



Acculturation in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* – A study

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This article focusses on the acculturation process of Rose, the main character in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*. Acculturation is the process of social, psychological and cultural changes that stem from blending between cultures. There are four different aspects of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Assimilation involves immigrants who totally accept the new culture, and reject their own culture. Separation occurs when immigrants reject their new culture and living according to their customs of their original culture. Marginalization represents immigrants who reject new as well as their original culture. Integration involves immigrants accepting the new culture, while maintaining close ties with their original culture. The transition of Rose belongs to the integration method of acculturation.

Rose is an English woman from a working class background, and she is bold enough to cross all racial and social barriers. She has broken an almost settled engagement with Freddie in order to marry Ram, a Lahore businessman. Rose is shocked when she comes to know Ram is a married man. She marries Ram for love with full knowledge of Ram's first marriage.

Rose dreams of a romantic life with Ram. But her dreams are shattered on her arrival to India. She cannot go back to her country because it is her firm decision to be the wife of Ram against the wishes of her parents. As Rose is the second wife of Ram, she is humiliated by the society and considered as intruder by Ram's first wife Mona. Rose feels guilty as Jasbir Jain observes,

The requirement of her was at many times requiring not only the acceptance of joint family system, but also the feeling of guilty aroused by the presence of Ram's first wife and her child. She had abandoned all her home, her country, her parents and even the familiar structure of love and marriage. (53-54)

The two woman characters Rose and Mona make a sharp contrast. The cultural conflicts between them are understood as one is a Hindu wife and other a Christian. Mona sticks to her tradition and religion, and Rose on the other hand is liberal and a non conformist believing in her instinct. But both the women are subject to male domination. At the same time they do not want to leave Ram.

When Mona attempts to commit suicide, Rose saves her, consoles her and instills courage to encounter problems in life. The brave spirit of Rose and her rendering helping hands to people belonging to all walks of life earns her a good image. Mona's son Dev is brought by Mona and Rose. In her death bed, Mona gets a promise from Rose that she would look after their son and daughter in law.

Rose is presented as a mouth piece of Sahgal. She attends parties and other recreations and thus has the chance of getting closer to Indian big business men and bureaucrats. Rose understands that most of these men don't have a correct image of womanhood. They think that whatever freedom women are enjoying is a kind of concession granted by men to women.

Rose understands that India is rich in its cultural heritage. But at the same time, her displeasure with Indian mythical patterns pertaining to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata is palpable. "We revere the Ramayana and worship a man who turned his wife out alone and pregnant into the forest. Not even ordeal by fire proving her purity saved her". (Sahgal - 71)

In religious books, woman is portrayed as deity but there are places, where woman is considered as a thing, and an object at second position. While talking about polygamy depicted in epics, Ram says,

In the Mahabharata, a woman marries five brothers in a charming accidental sort of way. One of the brothers goes to their mother and says, 'Mother, we have some precious and she replies 'Then share it among you, my sons'. (63,64)

Rose interrupts and asks, "Why didn't they tell her it was a woman they'd found and not a thing?". (64) The valid question of Rose cannot be answered by him.

Ram is attracted towards Marcella ever after having two wives. Ram justifies his action quoting the traditional sanction of bigamy and polygamy. 'King Thasaratha, Ram's father had four wives' (63). Like Mona, Rose feels helpless. While Ram refers to Ramayana and Mahabharata to justify his bigamy, Rose on the contrary is struck with the character of Sita. Sita repeatedly figures in the narrative as the archetype of the wronged woman, and Rose at various crucial moments in her life thinks of Sita. (Arora 69)

Indian Freedom Struggle movement led by Mahatma Gandhi is poignantly depicted in *Rich Like Us* Which teems with the actualities of life in India. Mahatma's words had the power to inspire the Indians and he invented new vocabulary such as "Daridranarayan", God of the poor, and "Harijan", words that had existed in no Indian language (Sahgal 125). When Gandhi and his thousands of followers had been arrested, many bridges were burnt, and trains derailed in protest. Ram's father, incensed by the British Government's action, throws every item of British manufacture, including Chivers Orange Marmalade and an unopened tin of Scottish shortbread Rose has been hoarding, out of the house.(141). Rose wonders if she will be seized and hurled over the bridge by him. But he acknowledges Rose's efforts in making Ram's business flourish.

Rose gets mingled with people belonging to all walks of life as Lalaji has started holding prayer meetings at the house, which is attended by Hindus, Muslims, the rich and the poor. The prayer has been patterned after Mahatma's own hymn to Hindu-Muslim unity.

Ishvar-Allah tere nam

Sub ko sanmati de bhagvan (141)

Rose asks how the god of Hinduism and the god of Islam could be joined together. Lalaii replies that the two are one and the same. Rose is also sitting with others at the prayer meeting and, she has been impressed by the unity of the people to gain freedom. She expresses her view to her friend, Minnie, “If all the mice in the world stopped running away and stood their ground, cats would stop killing them.”(142)

Rose undergoes the socialization process by which to some extent she adapts the values, customs of host culture, the Indian culture. Her concern for the less privileged people and the courage to fight against capitalists as a representative of the working class shows the moral grit of Rose.

Dev has always considered his step mother Rose as his enemy who is a block in his way to wealth and power. Dev does not have the mind to give Rose her fair share of his father’s fortune, and she is murdered by Dev. Dev has fabricated a story that she may have drunk too much, became unsteady and fell into the well. Through the process of acculturation Rose gets a unique identity which is a mixture of Indian as well as American. But she was misunderstood as an intruder even by her foster son.

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