screaming for more wages or bonus, or just screaming too many political parties, so humiliating to explain to foreigners. And then overnight a magical calm had descended like in Taiwan or Singapore. The idea of a leader, someone to look up to...fulfilled a yearning for tidiness, and a woman in command put at least one woman beyond the furies all others face. And then the Emergency was so popular."⁷

Another character Sonali in this novel, is an honest officer of the Indian Administrative Service, works for the Ministry of Industry. She is a person of grit, integrity and self-determination. Sonali stands apart from the usual stereotyped visions of Indian womanhood. The author looks at life from two perspectives one as the omniscient author and the other through the voice of Sonali. She is instrumental in

poignantly reconstructing the past through the monologues. Sonali's words are quoted "I did admire and envy his commitment, it was so cloudless. But I couldn't understand why we had to keep cutting and pasting Western concepts together and tying ourselves to them forever as if Europe were the centre of the universe, and the Bible and Marx were the last word on mankind."⁸

When she sees her friend Bimmie decked up as a bride she is awestruck by her mannerism she says "But I was hypnotized by Bimmie's nose ring, the sandalpaste dots on her face, eyes downcast, and those manacled hands resting submissively in her red silk lap. This was never Bimmie."⁹ Protagonist Rose the honest and bold wife of Ram is able to bring the desired changes in him. But even she does not display this level all the time. She fails to understand the emotions of her stepson Dev, her angry outburst and questioning makes him arrange goons to silence her unnecessary intrusions into his business dealings. Had she been tactful she would have made Dev understand his mistakes and lead a worthy life.

Conclusion: Thus this novel is full of miseries of the emergency and author tries to justify and explained the real situation and struggle through her this work. This was the reason; she was honoured with the most prestigious award for this work. Despite their courage, intelligence and refusal "to bend knee"¹⁰ Sahgal's women continue to be victims. Another well known personality, Jasbir Jain states that *Rich Like Us* "...reflects not only her personal values but also the changing values of a country exposed for the first time to both freedom and power."¹¹

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