



Revisited Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich like Us*: A Narrative of Postcolonial Dilemma

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Abstract

Most of the Nayantara Sahgal's deal with a comprehensive display of themes that ranges from personal predicament and problems, joys and grief contentment and frustrations of her protagonists to the political turmoil experienced by India since Independence. Sahgal's works intertwine features and phases of India's cultural, political and social history into the plot. She studies them widely in such a way that the period, the propensity and the subject is briefed with in its completeness. Subsequently Sahgal makes use of straight, accurate storylines that abound with well-established characters to understand her conclusion. The characters disclose their opinions, experiences and sharp vision in their daily life according to their own views. Thus, an attempt has been made in this in this paper to discover and analyze the theme of post colonialism and the interpretation in post-independence era. Most of the Nayantara Sahgal's is taken to examine Nayantara Sahgal's Rich like Us from this perspectives and to depict the various interpretations revealed and its impact on each character's life in this paper. This novel provides the genuine picture of India under Emergency in 1975. The author traces the effect of the Emergency and the communal pressure formed by the Emergency. The present novel evidently highlights the political situation in the country during that time.

Keywords: Post Colonialism, Interpretation, The Emergency, Nayantara Sahgal, Rich like Us, Political Scenario, Reality, History.

Introduction

"Whenever you take a step forward, you are bound to disturb something" (Indira Gandhi).

A nation that has been laid open to both internal and external exploitation, independence and liberty turns to be a chief social concern. Therefore, Nayantara Sahgal's works are not simply a remark on modern events but also a social movement. Her literary works enable one to

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apprehend and assess the dogmatic and communal events in India especially during the post-colonial era. The author briefs the various form of protest that took place back then. Sahgal in her fictions refuses to receive a political achievement merely on the basis of its purpose and a tenacity in relating the accomplishment to its result. The ultimate test she puts on to a situation is how far it advances the source of individual freedom and progress and how far it is favorable to self-respect. There is no step that can be measured as ending point. She through her novels prove that Independence is not a bequest, it is an accomplishment and every generation ought to do their job for it to last and to preserve the custom of freedom. The danger to freedom at all times is a communal danger for a nation and no act of an individual must turn into a threat to it.

The contemporary Indian novel in English usually chooses themes related to revolution, partition, financial problems, industrialization, deprivation, Gandhian ideology or cultural conflicts, difficulties faced by émigrés. The chief most aspect and power of Sahgal's fiction is that she narrates the various phases of the nation's history through the reliable mechanism of a network of human relations put up around keen, rational and liable characters. Drawn as a part of a specific time - space range, the characters are formed by happenings and events that take place around them and display a strong cognizance of their state in all its mixed dimensions.

All her characters continuously probe happenings, events and issues that are fixed in the real; they insinuate at prospects that could have matured but did not. Frequently they even propose the probable turn of occasions. Sahgal's treatment of India's cultural and social past in her novels is formed by her comprehending several vital issues, to which she throws light in her work. The primary one is her notion of India as a distinct, united nation that offers for the actuality of pluralities. This study will observe in what way Nayantara Sahgal's novel *Rich like Us* replicates the strategies by which the politics or history of the sub-continent is represented and this is an effort to chart the depictions of effects of the deteriorating democratic ethos of India, and the difficulties and quandaries of the citizens under the brutal bureaucratic system of the postcolonial nation-state. To do so, the paper will draw on numerous strands of critical ideas from Postcolonial Theory.

Critical Analysis of *Rich like Us*

Sahgal has offered a multifaceted political and social history in *Rich like Us*. The novel archives the variety in people's reactions to the transformations that took place in India when the British rule came to an end. It likewise exhibits how the British molded a class of people, completely out of tune with the requirements of the nation and by what means they shaped new set of values and power in the society of India and how it prevails even now in free India. Her novel is all about literature as an anti-historical record, yet it is not the self-reflexive, logo centric, post-modernist novel being produced in Europe, America and parts of Canada today. Though the writer stakes the modernist/postmodernist's logic of the ambiguity and indistinctness of all facts and blends a diversity of storyline modes, the writing of this book depicts a very profoundly

political act that is deep-rooted in present Indian history. Emerging, as it does, out of Indian history, it is very much an Indian novel and one that fits resolutely to the 1980s.

Nayantara foregrounds the authenticities of this fleeting nightmarish era that have been interpreted into human terms deprived of any of their abhorrence being lost. In this, one can discover a combination of the individual and modern politics and in what way the overpowering political situation push down upon the lives of a few thoughtful people. *Rich like Us* appears to be more of political experience than a slice of life captured impassively.

The novel deals with the changes brought about by the emergency bring in the social and political fabric of the country by analyzing the response it evokes among individuals, classes and groups. Here, Sahgal offers for two storylines, the main plot and the shorter tale of Sonali. The writer brightly exaggerates the historical extract and remarks sumptuously on few crucial issues thrown up by the times. Sahgal displays chiefly the state of affairs in India under the Emergency enacted by her cousin, Indira Gandhi. Her self-repugnance of the Emergency was expressed through her resignation of her membership for the Sahitya Akademi's Advisory Board for English. Her portrayal of the Emergency displays by what means the oppressors of all kinds were formed by that one act of Indira Gandhi and in what way they functioned with exemption. Sahgal has distinct respect for nationalists like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Lal Nehru and this can be seen in several passages in the novel.

The novel has also valiantly provided account of the nuisance and trouble caused to all sectors of people throughout the era of National Emergency. Also portraying the anguish during post-colonial period, the author takes the reader to the situation during the Second World War and nostalgic prepetition days and defines the captivating, renovating impact of Gandhi on the crowds. The author explains the postcolonial interpretation by delineating different events like the killing of the storyteller Sonali's great grandma in the name of suttee, the marring of the sharecropper just because he asked to pay the remaining due amount, the rape of the village women by the police since the village men dare to fight against the landlord and the killing of Rose, the big-hearted and a kind Englishwoman in New Delhi just because her open talk is an humiliation to her stepson Dev and all these incidents are described in an completely credible manner. The narrative technique that was used is rather thought-provoking; the storyteller is Sonali, yet alternate chapters speaks about her dad Keshav's friend Ram, an entrepreneur who was in love with Rose and Marcella although he has a wife, Mona. The story ends on a note of optimism and anticipation that in the middle of obsequiousness, there were also people like Kishori Lal who was merely a petty retailer, and the one who had the strength to fight against the oppressors.

The aims and functioning of the post colonialism and its impacts on the people's life have been blatantly shown and the connection amid politics, business and corruption is also evident

from the novel. The nation is led by “one and a half people” and the Emergency is “a disguised masquerade to prepare the country for family rule” (Sahgal, 29), an autocracy to confirm and safeguard succession of members belonging to the same family in a ‘republic’.

The Portrayal of the National Emergency

“The Emergency had finished my career, but suddenly I don’t want a career. In the crumbling unprofessionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus Emergency”
(Sahgal, 32)

Nayantara Sahgal and her propinquity with the political power has allowed her to project the kaleidoscopic view of the political transformation of the country. She certainly is in the ring-side view of the undertakings behind the radical and governmental curtains. In a Colonial state, any act of rebelliousness is regarded as high treason and the penalty for it is death. Ethical principles, ideas are swayed away in outlook of political convenience or objectives. Such a condition is thrown some light throughout the postcolonial period as described in *Rich like Us*.

The age of Emergency was certainly the bottommost point in the history of postcolonial India. This was considered to be the chief setback to the social-democratic principles of the country. This Emergency situation as confirmed by Mrs. Gandhi in 1975 exclusively to safeguard her political position, resulted in the mass arrest of opposition leaders, the annulment of elections, a prohibition on attacks and the deferral of press freedom. This consequently led to unhuman and brutal human rights violations that ended in the notorious rules and strategies of undiscerning slum-clearance and compulsory sterilization. Thousands were held without trial and a sequence of absolutely unlawful and gratuitous actions followed and this involved countless human suffering and misery.

Rich like Us provides us an accurate representation of post colonialism in Indian English fiction. Mathur in 1991 stated that

“It is in Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich like Us, however, that the realities of this brief nightmarish period have been translated into human terms without any of their repulsiveness being lost. In this novel we find an intermingling of the individual and contemporary politics and how the suffocating political environment bears down upon the lives of a few sensitive people” (Mathur, 6)

The novel has interpreted the actuality of the suppressive post-colonial era in all its unpleasant phases. Throughout the emergency period, “thousands of people were held under detention without trial, and citizens [are] broken on the wheel for remembering their rights” (Sahgal, 258). Many farmers and the workers were equally oppressed and the whole nation’s resources only benefitted a few people and those few belonged to elite classes of the society.

Many men were forced to undergo vasectomy and in such camps, both the unmarried as well as the old men were not spared. In the novel, the protagonist Sonali says:

“It did not need much imagination to sense the hate and fear inside the vans with iron-barred windows, like the ones used for collecting stray dogs for drowning that now roamed the streets picking up citizens for vasectomy” (Sahgal, 27)

Those who posed threat to the regimes and those who opposed and protested against the government were simply arrested, never questioned and were punished severely.

“...this emergency is just what we needed. The troublemakers are in jail. An opposition is something we never needed...Strikes are banned” (Sahgal, 10)

The “other” bodies of the self-centered, unethical state are made ineffective and feeble by brutal ways. The restricted, incapable characters in the novel are blunt reminders of a country that has botched to bring its pledged liberty and security even after the freedom.

The most draconian measures were put into effect by the state on the citizens to crush any possible opposition to the tyranny of the government. The most gruesome aspect of the emergency was the infamous policies of indiscriminate slum clearance and enforced sterilization, the latter claiming thousands of lives and mutilating countless others for life. In their realistic depiction of these terrible state policies and their grim effects on the masses are critical indictments of politics that attempt to protect India by removing all the imperfect regimes and bodies, thereby preventing the proliferation of such regime. “The removal of slum dwellers and forced vasectomies can, therefore, can be perceived as the attempts by the state to discipline and punish” (Foucault, 1977) the people who are deemed to be threat to its interests.

No Place for Virtue or Vice

Rich like Us cannot be considered as a novel where virtue is awarded and vice is disciplined but one of exaltation of brave and blameless. The novel did not provide any simple solution to the issues and disputes of human and as an alternative it tests all the acknowledged solution. This is about the compound nature of reality. Nayantara Sahgal tries to find explanation for colossal complications in the man-woman relationship. She feels very regretful that in this age, nothing has been done to sort out the human relationship. She as a result implores for the new ethics grounded on mutual trust, contemplation, big-heartedness and lack of deceptions, egocentricity and narcissism. The novel can be defined as what, John Barth calls the “literature of replenishment” Sahgal voices and looks at life as a minimum in the current novel. One is the all-knowing writer’s and the other is Sonali the protagonist’s. The story is esteemed for its inspired novelty and positive vision of life. The novel is portrayed in the view of third person by the authorial narrative voice and in the first person in the voice of the heroine. By the imaginative alternate of the attention between these two viewpoints are the two vision angles, the

writer projects a social-political actuality at two-levels with the varied mass levels and in the individual level. This represents two classes into which the character in the novel appears to drop certainly.

When the novel was published in 1985, it was tremendously acclaimed by critics as an astute political fiction and this resulted in the winning of the most coveted Sahitya Akademy Award in India and the Sinclair Prize in Britain. Due to the historical and sequential setting from 1932 to 1975 covered both the Indian freedom movement and its aftereffects that lead to the inclusion of the notorious political Emergency professed by Indira Gandhi. It openly treats demands of governmental strategy, several scholars have concentrated almost entirely upon the novel's commitment with state politics, ignoring the consequences of such a macro-narrative for the micro-narrative of gender. O.P. Mathur, for instance, acclaims *Rich like Us* exclusively as an revelation of the

“Objectives and functioning of the Emergency” and the “nexus linking politics, business, and crime” (Mathur, 6)

Ramesh Chadha's stress upon the mutual exceptionality of Sahgal's general and gender politics as she declares that

“Along with the political themes, [Sahgal] also portrays the modern Indian woman's search for individual freedom and self-realization” (Chadha, 261)

Sahgal likewise attempts to advocate that in circumstances of coercion and oppression, history can offer a means of hopefulness, not just for existence, but for being stimulated to fight, for the most horrible of autocrats had to provide to general will. Sahgal displays her reliance in the latent of literature to best along with re-interpret antiquity. Though she archives it through her characters whose narratives are altered by their natures, outlooks, strengths and weaknesses, the records 'possess the authentic taste of truth' that authorized forms of history failed to deliver. The novel is extraordinary for its pragmatic demonstration of a specific era of India's politic antiquity. Her novel views as a fine example of the interface of both fiction and history. The novel ends on an explicit note of sanguinity, prompting Sonali that “She was young and alive, with her own century stretched out before her waiting to be lived” (Sahgal, 266). In contradiction of such a massive historical perspective, the Emergency for all its nauseating brutalities, decreases into a fleeting moment both in time and consciousness.

Conclusion

Rich like Us is a replication act and an eye-opener go to examine the Indian heritage that is not all harmony and not all same. Many bits of evil surfaced in the postcolonial India as a result of freedom fight. It has its equal ratio in influencing the Indian Heritage, class-system and

caste-division and with India's incapability of generating and maintaining a native morality. The Gandhian events start not as a prolongation of a tradition, but a flash in the pan that now seems to be over. *Rich like Us* is very significant for various reasons. It remarks on the political condition that has post-colonial implications, it examines the flow in the native tradition and it defends the ethical struggle faced by many and important for existence of the human being. Sahgal's has given us several astute descriptions of the partition era. She has offered her interpretations of history at the same time that she has trained her eye upon sociological details.

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