

## Hostile Sexism in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*

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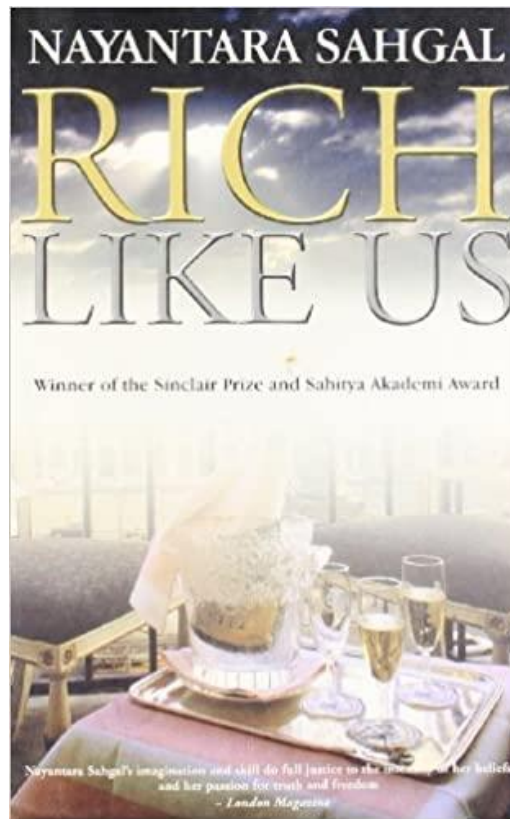
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### Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is a most notable feminist. Her active part for the emancipation of women is revealed through her novels. She has portrayed the real sufferings of women through her female characters. They have been tortured by the patriarchal society. But they never lose their identity. And they fight for their own freedom. *Hostile sexism* means insulting or degrading women directly. Their feelings are never considered. The novelist is the keen observer of the society even before independence. Because she was born in British India, she knew the sufferings for freedom. That's why she needs the same equality and freedom for women, because they are refused to have the same freedom as men have in the

society. They are treated as secondary beings. Women are always insisted to follow men in various roles. They don't have rights to question men because men are treated as superior beings. Later sometime, women are given a few rights like education, voting, job opportunities etc. However, women have been treated as sexual objects. In outward they are given all rights. The female characters of this novel have suffered a lot because of the dominative attitude of males. Rose is used by Ram and threw out by his son Dev. Above statement is proved by the women and female kids' harassments. Many laws are passed to safeguard female children from such cruel acts, like Pocso Act which was enacted in 2012. However, it does not reduce the crimes against females. So, the punishments should become more severe. Then only, crimes may reduce.

**Keywords:** *Rich Like Us*, Feminism, Hostile sexism, Patriarchal society, Gender Inequality, Liberation for women.

### **Introduction**

*Rich Like Us* is a significant novel of Sahgal. The female characters of this novel Mona, Rose and Sonali represent the crucial position of Indian women. They are tormented by the male dominative society. Mona is the traditional housewife of a businessman Ram L. Surya. He handles his business in perfect manner. However, he fails in his happy life with Mona. She feels that herself is responsible for the bad things in her life. She never blames her husband. He has spent his time in search of sensual pleasures. But she felt sorry for her husband and who has been fasting for several reasons prays to God on behalf of her husband. Mona feels happy to convey the birth of their son. Meantime, he has been in London regarding a business. He does not feel that true bliss of becoming a father.

Mona is used by her husband as a home maker to his family and the child. He never worries about her feelings. Ram meets Rose in a chocolate shop in London forty-three years ago. He has fallen in love with her. She too loves him. She did not know about his previous life with Mona. "He was a man. He was rich. He was abroad. What more did she need to know?" (39). Rose fell in love with Ram and came with him to India. After the confirmation of her strong love, he casually reveals his first wife Mona and his newborn son. He never hesitates to speak. According to "Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us: A Thematic Analysis*",

Rose risks marrying Ram despite knowing that he is already married and comes to India with him. She saves Mona, Ram's first wife from suicide and in spite of their initial antagonism, soon develops friendly terms with her. The crippled beggar, completely neglected by the family is also helped by her. Her outspokenness and cockney bluntness make her unacceptable to her step-son Dev (Kaur 36).

Ram used to say that his religion allows him to marry several times. "And one afternoon he told her, in a natural everyday voice, that he had a wife and an infant child. Her

shock was so great she couldn't speak" (41-42). Sonali is the modern woman of Sahgal. She represents the pity of women and also political situation of that time. She is a civil servant and who never bends her head for others. Her father used to say that "Sonali, people like you, especially women like you, are going to Indianize India" (22).

Sonali is the friend of Rose, who is the English wife of Ram. Ram and Sonali's father are friends. Ram's son Dev through Mona wants to start a fizzy drink company called 'happyola'. He wants to start the company for his personal purpose. He wants to use it as a tool for the development of his business. Sonali does not give him permission for the factory. So, she is demoted to her own state. The political parties have played a lot in her life. Ravi Kachru replaces her from her post. But she does not lose her belief. Sonali's character is observed in "*Rich Like Us: A Note*" that,

Sonali, a sincere, senior civil servant, is pained to see the murder of democratic ideals. Her sudden apocalypse of her well-to-do grand parents', especially her grandmother's submission to sati-an evil social system- leaves her dumb- founded for some time (Arora 95).

Through Sonali many female deaths come into light because she has a chance to read her father's diary. That reveals the cruelty of male domination. Women are destroyed in the name of tradition. Dowry deaths happen only in the community of human beings. No animal kills another animal for its sophistication except human beings. The doctor of Sonali reveals his own life experience that,

The bride burnt to death by her in-laws not more than two miles from where I lived because her family could not satisfy their greedy demands for more dowry. She was one of three hundred such women burnt during one year in this our capital city (30).

Nothing is equal to life. But human beings fail to understand the fact. Women have been experiencing a living death everywhere in families, schools, working places and society. Women are always treated as secondary beings, and they are the dependent class to men in several roles.

Sonali's father happen to see his own mother's death. But he could not stop it. She had fallen into the fire. As a son, it had great impact in his life. He cannot tolerate the happenings around him. The relatives did not stop his mother. But they let her to die. The painful memory is rightly described in "Search into History: Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*" that,

The search into the past brings Sonali a painful memory of her great grandmother's sati act in her husband's funeral pyre. The event turns out as a revelation about her grand father who as a boy tried to save his mother from

the burning pyre. He dashes forward to the pyre, but he is stopped by two men. They boy wants to kill those men because they are murderers of his mother (Gaikwad 63).

A widow cannot remarry. It is an offensive thing. But a widower can marry several times as per his wish not minding about the feelings of women. To Rose, many years have passed in India with Ram. Now she is at the age of sixty-three. Suddenly, Ram had stroke and whose legs and hands were frozen. He remains bedridden. Without Ram, Rose is nothing in the house. She is childless. Her stepson Dev has already begun to take the money from the joint account of Ram and Rose. "I don't know what my legal rights are if anything happens to Ram" (51). Ram's family is a joint family. Rose does not have any peculiar rights on the family and the property.

Rose and Mona remained as good friends or sisters, once Rose has saved Mona from the fire accident. As women, each understands one another. Then after, they began to travel together in their life. But their husband's thirst is not stopped with Mona and Rose. When he feels bored with Rose finds another woman, that is his secretary.

This novel also deals with the important topic of child marriage and explores the plight of child widows. Both are cruel to explain. They do not know anything about marriage, but they are married. Child widows' fate is cruel one. The outward appearance of the child widow is with shaven headed, covered with grimy sarees. They are treated as bad omen.

The widows wait for the left-over food from the kitchen. These things have changed a little in the modern days. But they have not vanished. Even now remarriage of widows is questionable in the male dominant society. A woman should be a virgin and she has to control her feelings and emotions. She has no individual life other than husband and family. Women are always treated as dependent in the society. Even in the working places, the wages are different for men and women. Male kids are warmly welcomed by the parents than the female kids.

Mona is a silent sufferer through worshipping God. Ram spent his life with two wives, one on first floor and another on second floor. He does not worry about their feelings. He justifies his action. He explains about a man who has first wife and five children in the village and who lives with the second wife in town secretly. He said that "King Dasrath, Rama's father, had four wives," (63). Rose does not like to give birth to a child. Because herself has no proper identity and who does not like passing it to another generation. She hates to bear the name of miscarriage. Ram's thirst is not stopped with Mona and Rose. When he felt boredom with Rose, he finds Marcella is a altar. A woman is not an enemy for another woman. This statement comes true through the behaviour of Rose and Mona.

Mona has tried to kill herself. Rose has saved her. She doesn't let Mona to die. "She buried her face in her pillow blocking out the Jackals. Mona was only two years older than herself; she wouldn't die for years" (107). She wishes that three of them want to live long. Rose recollects her past. Her father has worked in a bottle factory. She has been engaged with Freddie. But her true love affair with Ram made her to come to India with him. Her parents opposed her love affair. But she sailed with him.

The act of suttee is an old practice in India. According to this, a wife has to throw herself in funeral fire of her husband. If she hesitates, the relatives will forcefully push her into death. Swamy Vivekananda considered that the burning of widows is considered the most barbarous thing in the world. Raja Ram Mohan Roy abolished it. Sonali is rightly described in "Cultural and Political in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*" that "Sonali represents the "good" India and also modern Indian womanhood. She combines the best of Indian tradition and modernity. She is aware of the evil in traditional Hinduism because of sati of her great grandmother" (Paranjape 139). Sonali has read many real stories from the diary of her father. He described about the death of Sonali's great grand-mother. A brahmin lady was forced by her relatives to lose her life in the funeral pile of her husband. But she tried to escape from the fire. However, the relatives made her to fall into fire again and again. Later, she was sent to the hospital. However, she lost her life after twenty hours of the medical help. Later, he describes the story of his mother. She wakes up early in the morning and has cold water bath and then prays for the good health of her husband. "She was a good wife, I used to think. But now I believe all wives are good because they have little choice" (160). His father suddenly died of stroke. It was a joint family. His mother wanted to save her son with the will because her husband's brother would inherit all the property. She confirmed a will to her son and let herself to die in the fire. No one stopped her. As a young boy, he didn't know the reason for her actions. So, generally a woman is a sacrifice for her family.

The participation of Rose is explained in "Female Protagonist in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*" that

Rose who appears to be quite emancipated is not really so and this becomes clear in her interaction with Ram, as well as with Dev, her stepson. Rose left her people, her country and even her self-respect at times for Ram, but she is far away from the experience of Government (Gayathri 25).

The friendship between Rose and Mona become stronger. They understand each other. Dev is grown up. Mona seeks for a daughter-in-law. She wants a beautiful, homely girl, with good social background. She represents the mindset of the people. Money determines many things in life. No one likes to find an equal partner but they need a slave to decorate their life. Ram runs towards Marcella. Rose is worried about Ram. She is not ready to lose her lover. "The only thing I couldn't bear in any circumstances would be a divorce" (245). Ram is now bedridden who cannot speak. Without Ram, Rose is nothing in the house.

Dev is totally against Rose. He begins to steal the amount from the joint account of Ram and Rose. She knows it but cannot do anything.

Dev shows violence on Rose. He said that “One of these days I’m going to break her neck.” (275) Rose shares her sufferings to her only friend Sonali. Rose helps a handless beggar. One day the body of Rose was found in the well. It is believed that Rose drank much in the party and became unsteady. And she has gone to the well in the dark, accidentally fell into the well. Dev set it as an accident. Her murder by her stepson Dev is a kind of act of Sati. Ram is in his death bed. He doesn’t know the happenings around him. Rose has left her parents for the love, but now she is dead.

Female is not against one another. Rose has saved Mona without selfishness. Mona too has accepted Rose as her sister. Mona prays to God for the welfare of her husband. Her fasting and prayers never changed her husband’s attitude. Ram behaves like a bee jumps from flower to flower. He jumps from Mona to Rose and then to Marcella. To him, a woman is a sexual object to please him and to take care of the family. His son Dev behaves harshly to his stepmother. Finally, he sets up a team to murder Rose. And he is not friendly to his wife Nishi. She belongs to the middle-class family. Even she cannot help her own father and family when they are in a problem. At that time Nishi’s father was arrested. There Rose accompanies Nishi to the prison to meet her father.

Dev is not ready to help his own father-in-law. Rose and Nishi maintain friendly relationship in the house. His richness never gives her happiness. Sonali’s friendship with Rose is a genuine one. Rose is an elder woman. But they share many things freely. Sonali’s demotion is a great shock to Rose. She knows the seriousness of the Happyola project. Sonali doesn’t give permission for the fizzy drink company. She is demoted and sent to her own state. As a woman, she is daring enough to face the society. Through her father’s diary, she reveals female deaths, dowry deaths and sati. Her explanation to the diary of her father is that it presents a fact about the condition of women.

The events in the diary give clear cut view of the pity of women before independence. Sonali is the modern educated woman of Sahgal. She faces many problems as sincere ICS officer. She is demoted with transfer. But finally, she stands strongly in her decision. She helps the handless beggar. Later, she guessed that Rose’s death is a murder organized by her stepson Dev. There is no one daring enough to question him. Females are always treated as a dependent class. They have to be a household object and not equal human being as man.

Sonali is the daughter of a civil servant Keshav Ranade. He has worked in the British India. His personal sufferings have given him a bitter experience. Through the flash back technique, Sahgal brings out the female sufferings with evidence. Sonali feels proud of her job to be a civil servant. She wants to serve like her father. She said that “My training had taught me to review good harmless products with care and the sellers of wares as the world’s

most relentless people” (25). That is why she refused to accept the proposal of fizzy drink called ‘Happyola’. That straight forwardness of Sonali made her to get demotion from her position. But she never worries about threatening of the popular personalities. She wants to serve the people. That fizzy drink will affect the health of the people. She felt that “I am sure the true explanation is that we are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth” (24). Being a woman, she couldn’t oppose the political personalities.

Her father wants her daughter to come over from the slavery of womanhood. He has tears in his eyes fifteen years ago when she passed her civil service examination. He has stressed the importance of female’s job and education. Her refusal for the fizzy drink proposal made her to feel about the society. Ravi Kachru is replaced in the position of Sonali because he is flexible with the political parties and businessmen. She understands the reality that “Twice ten can never make fifty. And Happyola cannot by any standards be a national necessity” (34).

Sonali’s demotion shows the real-life situation of that time. She is the good friend of Rose. Rose is an English wife of Ram. Rose shows her humanity in several ways like showing mercy for the beggar. Her kindness makes the beggar to have food regularly by her hands. Rose is also a true friend and faithful lover of Ram. She follows the Indian tradition of one-to-one life. She belongs to the British culture of free tradition. She has no limit to choose her husband. But she has converted herself to be a tradition-bound Indian wife. Female’s position is clearly described in “Feminist Concept: A Study of Nayantara Sahgal’s Fiction” as “Woman has always been dependent on man. The two sexes have not shared the world of reality” (Sinha 2).

## Conclusion

So, the women should be treated with concern and equality. They are not inferior to males by anyway. Almost all the fields are touched by women. They are not an object for criticism. But they are the human beings with equal emotions and feelings like men. A woman should be like Sonali of *Rich Like Us*. She has tolerated all the sufferings in her life as a woman and sincere civil servant.

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