

# Treatment of Women in *Rich Like Us* by Nayantara Sahgal

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**Abstract:** Women novelists in English have portrayed the problems of personal relationships and have effectively created an inner drama that dramatizes the man woman relationship and have advanced themselves towards an innovative creation. Nayantara Sahgal is a sensitive and prolific novelist of Indian English Literature. Nayantara Sahgal distinguishes herself from her other contemporaries as an Indo English novelist of reputation Sahgal focuses on the recurring and prolonged conflict and struggle between the Hindu Culture, male defined norms and values and the plight of the typical Indian women in the contemporary society. Nayantara Sahgal's works always have her own emotional and personal experiences as a fictionalized autobiography. In the present article, the scholar attempts to present the delineation of women characters in *Rich Like Us*. *Rich Like Us* is a lyric of political experience than a leaf of life captured dispassinately. Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* does not seem to prove her inborn talent as a novelist but it has offered her a chance to personal purgation.

**Keywords:** status, suppression, gender role

In *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal presents three women characters from different backgrounds and in three dimensions. Sahgal attempts to present how these three women suffer in the clutches of the patriarchal men in the society. Mona is a typical Indian woman and wife of Ram. Ram is an insensitive, apathetic, rich patriarchal man. Ram always feels happy and proud to be born as a Hindu because he has no restrictions as far as marriage is concerned. Though he begets a son with Mona, he wants to be a polygamist and feels happy that he is not born as a Muslim who can marry only four times in his life time. Though Mona does not attain any emotional fulfillment and advantage that a wife uses to get from her husband, she wants to lead her life in that way itself without questioning him. Mona does not have the urge to seek for a self-identity and she sacrifices herself and life to her family which life to her family which is not faithful to her. Sahgal presents the sacrificing, self-deceiving disillusioned and satisfied woman through the character of Mona.

Rose is a foreign lady who was met by Ram in his trip to attend a meeting in foreign country. Rose was born and brought up in an independent background by her parents. Rose can be rightly called ad a fatalist because she loves Ram and marries him inspite of having the knowledge of his first marriage with Mona. She is a twenty one years old girl of lower class. She is an English girl with a little formal education to her credit. Ram is highly romantic and understanding with Rose before marriage. Rose fate was decided with Ram in the name of marriage. In an interview with Sahgal, S.Varalakshmi says,

She (Rose) keeps thinking that it is her destiny that Ram walked in one day and captivated her and she had no option but to follow him wherever....across the seas or over the mountains or wherever he would have taken her. It is the destiny of anyone who is struck like that by lighting to behave in this (An Interview with Nayantara Sahgal 18).

Mona, being the first wife has all the responsibilities and power to herself in the household. Rose adjusts herself to life as a second wife. Yet she does not lose her values. But she could not fear the presence of Mona. She has her own conflicts and tensions about her shared life with Mona who is not all understood or answered by Ram. The worst fate is that rose is not lucky enough to attain motherhood which will give completeness and unique respect to women.

Through the portrayal of the characters like rose and Mona, Sahgal projects light on the typical Indian woman. Rose struggles with her might and courage against Ram who let her in solitary confinement most of the time. He does not share anything with her. He looks down upon her as a sexual object to be used in bed and as an accompaniment to arrange the partier for him at home. But after Marcella's entry into

his life, he says “You have the path to heaven all paved for you...with a cocktail party upstairs and a prayer meeting downstairs” (Rich Like Us 65).

Ram as a husband to two wives has failed in his duty to give emotions fulfillment to both of them. Mona has learnt to accept this. But Rose could not be like Mona. Ram who is brought up in the Mala dominated chauvinistic society never thinks of apologizing for his mistakes to his wives. Rose never gives up her own values which is evident from her refusal to go bed with Ram before marriage.

Mona is a typical Indian woman from a traditional Punjabi family. She is highly pious and takes refuge in her prayers always to escape from the tensions and conflicts that she has because of the presence of rose a her rival and indifferent and insensitive attitude of Ram towards her.

Sonali is Sahgal’s new woman in the novel. She deals with the gender discrimination faced by the career woman in their working places through Sonali’s character. She is an IAS officer who wants to be honest, perfect and sincere in her duty. Sonali’s role model and inspiration is her father who is a similar type of character known for his dedication and commitment towards freedom.

Sonali is the narrator of the novel. The readers can find her being passive in spite of her own higher values. During the time of emergency in India, her firm opinions on the democracy have profoundly affected her job. Sonali is in love with Ravi, her schoolmate. But when she comes to know about Ravi’s appearance in political intrigue, she decides that she cannot love the man he has become. Sonali decides to remain a spinster so that she can be free to do whatever she wants for the sake of her and the common people in the society. She wants permanent. Sonali has her own dreams and aspirations towards her future. Sonali’s clear cut mind, sharp vision, boldness to take decisions for her welfare to survive in the chauvinistic society is expected from all the women in the society by Sahgal.

The male supremacy and domination over female in marriage is one of the important feminist themes dealt almost in all the novels by Sahgal. Sahgal has also focused on the social evils like ‘Sati’ in *Rich Like Us* and *Female Infanticide*, Child Marriage, Purdah system in *Mistaken Identity*. In *Rich Like Us*, Sonali has got a chance to read her grandfather’s diary in which he had written about the death of his mother in Sati like a wax doll melting in the very front of his eyes due to the force of his uncle, when he was nineteen years old. He says, “I saw her fling her arms wildly in the air, then wrap them about her breasts before she subsided like” a wax doll into the flames (134).

Polygamy is one of the major issues against women in the society. Whenever ram is asked about the consecutive marriages, he refers to the Lord Krishna who has two wives. Having the name of the great epic hero Rama in the Ramayana, Ram has brought disgrace to the divine and holy name. Rose is the Sita figure of the novel. The readers can find an unfathomable fatalism in her life which has yielded towards married Ram against her parents’ warnings. Ram as a polygamist is not fit to question and to emulate Rose for having talked with Freddie for some mental relation. Rose meets Freddie with whom she was engaged first before marrying Ram. Rose leads an isolated life for five long years after ram’s union with Marcella. It is Sonali who supports Rose is murdered towards the end of the novel and it is made to believe that she has invite death on her. Hence Rose is right to be called as a fatalist.

Rose is the symbol of many Indian women living in the male dominated and male centered society. In the name is Sati, Sonali’s grandfather’s mother was murdered. Later women like Rose were pushed to death or murdered. The habit and practice of polygamy in the patriarchal system is the root cause of the humiliations, violation, exploitation and finally death of many victimized and suppressed women in the society. B. Charanya observes that “Though the Women are humiliated and exploited by the dominating men, they have realized that there is still a part of her own remaining undamaged and unhurt and that can make their life free from the compulsions and the oppressive dictates of male chauvinism” (19). But Rose was forced to death in her struggle to fight for her legitimate rights. Dr.M.P.Ganesan opines that, “women are constructive in her wifely and motherly roles. Her constructive and destructive character can be interrelated to the concept on the female in the Hindu ideology which presents an essential duality”(). In this novel, Rose as a bold woman, withstands her values and respects the traditional Hindu system inspite of being a foreign lady in order to adjust to her married life. But her role as a constructive woman has led her to be murdered towards the end of the novel. A woman needs to be destructive like the goddess Kali and Durga to seek justice.

**Work Cited**

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