

Women's Search for Individuality in Nayantara Sahgal's -- *Rich Like Us*

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Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. Most of the women writers focus on issues significant to women, how women suffers in the patriarchal hegemonic structure and the way the women protect against their subjugation are the concerns in a most of the fictional writings. Women writers try to give voice to women and support their struggle for fights.

Writers like –Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, NayantaraSahgal and Shashi Deshpande have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as their main theme of the work. These women novelists have been focusing on the social, political and psychological struggles that the Indian women encounter, struggle against the male dominated society, their conflicts, victories and defeats.

NayantaraSahgal one of the famous women writers writing in English depicts the inner trauma of Indians women who are exposed to the social, political and cultural changes. Sahgal takes us through the families which are exposed to these changes. Sahgal women characters are courageous and indifferent to the traditions and least bothered about the society.

In this novel Sahgal portrays women who are trying to search for Identity. She remarks in the same in a letter to Jasbir Jain;

“ I try to create the virtuous women –the modern Sita, if you like my women are strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world; these virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit,a kind of untouched innocence and integrity , I think there is this quality in the Indian women” *1

In this novel she portrays women characters that are in search of their individuality and for the same how they rebel against the society and maintain their positions. Characters like Rose, Sonali and Simrit struggle to maintain their position and individuality in the male dominated society. The story told through the lives of two women –the cockney memsahib Rose and the young, well-educated unconventional Sonali. The story set in the backdrop of Emergency deals not only with emergency but it touches the issues like sati, plight of lower classes, social injustice, corruption and political upheavals of 1975.

Rose—a well-educated, young lady quickly falls in love with Ram when she encounters him at a chocolate shop. She was emotionally so attached to him that she leaves with him for India even after knowing the truth that he is married and had a son. She feels lost in the alien culture and this constant changing world. She struggles to find cope up and understand this culture and herself. Ram enjoys life with both the women. Rose provides him sensual pleasure and helps him in business. Mona looks after the child and household affairs. When Ram meets Marcella he starts having a love affair with her. He never thought of his two wives or he has any feeling of guilt. He refuses Mona for Rose and now Rose for Marcella. This identical suffering brings Mona and Rose together. Ram does not have any emotional attachment with his wives. When Mona is dying of cancer, he does not have time to listen. Sahgal condemns such attitudes towards women. She condemns treating women as an Object. In her essay: Women: persons or possessions. She says –
When I heard someone remarks

“We never allow our daughter to go out” or “I can’t do that,
My husband would not like it”,
it sounded very peculiar, alien jargon,
As if I thought, women were property not persons.

When Ram bedridden with stroke she realizes that she does not have right on his property in the absence of a will. She was cheated by Dev- Ram and Mona’s son, and then she turns to sonali for her help. Rose is the most prominent character in the novel. She tries to adjust with her life but failed.

Sonaliranade - a civil servant in the ministry of Industry. Sonali symbolises sahalgal’s philosophy of active intervention in life. She is different from the stereo-type of women in Indian fiction. Sonali values Individual freedom than anything else. By refusing to compromise with Dictatorship results in her resign from civil service. She says:

“When constitution becomes null and void by the act of a dictator

And the amour of a modern state confronts you,
Satyagraha is the only way to keep your self-respect”

Her resignation is not her defeat but her rebel against the oppressive forces. She refuses to bow her head in front of the forces which act against her identity. Her fight for justice in case of Rose makes her an ideal character.

Simrit - another women character in the novel dares to come out of the male dominated society – by breaking her marriage. It's her awareness about her identity and to achieve something she breaks the marriage even after seventeen years of marriage life. Her willingness to change and have an identity makes her strong and capable of releasing herself from patriarchal norms. There are other characters in the novel both educated and uneducated rebel against the male dominant society to realise their individuality.

Sahgal characters represent a new morality which says women are not a toy or an object of lust but equal to men. Sahgal's women are victims of societal norms made by men which assert their rights pertaining to their individuality. Sahgal shows deep concern for women who are suffering and try's to give voice for them by making strong and bold to fights against the injustice.

References

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