

# **Personal and Political Life in Nayanatara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the theme of east-west conflict, social realism, multiculturalism, gender issues, and the funny side of human being nature, environmental issues, diasporic works, magic realism, and other similar topics. Sahgal presents that in India, personal life, particularly for women, it is intrinsically political, with subjects like, emancipation of woman, dowry and exploitation of male in dominated society. Political consciousness in literature is the understanding of social and political issues by a writer or a character, which frequently results in indication of social realities, critique of power structures, and engagement with themes such as community, justice, and human rights. By addressing and reflecting current issues through their creative works, authors can pique readers' interest in politics and foster a sense of social responsibility.

**Key Words-** political, politics, personal, struggle, integrity, freedom and patriarchy

## **INTRODUCTION**

The novel interlinks the characters and incidences of Sonali and Rose to reveal ethical perish, the silent of rebel, and the exploitation of women, it highlights how national politics changes personal life. The prolifically produced literary works produced by Indian authors in English are primarily responsible for India's significant contribution to international literature. Their works shed light on and emphasise a wide range of subjects, including nationalism, the struggle for freedom, social realism, personal consciousness and others. Due to the overwhelming output of writers, this literary movement has established itself as a powerful force in international fiction. By attempting to demonstrate their inner creative desires via the English language, these writers succeeded in doing this. Indian English novels began to have a significant effect on other parts of the literary world

Nayantara Sahgal was one of the best Indian authors who write in English. She was born on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1927. She is a family member of the Nehru-Gandhi family and the second of Jawaharlal Nehru's three daughters, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Her 1986 The English novel *Rich Like Us* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in this category. Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, her father, was a lawyer in Kathiawad. Pandit was a traditional scholar who translated the epic history of *Kalhana, Rajatarangini*, from Sanskrit to English. He died in jail in Lucknow in 1944, leaving behind his wife Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and their three children: Chandrakanta Mehta, Nayantara Sehgal, and Rita Dar. She had been imprisoned for her support of Indian independence. Nayana's mother, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, was Motilal's daughter & sister of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. In addition to M.C. Chagla In 1946, Vijayalakshmi was a part of the first Indian delegation to the UN after the country's independence. She had been incarcerated for her involvement in the Indian liberation struggle. She was the governor of several Indian states, a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, and, after India attained independence, its ambassador to the US, Mexico, the Court of St. James, Ireland, the UN, and the Soviet Union. She wrote many novels and short stories like *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), *From Fear Set Free* (1963), *Time to Be Happy* (1963), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Freedom Movement in India* (1970), *Sunlight Surrounds You* (1970), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *Indira Gandhi's Emergence and Style* (1978), *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1982), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Mistaken Identity* (novel; 1988), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1989), *Lesser Breeds* (2003), *Relationship* (collection of letters exchanged between Nayantara Sahgal and E.N. Mangat Rai; 1994), *Before Freedom: Nehru's letters to his sister 1909-1947* (edited by Nayantara Sahgal) and *The Fate of Butterflies* (2019).

Sahgal constructs two levels of social-political reality. The people and their respective abilities are imaginatively alternating between these two perspectives, which represent the two angles of the vision. This stands for the protagonist belongs to two social classes of the book seems to naturally belong to. Sahgal can use the dual vision technique, the two Indians are realistically portrayed: the working class and poor masses that have been excluded from the advantages of their nation's liberty and the India of the wealthy, educated, and powerful Western elite. This article demonstrates that, in contrast to these conventional hermeneutic interpretations of Sahgal, both her nationalism and feminism are marked by debilitating omissions that make her an accomplice in the very patriarchal and imperialist discourses that she claims to expose and denounce in *Rich Like Us*. Because she was born into the Nehru family, the most influential

political family in contemporary India, and because she grew up in a household free from the constraints of being a woman, Sahgal inferiors the woman's question to the national question in the narrative.

Her western-style education and upbringing, as well as the fact that she was placed in a global literary ground rather than a local one, are sarcastic but not surprising. The time frame covered is approximately from the 1930s to the nation experienced a widespread uprising against the British Empire, and the 1975 state of emergency. Her novels, particularly those from the 1970s and 1980s, contain subtle and occasionally overt allusions to important political events; critics have referred to her as either a novelist with political consciousness or a political novelist consciousness. Her approaches are problems pertaining to historical reconstructions with greater self-awareness. She blends public and personal history in her earlier books as well by fusing the historical past of India with the past of individual lives. She was the source of unrest prior to and following the country's independence in 1947. Sahgal's autobiography is titled *Prison and Chocolate Cake*.

*Rich Like Us* is the title of Nayantara Sahgal's highly regarded Sahitya Akademi award and Sinclair Prize-winning book. The action in what is arguably her best book takes place during India's National Emergency, which lasted from 1974 to 1975 and put the Parliament in suspended animation. The novel mainly focuses on the state of the nation during the Emergency that her cousin Indira Gandhi forced, even though it shows India after freedom. Nayantara Sahgal's thorough analysis of India during the Emergency exhibits the shallowness of democracy and mysticism. She explains the socio-political ambience in India, particularly during the Emergency, with Delhi as the setting. A devoted wife, a vibrant English woman, and a middle-aged, unmarried civil servant are among the women whose exploitation, frustrations, and failures are portrayed in the book. Here, the public and private domains are extraordinarily merged.

"*Rich Like Us*" novel examines political consciousness through an analysis of the effects of the Indian Emergency (1975–1977) on people. Through instances of repression and forced sterilisation, the book illustrates how political power undermines democracy and corrupts individuals' lives. Through the similar lives of two women, Sonali and Rose, Nayantara Sahgal weaves together the personal and the political, emphasising how both are harmed by the political corruption and violence of the time.

The novel courageously describes the pestering that was inflicted on all groups of people during the National Emergency. In addition to describing the suffering during Emergency, the author transports the reader to the Second World War and the days of nostalgic repetition while describing Gandhi's enthralling and transformative impact on the general populace. The suttee is one of the major themes that recur throughout Sahgal's story, both literally and figuratively denoting the exploitation of women for the benefit of the male population. For instance, the Ramayana's Sita story is frequently used to illustrate how the goddess actively desired death as a result of Rama's long-term mistrust and mistreatment of her. This story contains several incidents, including the kidnapping of women labourers for sexual slavery by dishonest police officers and businessmen, the attempted suicide by Mona, the senior wife of Ram Surya, the suttee committed by Sonali's great-grandmother to shield her son from her brothers-in-law, and the murder of Rose, Ram's English junior wife, for knowing too much about her stepson Dev's illegal activities. Sahgal examines how the Emergency affected numerous characters at the same time, showcasing how these people responded to the social unrest brought on by the emergency. Sonali, a diligent civil servant, is one of the numerous victims; Kishori Lal, a small-time vendor who was arrested and harassed by the police for having ties to the RSS; a young person from Nehru University who was cruelly abused and imprisoned for belonging to the Marxist Party; Rose, a Cockney shop girl who became the foreign wife of an Indian businessman who tries to enter India and eventually dies at the hands of a "youth camp tough" hired by her step-son, Dev, one of the little tyrants the Emergency has produced; and the clever administrator Ravi Kachru, who successfully rides the wave of popularity in the early days of the Emergency.

These serve as an example of the widespread predicament that most people experience during a national emergency. Rose's encounter with Ram transforms her life. Rose is a twenty-year-old English cockney who is from a lower class when Ram first meets her. She is a factory worker's daughter. She had not been prepared for a lifetime of dedication to someone like Ram, much less his way of life, by her life prior to Ram.

In order to wed Ram, a businessman from Lahore, Rose had called off her planned engagement to Freddie. She married Ram out of love even though she was fully aware of his previous marriage and his son. In an interview, Sahgal stated that "it is very difficult to separate [politics] from actual life in India, where women are roasted alive on their husbands' funeral pyres and burned to death for dowries," (Sahgal, 97) implying that women's issues are a subset of "politics." She thus reveals that the basis of national politics is the experiences of women, especially the murders of dowries and suttees. Therefore, the diverse suttee portrayals in *Rich Like Us* are oppositional on a macro-political level rather than explicitly interventionist on the part of women. For instance, the Sita story is first mentioned and surprisingly by a man during a discussion on nationalist allegiances. Keshav illustrates how Hindu tradition has denigrated Rama by pointing to his abhorrent treatment of Sita. He connects his scepticism about Hindu tradition to his schizophrenia about being Indian and/or British.

In order to highlight the corruption of a country and a political structure founded on repressive religious tradition, Sita's suffering is being reduced to a parody this is yet another example of Sahgal exploiting the story for her own political ends. Similarly, the story's goal is to raise awareness of the larger religious and cultural oppression of women rather than to analyse the specific framework of social and nationalistic corruptions. It accomplishes this by recording two actual stories of widow burnings from the nineteenth century in addition to re-enacting Sonali's great-grandmother's suttee. In order to do this, Sonali's great-grandmother's experience is creatively recreated by her son, while the male British witnesses recount the nineteenth-century suttee episodes, denying the women their own voices. Furthermore, the men's personalities are not examined. For illustration, the British's objectification of the suttees, their emphasis on the suffocating effect of "superstition" on women" (Sahgal, 126), and their sincerity that gender inequality is an indication of Indian inadequacy are all unquestioned. Similarly, there is no resistance to Sonali's grandfather's criticism of Hindu India's complacency in not questioning its own detrimental traditions and beliefs, but rather the reprehensible suttee practice itself. Using the suttee practice as an example of religious contradictions, he concludes in an instructive manner: "I cannot believe in Hinduism, whatever form it may take. Not because of evils like sati, but rather because evil is still inexplicable" ( Sahgal, 157 )

By writing from the point of view of bourgeois nationalism and admiring the virtues of the British over the Indian, she also contributes to the repression of subaltern nationalism. Stuart Hood's comment that she is "not an Indian writer" but rather "an English writer working in a tradition which is hers by birth, education, and class" takes on a new, satirical meaning as Sahgal eventually exposes the dual alienation in its elitism and imitativeness of her Eurocentric "nationalist" consciousness. Beyond the purely belletristic, this has implications for the ideological, the formal, and the political-cultural.

Sahgal depleted the majority of her childhood in Anand Bhawan, the Nehru families inherited home in Allahabad, so she has actual knowledge of Indian politics and following leaders. Politics is undoubtedly embedded in her. Each of her novels is set against the surroundings of significant political events. Her writing is well-known for emphasising current political events while incorporating elements of Western liberalism. Her books accurately reflect the political themes of modern-day India. The different social and cultural shifts that occur in India, as well as how people react to them are depicted in Sahgal's novels. Her books are closely examined critically and incorporate India's social, political, and cultural history into their narrative structure.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sahgal's speciality is political fiction, and she has provided us with a number of insightful accounts of the time of the partition. She has shared her historical interpretations while simultaneously focussing on sociological details. The novel provides important events as Indira Gandhi's Emergency, representing it as effects of eroding democratic principles, where power became unconditional and oppose was compacted. English language is starting to be regarded and liked in India, especially by the upper and middle classes. Writers are using it more and more to give structure to the many problems that people face. It certainly has grown into a possible way for the writers to show off their innate skills.

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