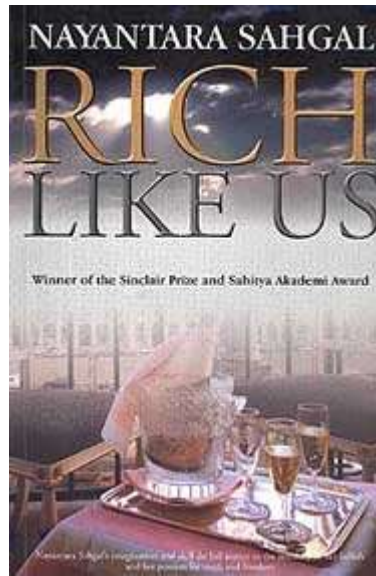


**Quest for Identity in Socio-Political Turmoil with reference to
Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us***

Selvalakshmi. S and Dr. Girija Rajaram

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Responsive to Socio-economic and Cultural Reality

Indian English Fiction has always been responsive to the changes in socio-economic-cultural reality and theoretical perspectives that have impacted and governed its growth since the time of its inception. At the earlier stage the fictional works of writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao were mainly concerned with the down-trodden of the society, the Indian middle class life and expression of traditional cultural ethos of India. At that time, and even onto a much later stage, when writers like K. S. Venkataramani, Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Chaman Nahal, Ruth Prava Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Arun Joshi and Khwshwant Sigh wrote, Indian English fiction concentrated on the depiction of the social reality of the times.

Nayantara Sahgal's Creativity

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Nayantara Sahgal

Nayantara Sahgal has written nine novels and eight works of non-fiction. She is the recipient of the Sinclair Prize for Fiction, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. A member of the Sahitya Akademi's Advisory Board for English till she resigned during the Emergency, Sahgal served on the jury of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1990 and 1991. She has held fellowships in the United States at the Bunting Institute, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the National Humanities Center. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature by the University of Leeds in 1997. She is associated with the founding of the People's Union for Civil Liberties and served as its vice-president during the 1980s.

***Rich Like Us* – A Fascinating Novel Presenting the Multi-facet Life in India**

Rich Like Us is a fascinating novel presenting a multi-faceted picture of modern India. The reality emerges as the story unfolds in its multi-faceted, multi-layered, and complex manner, but in a way that the reader does not lose his/her way. It is a complexity that does not baffle –a complexity that suggests wonderfully the multi-faceted complex land that is India.

Deferred Exploration Creates Curiosity and Expectation

Despite the many rich layers, there is, a sense of judicious restraint guiding the writer through scores of side-alleys beckoning to be explored, back on to the main path of **Language in India** www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:8 August 2013 Selvalakshmi. S and Dr. Girija Rajaram
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the narrative. The suggestion is aptly made of riches waiting to turn up, but whose fullest exploration is deferred, giving it the majesty of deep waters with the promise of priceless gems lying under the depths. The novel runs on the oddly parallel life tracks of two very different women. A time promising wealth for the corrupt, but terrifying with sterilization for the poor and jail for the critical; and the Emergency changes forever the lives of both women. The paper focuses on Rose, an English woman who searches for her identity in the socio-political turmoil.

An English Woman in Search of Her Identity

Rose, the lower-class English woman becomes the second wife of Ram Grewal. Rose gets a distinctive place in Indian fiction by her Cockney speech and also by her habit of speaking her mind without any hesitation. Sahgal has done an exceptional job in portraying the strong minded woman. Though an outsider, and bearing a vestige of colonial authority, she represents the Gandhian values which are losing ground in modern India.

Rose on Values and Ideals of Gandhi

The readers encounter Rose when she is helping Dev's wife, Nishi to entertain a visiting Mr. Neumen, an American garment business man who has come to investigate her husband's failure to maintain manufacturing standards. Instead of trying to impress Mr. Neumen, Rose speaks about her father-in-law from whom she has come to know the values and ideals of Gandhi; she talks about his humble origin to Neumen:

'E was villager, that's wet 'e was, and that's wet 'e stayed till 'is dying day. Anyone wanted to do business with 'im came and sat on the floor, English people an' all, and did it 'is way. They knew who they were dealing with a proper business man down to 'istoes who knew everything there was to know about whatever 'e was adding not like nowadays when the business is minding itself and you're sitting pretty with the loot (page-6 *Rich Like Us*)

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Optimistic and Forgiving

Rose becomes a legend because of her qualities which she maintains throughout the fiction. She is an optimistic person who forgives everyone and tries to see only the good qualities with her relations and friends. The readers get impressed by her character. Rose's life becomes a question mark when her husband, Ram becomes bed-ridden because she can't claim her legal rights in the house. Dev, Ram's first wife's son takes hold of all the property of Ram. Dev hates Rose and openly says, "One of these days I'll break her neck" (page-11 RLU)

Choosing to be a Second Wife and Consequences

Rose's only hope in India is this man Ram. She believes him without any doubt so she agrees to marry him though he is already married. Mona, Ram's first wife becomes the mistress of the house, Rose doesn't know what her future is in Ram's house, but she works for the improvement of Ram's business. When Ram becomes bed-ridden Rose is engulfed by anxieties about her future. She shares her worries with Sonali, an ICS officer, "What's worrying me," said Rose "is I don't know what my legal rights are if anything happens to Ram. He never made a will. We're a joint family and Dev is already helping himself to Ram's money (p51- RLU).

Fighting Forgery

Dev tries to take revenge on Rose. He behaves very meanly towards her. According to him, she is not having any rights in the house, or over the property. Rose's condition becomes very bad due to emergency. People like Dev who have money and power use the situation very well to build their career. Dev forges Ram's signature to withdraw his money from the bank. Sonali who wants to help Rose argues with the Bank manager about it and warns him, but the manager pleads with her that he is helpless; and the condition is different, since he has crossed the cheque only by higher order. Dev actually plans to kill his father for the complete rights for the property. Rose overhears the conversation and shares her fear with Sonali. She says:

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It sounded as if he was trying to kill the man than cure him. He said it would be quite possible to finish him off, yes that's what he said, finish him off with salt tablets, ordinary salt, instead of his medicine, because plain salt in big enough doses could kill a man in that condition" (P-51RLU)

A Refugee and Slave in Her Own House

Rose knows that Dev is talking about his father, but she is helpless. She can't ask help from anyone. She is leading a life of a refugee in her own house. The author makes it very clear about the life of Rose in India, "Rose had been wretched after her arrival in India, with a rebellious active misery quite different from the creeping uneasiness she felt now, more than forty years later" (P-61). But she maintains to have the kind and humble character till the very end. This good character makes Rose to shine like a pole star in the novel.

Rose lives like a slave with Dev. When Nishi, Dev's wife says that she will take her out "There was sudden gleam in Rose's eye and she said, If you're driving into town, I'll come along with you".(P-86 RLU) The words of Rose brings out the fact that she is longing for some fresh air. Though she leads a miserable life, she shows only care and kindness to everyone. She fights with Nishi when she forces Kumar, her servant who is beyond the age of sixty years, to have vasectomy. Rose tells her Kumar is at the age of Nishi's father. At Dev's house Rose can get some concern only from Nishi, but she fights even with her for the sake of poor Kumar. Through this incident the author clearly reveals the real character of Rose to the readers.

Symbols Representing Thoughts

Rose worries much about the beggar who is without hands. She wants to get artificial hands for the beggar when she gets her share from Dev.

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She would have to talk to Nishi about money matters, ask her to arrange whatever meager settlement Dev was willing to make. It would not do to let matters drag on. Once Ram was gone, and it could happen tomorrow, she'd be entirely at Dev's mercy, having to beg for every penny. Ram's breathing body induced a restraint that would snap when life left it, when the body itself no longer lay upstairs, a mute but august reminder of who was master of the house. (P-279-280 RLU)

Male-chauvinist Attitude

Dev's male-chauvinist attitude makes him express very demeaning words about Rose. He says "she was my father's keep, so why shouldn't I control her account?" or "she nearly killed my mother" or "she lorded it over the house, bossed the show when it was my mother's house" (P-275 RLU)

As a Yogi

Rose wants to put an end to the entire problem with Dev. She is in need of a solution; she is in need of peace; so she sits like a yogi in the cross-legged posture in search of it. All her confusions are beautifully cleared. She thinks about Mona's words that Dev is her son and she only wants to correct him and make him realize his mistakes. But all get changed when "she was on her knees in the act of getting up when a cloth came down over her head, arms pinned hers down, and she heard a thick satisfied grunt as she lost consciousness." (P-282 RLU)

Finest Moment

Rose's finest moments come when she is attending a cocktail or dinner party. Although others are embarrassed by her blunt, unvarnished talk, she frequently delivers her opinions on some of the most important matters in the country. The rampant corruption at all levels makes Rose to lose her basic rights.

As a second wife she is unable to claim any rights from Dev, her stepson. The politics and law also support Dev because he has the money. The money gives him even a cabinet minister's post. The good attitude of Rose helps her forgive Dev for the cruelty which he has shown her. When she thinks that she can bring Dev to the right path, Dev makes her take the path of eternity. The author brings to the reader the gruesome fact that male dominance and corruption (all over the country) has taken away the life of an innocent, kind-hearted, caring woman.

Memorable End

Rose's search for her identity in the socio-political turmoil brought her to the horribly tragic end. Even though she faced a tragic end, she has become a memorable woman because of her unmatched, unique identity.

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