

Societal Pleasure, Structural Chaos, and Alienation in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*

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Abstract: People in India are categorized into groups and classes based on a variety of factors, including caste, community, economic status, religion, and more. As a result, one segment of society starts dominating the other. The dominant groups create inequity and injustice against the voiceless. As a result, they lose their identity, cultural heritage, and moral rights. The Indian Emergency of the 1970s, which caused a serious political crisis in the nation, serves as the setting for Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*. The theme presented in the novel is the concept that consumerism has the potential to make developing countries wealthy. Sahgal reveals how materialism and the delusion of progress enable the ruling class to pursue luxury and wealth, which ultimately undermines social fairness and democratic ideals. This paper attempts to bring forth the scenarios of societal pleasure that lead to structural disorder and alienation in the novel.

Keywords: Alienation, Consumerism, Emergency, Materialism, Democracy

Introduction

The historic achievement of independence was tainted by the disastrous partition of 1947. The writers of that period portrayed the traumatic impacts of partition, including widespread migration and brutal massacres, in their literary works. East-West conflict, multiculturalism, social realism, gender issues, ecological concerns, and diasporic works were commonly discussed by post-independence writers. Eventually, Indian English writing received unswerving praise on a national and international level. Indian women writers have contributed to the literature as their male counterparts. They have added a fresh viewpoint to Indian literature. Many female authors published plays, poetry, short stories, and novels. Sarojini Naidu, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shobhaa De, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, Nayantara Sahgal, and numerous others are notable Indian women authors in Indian English literature. The evolution of Indian writing in English was greatly influenced by their varied themes and narrative strategies.

The writings of Nayantara Sahgal have a solid, realistic foundation and reflect not just her own ideas but also the changing ideals of a society that is gaining independence and authority for the first time. Her compositions have a strong autobiographical foundation because they are also influenced by her personal experiences. Through her female characters, she also expresses her femininity. Her writings also discuss women's struggle for sexual liberty and self-actualization. She frequently discusses marital problems, conflicts arising from ego or submissiveness of women in society. *A Time to Be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Plans for Departure* (1985), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Mistaken Identity* (1988), *Lesser Breeds* (2003), *When the Moon Shines by Day* (2017), *The Fate of Butterflies* (2019) are her significant contributions to literature.

Research Questions

1. How does Nayantara Sahgal portray societal pleasure in the novel?

2. What is the structural Chaos during the period of Emergency?
3. Who is affected by societal pleasure and structured Chaos?
4. How does alienation reflect in the lives of the affected people?

Research Methodology

The study attempts to understand the societal pleasure, confusion, and alienation that the author depicts against the backdrop of the Indian Emergency. This study uses qualitative, analytical textual analysis of Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*. The study uses post-colonialism and sociopolitical viewpoints in addition to feminist literary theory to analyze the characters. Secondary sources include journal articles, theses, and critical essays on post-colonial studies, feminism, Nayantara Sahgal, and Indian writing in English. The study investigates the connection between political corruption, patriarchal systems, and women's estrangement in the novel.

Review of Literature

Nayantara Sahgal is a significant writer in Indian literature in English. Her sharp depiction of sociopolitical reality is well-known. Her novel *Rich Like Us* earned the Sahitya Akademi Award and was praised by academics for its portrayal of the 1975–1977 Indian Emergency. Numerous reviewers have analysed the novel from post-colonial, feminist, political, and historical angles and from a feminist perspective.

In the article "Nayantara Sahgal's Sextet: From A Time to Be Happy to Rich Like Us," Lakshmi Sinha observes that Sahgal's novels include political consciousness in her literary works that is real and not merely a political theme. Jasbir Jain in the *Preface to Nayantara Sahgal* (1978) calls Sahgal a political novelist in Indian English Literature. He adds that her works have strong realistic nuances that include not only her personal observation but also the condition of a nation that is experiencing freedom for the first time. Asha Choubey points out the dual focus in *Preface to The Fictional Milieu of Nayantara Sahgal* (2002). She remarks that Sahgal's novels include the representation of both the world of politics and the personal world of the man-woman relationship. A. V. Krishna Rao, in *Nayantara Sahgal: A Study of Her Fiction and Non-Fiction* (1976), observes that Sahgal's novels are influenced by political liberalism, Gandhian idealism, cultural pluralism, and economic moderation. Shankar. G and Kamaraj. L made a critical study on social realism and psychological transformations of women protagonists in Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi*. Hitesh Rani and Joginder Singh made a study using feminist theories in Sahgal's novels. Md. Muzammil Hussain carried out a study to delineate the development of female characters and their mentality in breaking their bondage in Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*.

Several studies have been carried out on Sahgal's novels from a feminist perspective, with ideas from Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, etc., suitably applied. Although extensive research has been conducted on Sahgal's works, most of them have focused on feminism and political criticism. The current study approaches the author with an observation of identifying societal pleasure, chaos, and alienation in the novel *Rich Like Us*. It observes that these elements are interrelated and collectively shape the characters in the novel. The study reveals Sahgal's critique of corrupt politics, patriarchy, and injustice within the family structure.

Analysis

Sahgal reveals the Emergency abuses that occurred while Indira Gandhi was India's prime minister in *Rich Like Us*. Sahgal found it incomprehensible that the people of the nation had to live under an emergency due to a few dishonest politicians. The monarch had a great deal of power because of the emergency, including the power to imprison anyone who dared to oppose the government. Sahgal accuses Mrs. Gandhi of enforcing censorship, imprisoning political opponents, and initiating a forced sterilization campaign. The Allahabad High Court found

Mrs. Gandhi guilty of electoral misconduct, and she was disqualified from holding or contesting public office for six years.

The following morning, Mrs. Gandhi proclaimed a state of emergency across the nation and ordered the arrest of all opposition leaders. The Prime Minister ruled over the defenseless and freedom-loving people, and there was fear and commotion everywhere. National unity and consciousness were subordinated to provisional identities and preferences. In actuality, this constitutes the fundamental framework of *Rich Like Us*. In *Rich Like Us*, Nayantara Sahgal explores the administration style of her aunt, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, demonstrating her strong sense of public duty. She expresses her disapproval of a number of the government's policies at the time throughout the novel. She uses these lines to convey her disappointment: "With Mrs. Gandhi this atmosphere, along with the political structures it involved, the climate of debate and dissent it had encouraged began to be eroded." (RLU,1)

Newman, a Western businessman, in the novel says, "We can't blame them for wanting to live like us. Besides, it's what makes them ready to buy what we have to sell" (RLU, 9). These lines reflect the Western capitalist and ethnocentric mindset of Western countries that perceive the newly independent countries. Westerners assume that the privileged population of the newly independent nations will emulate the Western standard of luxury and status. These lines also show the financial motivations of Westerners who believe that the appreciation of the Western way of life by indigenous people presents a bigger chance to increase the marketplace for their goods. Instead of viewing the citizens of their home countries as partners, they view them as consumers. By demonstrating how Western consumerism affects postcolonial nations, Sahgal challenges this ideology. She also illustrates how, even after gaining political independence, cultural alienation, socioeconomic reliance, and uneven power relations result from blindly copying Western ideals.

The construction of the Happyola factory's building serves as a symbolic representation of political power corruption. The factory introduces a new consumer culture in India that is fascinated by Western brands in an attempt to brand the American soft drink Coca-Cola. The primary goal of Coca-Cola branding is to conceal the illicit production of engines and replacement parts. This political conspiracy exposes the dishonest behavior of those in positions of authority. Instead of acting in the public interest, powerful politicians and bureaucrats engage in illegal activities for their own personal gain. Sahgal courageously reveals the indulgence of influential persons such as Devikin, Sanjay Gandhi, and the bureaucrat Ravi.

The Emergency serves as the novel's backdrop, but it also portrays the plight of women who experience injustice, treachery, and persecution. The main character of the novel, Sonali, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, is shown as a self-reliant, educated woman who opposes both political and patriarchal oppression. Another important character is Rose, a British woman who starts dating an Indian businessman who is already married to Mona. Through these important figures, Nayantara Sahgal examines the challenges faced by women in the post-colonial age. In the article "Politics and Personal Relationships," Ramesh Chadha observes that, "along with the political themes, Sahgal also portrays the modern Indian woman's search for individual freedom and self-realisation" (261). In addition, Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1976) argues that "... is the birthright priority whereby males rule females... This is because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy." (25)

Sahgal wants educated women to give a new shape to independent India, and so she speaks through the character Sonali. She speaks through Sonali's father as, "Women like you are going to Indianise India" (RLU, 22). Sahgal presents women as active participants in politics, business management, and social life because she does not wish to limit them to home responsibilities. Through Sonali, she spreads the idea that women are just as capable of constructing nations. Through their moral rectitude and knowledge, they can preserve democratic values in times of political turmoil. The phrase "Indianise India" emphasizes developing a prudent, culturally grounded country rooted in local values, rather than merely referring to the end of British control.

Sonali holds a prominent position in the Indian Administrative Service in the Ministry of Industry, where she is subject to intense political pressure. She does not compromise her values for her own interests and is steadfast in her commitment to ethical governance despite pressure. She also declines to abuse her power for the benefit of powerful politicians. But she is troubled by the bureaucratic abuses and corruption that have permeated the entire administrative structure. Instead of merely serving as a political weapon in the government, she thinks public servants should continue to be resolute in carrying out their duties honestly and serving the country with integrity. Her direct approach makes her the subject of political reprisals. She is transferred and given administrative punishment without any previous notice. She gets victimized because of her professional ethics. Sahgal sheds light on how democratic norms are being undermined under the Emergency, leading to the marginalization of honest government servants by dishonest politicians and bureaucrats. She says, "I hadn't merely been transferred without warning, I had been demoted, punished and humiliated and I had no inkling why?" (RLU, 27)

Sonali's adherence to ethical governance leads to the rejection of an American multinational company's carbonated soft drink called "Happyola." She discovers flaws in the project and declines to approve it. Her career has been jeopardized by her commitment to maintaining administrative integrity. Neuman seeks to convince Sonali that the project would significantly boost economic growth and increase the company's operations in Asia. She replies, "designed towards self-reliance, producing infancy goods but ours" (RLU, 26). According to Sonali, a country can only advance if its domestic industries are bolstered. She does not want the nation's development to be dependent on foreign companies. Her program is in line with the plan to develop a self-sufficient economy to strengthen the country. She later realizes that because of her vision and directness, the entire political establishment is against her. She gets demoted without warning as a result of her continued refusal to approve the soft drink project. Sonali then steps down from her position. Sonali shows herself to be a strong individual who opposes the corruption that has crept into the bureaucratic system. She questions the deeply ingrained corruption in the system. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997) states that, "Woman herself recognises that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it and still dominate it today are men." (609).

Nayantara Sahgal depicts women's challenges because of the dominating segments of society and their disparate situations across generations. Even though Sonali is a modern woman with a successful career, she is alienated in a corrupt, male-dominated world. In such a culture, the status of women in earlier decades seems unthinkable. They may have experienced great adversity in their life. Sahgal uses Sonali's great-grandmother's suffering to highlight the challenging circumstances that women experience across generations. Sonali remembers how the practice of Sati led to her grandmother being carried against her will to her husband's funeral pyre and burned alive. The patriarchal and religious orthodoxy imposed inhumane social practices in the name of devotion. Sonali questions Sati, "socially enforced suicide and may be defined as a murder. Even if satis were not illegal, murder is illegal, but the Government will not lift a finger against those murderers" (RLU, 151). Sahgal makes it clear that the patriarchal system still alienates and suppresses women by contrasting the disparate experiences of her grandma and herself. While Sonali is sidelined both professionally and mentally by crooked politics, her grandmother suffers physical violence in the name of customs. Through these identical experiences, Sahgal reveals the structural turmoil and social pressure that have been established among the dominant segments of society, ultimately harming women in the name of caste and gender.

Spivak takes an extra mile to question the status of subaltern women in such a society because, along with discrimination, caste discrimination was also severe in society. He says, "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak... as female is even more deeply in shadow." (81). He adds that subalterns can speak, but there is nobody to listen to them. He also comments that when Sati was abolished by the British government, "White



men saving brown women from brown men” (93). Lata Mani points out that “Super slave or Super human, women in this discourse remain eternal victims.” (97)

Sahgal also highlights the vulnerability of women from lower social classes. In the novel, she denounces power abuse and sexual assault. Numerous stories involving the rape and murder of female labourers by dishonest businesspeople and police officers are exposed. Sahgal highlights that the relationship between political authority, power, and the law causes women to struggle. A beggar in the novel depicts the situation of women, “She was the only one still clothed and standing. The others lay like overlapping corpses on the ground” (RLU,146). These incidents in the novel illustrate the fundamental chaos that permeates society, depriving the weak of justice and subjecting them to systematic mistreatment. Sahgal expresses the influence of men in society using Sonali’s words. She says, “I think he (Ravi) said that because he was a man. He had never fought a battle for freedom” (RLU, 123). Sahgal condemns this kind of unequal socialization that perpetuates patriarchal values across generations and demands women’s subordinate position in society. Sahgal points out the remarks of Ram that “My son had to be spoken in holy whisper. Never mind if he hijacked cars for fun, Boys will be boys.” (RLU, 205). Sahgal asserts that alienation is a result of repressive social systems rather than a personal feeling through these allusions. Women are typically marginalized, and they face severe repression. In addition, they are cut off from human rights, security, and dignity.

Nayantara Sahgal shows how women’s subjugation is not limited by geography or culture. Whether in the West or the East, women are still at risk in patriarchal societies. To marry Ram, Rose calls off her engagement to Freddie. She is completely astonished, though, when Ram discloses that he is already married. She asks, “How can we get married when you're married?” (RLU,42). He replies, “ My religion lets a man have more than one wife” (RLU, 42). Ram tries to legitimize privilege for men in India by referring to the cultural and religious traditions. This demonstrates how men may emotionally and socially control women. Despite coming from a distinct cultural background, she experiences the same gender-based discrimination. Rose feels neglected by her own husband’s family and cut off from her native country. She consequently finds it difficult to define herself in a strange setting. By doing this, Sahgal demonstrates how patriarchal structures and social pressure continue to alienate women regardless of their ethnic origin.

The emotional and psychological effects of patriarchal privileges in the marriage system are revealed by the author. Ram’s first wife, Mona, is forced to accept her husband’s choice to wed Rose. This demonstrates how patriarchal society requires women to bear with men’s behaviour in silence. In addition, Rose feels guilty about upsetting Mona by being married to Ram. She is stuck in a relationship that is based on deceit. Rose’s misery increases when she discovers that Ram has cheated on Marcella. This exposes Ram’s tendency to objectify women and his incapacity to maintain a relationship with a single spouse. He only travels with ladies to satisfy his bodily demands. When he starts dating Rose, he is not concerned about Mona, his first wife. Additionally, he acts in the same way when he begins dating Marcella. When Rose questions his infidelity, he says, “It would be a separation, not a divorce, and she would have everything she wanted. He had to be himself” (RLU, 228). This shows his self-centered attitude and how he equates money with women’s emotions. He believes financial compensation will be a right deed for his neglect and betrayal. Beauvoir states, “Since a wife is his property like a slave, a beast of burden, or a chattel, a man can naturally have as many wives as he pleases; polygamy is limited only by economic considerations” (114). Ram’s pleasure-seeking mindset so suppresses and alienates both Rose and Mona. They fall prey to the patriarchal system’s exploitation of women's dignity.

Findings

According to the study, *Rich Like Us* by Nayantara Sahgal is a potent critique of the patriarchal social structure and post-independence political reality of the Emergency. The following are the study areas' main conclusions:

1. The pleasure-creating factors that cause chaos in the public sphere are patriarchal traditions, gender stereotypes, and social orders.
2. The strain and instability typically harm and alienate women and the weaker segments of society.
3. Women are treated as sexual objects irrespective of their geographical boundaries even after independence.
4. Patriarchy is certain that women should not receive equal and respectful treatment.
5. Women in the past and in the present face the same challenges.
6. Education and economic independence of women are least respected by patriarchy.
7. Marriage is an institution that provides unequal power relations.
8. Historical oppression continues in modern ways.
9. The author advocates social justice and democratic values
10. Respect and freedom for an individual are more important than political reforms.

Limitations and Scope of the study

1. The study is limited to the textual analysis of the author's *Rich Like Us* and does not include other novels.
2. The study mainly focuses on the primary and secondary sources and does not include interviews or other empirical data.
3. The study has done a thematic analysis and does not include narrative techniques and stylistic analysis.
4. The study focuses only on the major characters of the novel and does not include other minor characters.
5. These limitations provide a scope for more comprehensive research in the future.

Conclusion

The analysis in the study shows how Nayantara Sahgal depicts society's sociopolitical situation in the novel. The dominant segment of society has always attempted to repress the weaker segments throughout human history. Its pleasure-seeking and autocratic views primarily affect women. They are frequently repressed in the name of custom and culture. Additionally, guys take advantage of them emotionally and physically. It is evident from this study that males treat women equally regardless of their geographic origins. They claim that women are merely objects of physical amusement. It is impossible to imagine the difficulties faced by women from lower castes. Sahgal denounces society's evils like prejudice, crooked politics, gender-biased violence, sati, and polygamy in this book. She reveals how women are severely impacted, repressed, and alienated by all these wicked behaviors.

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