

Fiendishness of Male Characters in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*

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Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is a significant female writer of Indian English literature. She is famous for her reflective writings on politics. Naturally, she belongs to the political blood of the Nehru family. However, her personal abides make her write on Feminism related topics. Through her writings, she brings out female sufferings. The word 'fiendishness' means brutal or violent behaviour. Rich Like Us is an award-winning novel with Sinclair Prize and Sahitya Academy Award. The Male dominative society never gets changes. It reveals through the two-generation characters like Mr.Ram N.Surya (old generation) and his son Dev (modern generation). They do not respect women. Sahgal wants to give identity to women without dependence because they are always treated as dependent creatures. Women have many obstacles from birth to death. Born as a female child is a curse in the male dominative world. It is a trend to speak about Feminism, but no one is ready to accept feminists from their own families. Invariably, they want their women to take care of family and kids, not society. In this novel, Rich Like Us describes the cruel behaviour of male characters and the sufferings of females through Rose, a cockney English woman; Mona, a traditional housewife and Sonali, the civil servant. The harshness of males affects not only the females but also their families. Moreover, Sonali's flashback episode of her father's diary gives a clear account of women's position. She comes to know about marriage and infanticide of female kids. These are cruel and unbearable evidence of female harassment.

Key Words: Fiendishness of men, Sati, Domination of Men, Child Marriage and Infanticide.

Introduction

The wave of Feminism has begun in the late nineteenth century. At first, it needs equality for women like men in all fields. Nevertheless, it needs some years to adopt few rights for women. Now, in this modern time, women are given equal rights in the name shake but not indeed. This novel is an excellent example of that. In this novel, Ram Lal Surya, a wealthy, successful business tycoon, enjoys his life by spoiling the life of many women. His first wife, Mona, a traditional woman, loves and worships her husband. He cheats her in several ways. Ram has gone to London for a business trip.

Pity of Rose:

Ram introduces to Rose in a chocolate shop. Both love each other. Already, she has been engaged to Freddie. However, she has ready to come with Ram because of her true love made her do anything for him. This novel is rightly observed in *Myth as Metaphor: The Structure of Rich Like Us* that, "*Rich Like Us* dramatizes Indian woman's privations and suffering without being a downright documentary and the novel proposes rationalization of sex relations offering kinds of man-woman relationship" (Raju 78-79).

Rose's mother has prevented her from believing a man from abroad who is not a Christian at all. She prepares herself to trip with that man(lover). One day, he told her in a regular voice, "And one afternoon he told her, in a natural everyday voice, that he had a wife and an infant child" (41). She is shocked by the news. Nevertheless, he does not look guilty for his doings. She questions herself, how dare is he propose to another woman, even if he has been already married and has been a newborn baby's father. He told her that his father had called the news of his son's

birth. She asked, "How can we get married when you are married? My religion lets a man have more than one wife" (42).

Ram never feels guilty; however, he justifies his action in the name of religion. So, religion, too, does not treat women equally to men. A woman has to marry one time. She has to sacrifice her life for her only husband in the name of Sutte. Even after the death of her husband, she has to die with him; otherwise, she should lead her life with the memories of her dead husband. However, a man can marry several times. Rose's innocence made her to lose her life.

Rose's mother has warned her not to go with him. That love makes her leave her parents for a new country like India. "Ram being a man who appreciated female flesh..." (44). Ram's first wife, Mona, always prays and fasts for her husband's health. She finds fault with herself, not with Ram. She is a poor creature who belongs to the kitchen and prayer room. Mona lives on the first floor, and Rose lives on the second floor. Ram supports polygamy. He is like bee and jumps from flower to flower. He said, "King Dasrath, Rama's father, had four wives" (63). Rose does not have child of her own. She never becomes a legal wife of Ram. So, her rights are questionable after Ram.

So, Rose does not like to give birth to a child. That will affect the life of the kid. She has seen Dev from his childhood. Ram's attraction is not stopped with Mona and Rose, but it shifts to Marcella, his secretary. In the beginning, Rose and Mona remain enemies. However, later, Rose saves Mona in a fire accident. She does not let Mona die. She wants to live with Mona and Ram. The three of them have to lead their life happily. After the incident, Mona and Rose become friends. They have joined together to visit many places like sisters.

Rose is introduced to Sonali, the daughter of Keshav Ranade, a civil servant. She is a bold woman. Now forty years have gone after Rose's marriage life with Ram. She has no property individually except the joint account of Ram and Rose. Her stepson Dev has grown up. Dev hates her rudely. Now Ram gets a stroke, and now he is bedridden. Rose is nothing in the house without Ram. He used the harsh words that he was going to break her neck. Dev's wife is Nishi, a lovely girl from a typical middle-class family. The relationship between Mona and Rose proves that woman is not an enemy of another woman. The actual position of Sonali and Rose are described in *Towards Freedom, From Fear: A Discussion of Rich Like Us* as,

Closely interwoven with the story of the moral dilemma of Sonali is that of their domestic crisis of Rose. Rose, a simple, straightforward cockney shop-girl who marries an Indian businessman and leaves her home and country without a backward glance, is one of the most memorable characters Sahgal has ever portrayed. (Vijayasree24-25)

Dev has shown his brutality towards his stepmother. At the same time, his father's illness, he has begun to steal money from the joint account of Rose and Ram. No one questions him. He never respects his wife, Nishi. Moreover, she loves her mother-in-law though she is helpless because of her husband. Rose's life remains a significant question mark in that house. Dev joins with the great conspirators of the country. He wants to earn money by any means. He does not give equal rights to his wife. Sonali is a young civil servant. Her father represents female freedom. She has become the close friend of Rose. Sonali recollects that,

Papa, a member of the I.C.S. himself, had said with pride she was used to hearing in his voice, "Sonali, people like her, especially women like her, are going to

Indianize India". It was the day her name had topped the list in the competitive examination for the civil service (22-23).

Sonali is strict in her service to the people. However, her sincerity makes her transfer demotion. She has refused the proposal of a fizzy drink called Happyola because it is not suitable for the people. With the political influence, she was transferred with demotion to UP. In her place, Ravi Kachru has been replaced as Joint Secretary. Ravi and Sonali belong to the same age and batch. However, he bends for industrialists and politicians. However, they are the two sides of the same coin. She has brought by a strict officer Keshav Ranade.

Plight of Indian Women:

Sonali knows the lifestyle of her grandmother's period. The Doctor who treats her hepatitis recollects his mother's time. His mother woke up at 4. am and walked to the well to fetch water. Then she would have done household work and had seven children. Even during pregnancies, she has done all the household work. It is known that women were assigned only to families. The cruelties to women have done on different levels. Sonali recollected about a bride whom in-laws burned. Her parents would not satisfy their demand for money. "She was one of three hundred such women burnt during one year in this our capital city" (30).

The above words are evidence of the inferior position of women in the dominative world. Sonali has consoled Rose while under stress because of her stepson Dev. Her country is England and which does not have a tradition like India. However, she never deviates from her husband, Ram. She has followed the traditional rule of Ramayana, which is one for one till her death. "Rose had remained virgin by choice" (37). Sonali has not married even at the age of thirty-five. She

fears marriage. She remembered her childhood experience of her friend Bimmie's marriage. She got married at the age of sixteen.

Bimmie got marriage at the age of sixteen. Chains covered her, and her saree covered her face. Girl children married earlier, and they became widows earlier. Widows have to lead their life without happiness. They have to wait for the leftover food from the kitchen. Their heads were shaven, and they were surrounded by white saree. It looked terrible to Sonali. The child widow's appearance was too cruel to see them in the house. Others blamed them, and they were treated as a bad omen. Rose feels that "Women is a vehicle for the next generation" (75). She cannot fulfil her duty because she has never been treated as a legal wife of Ram. She never becomes the mistress of the house without a child.

The Cruelties of Suttee:

Suttee of women gave fear to the parents of female children. Even the avatar of Rama did not believe his wife because of the common person's suspicion. She proved her chastity by coming out of the fire. Finally, Sita prayed to her mother earth God to swallow her. It was voluntary death like Sati. Many women were burnt on the funeral pyres of their husbands. This shows the brutality of male characters. They are not ready to accept women as their equals. Nishi is the wife of Dev. Like his father, he, too, never respects women, even his mother and wife. He is not a chauvinist but never looks at his wife as an equal partner. However, Rose sees Nishi as her daughter and helps Nishi when her father is in prison.

A woman is the friend of another woman. And Sonali has helped Rose in difficult situations. Mona has been in prayer. The fire has caught her saree and Rose has saved her life. From that movement onwards, they become friends. They behave as sisters. Mona's father-in-law

asked apology from Rose. He understood her excellent character. However, Ram doesn't consider the feelings of both when his affair moves on to Marcella. His behaviour has made to think of him as a male chauvinist. Ram's father, too, appreciated Rose on several occasions in the house. However, Ram did not utter a word. To him, both are sexual objects to satisfy himself. The virtue of *Sonali and Rose is rightly described in Riches Galore in a Land of Poverty*, "Sonali and Rose are both part of that new definition of virtue Rose, whom Lalaji would not speak to when she was first introduced to him by Ram, is hailed by Lalaji himself" (Sharma 13).

At first, Sati was not considered an illegal thing. It mixed with the tradition of Hinduism. It was the fate of women to accept it. Sonali has read a manuscript from her father's trunk. It was written in English about the cruelty and abolition of Sati. Sonali's grandfather said, "Even if Sati were not illegal, murder is illegal, but the Government will not lift a finger against those murderers" (151). The cruel happenings around him upset Sonal's grandfather. He wanted to eradicate all the evil things like Suttee. After the husband's death, the wife has to accept death voluntarily in the funeral fire of her husband. During that time, she must not be pregnant, and she must be clean. If it happens means she has to wait until her cleanliness.

Then she would go with her husband's possessions or part of his body like swords and bones of her husband. The devil thing upset to write this note regarding that incident. These are clear evidence of the brutal treatment of women. He also described one incident about a brahmin girl. She refused to fall into the funeral pyre of her husband. However, her relatives forced her and pushed her into the fire. She escaped from it three times. Finally, she was saved by her grandfather and admitted to the hospital. After twenty hours of pain and suffering, she lost her life in the hospital.

Fate of Indian Women:

He wrote about several incidents in real life. A widow named Comer and her husband's name Neerbhoy Singh sacrificed his life in the army service. She was a young widow of twenty-six and prepared a pile for herself. No one convinced her. She burnt herself, and her suffering sound made her feel that not to born a woman. He had written a note about his mother. His mother woke up early in the morning and took a bath in the cold water at 4'o clock, even if it was winter or summer. She prayed for the health of her husband.

She was a good wife; he used to think. However, now he believes all wives are good because they have little choice. The nuns in nunneries are good. Little children in the cradles are good. The Hindu wife is Hindu and can be nothing else. (160)

Suddenly, his father died of illness. His mother sat like a statue. Their relatives wept with a loud noise. The rituals happened to his mother, like breaking the bangles with a brick. They removed her earrings and nose ring too. He was with his mother the whole happenings. He took the removed bangles of his mother, which were unbroken. He still kept it with him. His mother looked like a ghost in that appearance. As a son, he had done the ritual of cremation. Then his mother worried for the future of her son. She wanted to make a will for her son because his father did not write any wills before his death.

That courageous woman prepared a will favouring her son through the right person and assured a bright future for her son. Moreover, she darley made herself fall into the fire. He saw it but could not stop her from death. The relatives caught him. The property reached him after two years. He still had that image of his mother, who was caught in the fire. He did not imagine his mother's courage. He felt she was great. Sonali felt that “On a narrow parapet enclosing a funeral

pyre I saw a boy of nineteen balancing dangerously unconscious of the danger to himself as he fought savagely to kill his mother's murderers." (171)

Male chauvinistic Attitude:

Ram told Mona that he is not clean and has a family. He could not hide his past life with Mona. He wants two wives. At the same time, he never feels guilty for this attitude. He feels that man's pride is still active in seeking more women to enrich the list of his women. Mona accepts Rose as her sister. Rose, too never thinks Mona to die. She wants all the three to live long. At first, the traditional silent sufferer did not utter a word against her husband and his new wife. However, she always blames herself and prays to God for her inability to handle her husband. However, Ram did not deserve these two good wives. The male domination is aptly explained in *Feminist Concept: A Study of Nayantara Sahgal's Fiction* as,

The reason is simple: the male domination and cultural psyche are ingrained in the orthodox social norms. Women are still fighting for their voice and liberty. They are asserting their identity. The liberation of women is superficial. They are not liberated in the true sense of the term. In India and even in the West, the cultural and social problems concerning women persist. (Sinha 10)

Rose remained an honourable wife to Ram in the inner world of her home. She understood her feelings for Mona when he moved to the other woman Marcella. He never considers the inner emotions of his wives. Even if it is a man's mistake, the woman is the sufferer in society. It never blames the dominant gender. Forty-three years have gone by in the life of Rose with Ram. Now he has been paralyzed by his illness. Sonali takes the problem of the forgery sign of Ram by his son Dev to the Manager. The Manager is a true man. However, he cannot do anything with the

high-class people. The woman is a decorated doll with educational qualifications to sell in the market for marriage.

When Mona seeks a bride for her son, she puts a condition of fair-skinned, home-loving, with educational qualifications. Society created the view that women are the product belonging to men. The deep relationship between Mona and Rose has revealed when Mona invites Rose and tells her to meet her daughter-in-law. Mona said, "I thought you should meet your daughter-in-law to be" (208). The date is fixed for the marriage at the time of winter. However, before winter, cancer destroys her body. Mona talks to Rose on the death bed to take care of their daughter-in-law. Ram has assurance, but she does not listen to him but only to Rose. So, she believes her on a deep level.

Sonali speaks about dowry deaths. In the union of two hearts, there is no need for dowry. It is against true love and affection. She wants to abolish that practice. The mutual understanding between the two people (husband and wife) is the good seed of love. Sati or Suttee, Dowry deaths are reduced in the modern days. However, child or female harassments and sexual abuses are a significant threat to society. Sonali knows that Rose is a faithful wife to Ram. Even though he shifts his love continuously from Mona to Rose, then from Rose to Marcella, she wants him to be with her for her whole life. She always forgives his mistakes. Rose and Sonali are rightly described in *Female Protagonist in Nayantara Sahgal's Rich Like Us* that,

Sonali's struggle for self-determination is somewhat different from that of other women. In the sense that she is facing destructive forces outside of her home. Rose-a close friend of Sonali-is facing this problem at the home front. Rose, the foreigner, is a picture of victimization as Sonali, the Indian. (Gayathiri 25)

Rose has known Dev since he has born. By that time, she has entered Ram's house. However, the cruel man Dev plans to kill his stepmother, Rose. Two days after Diwali, Rose's body has found in the well. The incident was created as an accident; by consuming more alcohol, she lost her steadiness. Moreover, she walked down the street and fell into the well. The only worrying heart in the house is Nishi. Ram is not aware of the happenings around him. Because he is bedridden, Sonali is too worried about Rose's death. She cannot tolerate her separation from this world.

Conclusion

Mistakes are common among human beings, but the sufferers are females. They are born to suffer. The violent behaviour of males extends toward murder. No one can question it. Ram Surya has changed the fate of Rose through brought her into India. His mother worried about her daughter's suffering in an unknown country. Mona too, has lost her peaceful life because of her husband, Ram. Finally, he was not faithful to Mona or Rose, but needed another woman. Nishi worries about the rude behaviour of her husband. He did not treat her with respect and equality. His harshness extended to killing his stepmother Rose using money and power. Sahgal brought to light the female sufferings in the house as well as in the society.

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