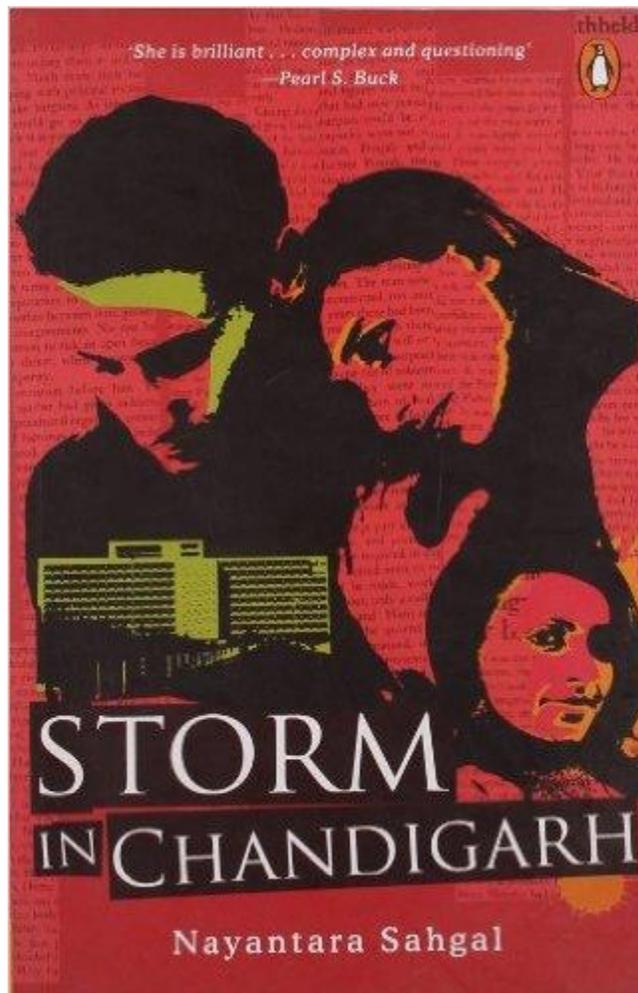


Feministic Perspectives in *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Rich Like Us*

M. Kartheeswari, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.



Abstract

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the distinguished Indo-English writers who write in the stream of national consciousness. The novels of Nayantara Sahgal deal with a wide array of themes ranging from personal quandary and problems, joys and sorrows, fulfilment and frustrations of female protagonists to the political upheavals that India has experienced since Independence. Her fiction is pre-occupied with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. The paper titled "Feministic Perspectives in *Storm in Chandigarh*

and *Rich Like Us*” deals with complex human relationships. It portrays the development of feminist consciousness, which is clearly apparent from the character analysis of three mismatched couples. The paper also deals with the problems that the contemporary women face in the society. It also concentrates on the two types of women. *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with marital as well as political crises. In this novel characters come close to each other but without any emotional attachment and sincerity. There is no sensitiveness or loyalty in their relationship; it is just for time being. In *Rich Like Us*, there is also a juxtaposition of two worlds, the personal world of man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. It presents the problems that the contemporary women face in the society and in their struggle towards self-realization. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* stands for the emerging woman of India who refuses to remain silent and submissive. Mona in *Rich Like Us* is a symbol of docile woman who remains suppressed till the end of her life.

Keywords: Nayantara Sahgal, *Storm in Chandigarh*, *Rich Like Us*, mismatched couples, marital as well as political crises, contemporary women, lack of loyalty.

Global Idea of Feminism

The global idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect, and social rights. In general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing. Feminists point out that in most cultures throughout history men have received more opportunities than women. The term ‘feminism’ was derived from the Latin word ‘Femina’ meaning ‘woman’ and was first used with regard to the issues of equality and Women’s Rights Movement.

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies which share a common stated aim: to define, establish, and defend equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminism is a philosophy that fights against such definitions of masculine and feminine, and aims at placing women in a just perspective.

Nayantara Sahgal’s Feminist Writing

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Nayantara Sahgal is also a successful figure of Feminist Writing. She beautifully probes the psyche of her women characters to reveal the trauma, insecurity and agony that lies beneath the gloss and glitter of modern life. She reveals her feminine sensibility more overtly in her choice of characters and concerns than in her style and language. She has tried to depict women suffering due to sexist bias in patriarchal society and she envisions a world which should be based on equality and harmony between the two sexes.

Nayantara Sahgal shows women suffering in marriage-life and then deciding to come out of the suffocating bondage by preferring for divorce. She depicts her women deciding to prefer divorce rather than live a stifling life of injustice and agony. Her women characters leave their husbands or break the marriage which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. Sahgal's heroines represent the emergence of 'New Woman' in India. Quest for female identity and emotional fulfillment are the major motifs of her novels.

Sahgal, in her novels, presents three generations of married couples. The first generation of couples feels satisfied in seeking happiness within the precincts of their marriage. The wives in this group willingly or unwillingly accept a tradition-bound world where their entire devotion is directed to their husbands and families. In the second generation, the wife manages to escape out of the world of her husband when she feels it uncongenial to her. But she cannot think of a divorce, as the separation may cause a scandal. In the third generation, the wife expects her husband to get himself adjusted to her emotional world and when he does not, she hesitates not to step out of his world which happens to be narrow and unfamiliar to her.

Storm in Chandigarh

Sahgal's novel *Storm in Chandigarh* presents a scathing protest against the denial of freedom and individuality to woman. Sahgal's concept of a free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom. Through her novel, she tries to put forward the view that in the modern society, woman should not be seen in the stereotypical passive roles of a sex object or as the one who is fit only to manage home chores and children without any self identify of her own. For the smooth functioning of family and the society at large, woman needs to be seen as man's equal and honoured partner. In her novel, Nayantara Sahgal, "pleads for the new marital morality

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based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centredness” (Lone, 1).

Nayantara Sahgal though never claimed to be a feminist yet her *Storm in Chandigarh* portrays the development of feminist consciousness in her, which is clearly apparent from the character analysis of three mismatched couples- Vishal and Leela, Inder and Saroj, and Jit and Mara. Saroj, the chief protagonist a “.... bright girl with a college degree,” (SIC 166) was born and brought up in a liberal atmosphere of prosperous family but she could not find the same atmosphere at her husband’s home.

Theme of the Novel – Violence and Feminism

The theme of the novel is violence, not necessarily an obvious physical violence, but an invisible and the more subtle form of violence. Saroj’s pre-marital relationship becomes the cause of failure of their marriage. Saroj, the female protagonist in the novel is married to Inder who runs the textile mills of Saroj’s cousin Nikhil Ray’s company in Chandigarh. There is no emotional communion between Saroj and Inder. In the novel, Saroj emerges as a victim of male tyranny and chauvinism. She fears rather than loves her husband.

Saroj

According to Inder, Saroj was just a wife to satisfy his physical needs and a mother to take care of the children. To Inder, “A wife was one half of an enterprise, the complement partner who presided over home and children and furthered her husband’s career” (SIC 53). Inder treats his wife, Saroj, very callously. As a result of Inder’s ill-treatment she feels unhappy and is unable to find reciprocal involvement in her marriage. He considers Saroj to be a wrongdoer. He snaps his emotional relations with her. He leaves her alone emotionally. Saroj feels much disturbed as her husband uses her as a tool to gratify his sexual lust.

Saroj’s quest for communication and sharing naturally leads her towards Vishal, whom she finds more understanding and considerate. Saroj who longs for “the oxygen of understanding” (SIC 220) finds it in her friendship with Vishal Dubey, a liaison officer, who has come to settle the political problem between the Chief Ministers of Chandigarh and Haryana and

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develops a cordial relationship. Saroj who longs for “the oxygen of understanding” (SIC 220) finds it in her relationship with Dubey who instills in her the value of emancipation during the long walks together. Being attracted by Saroj’s childlike innocence, Dubey draws himself emotionally close to her. She finds his company restful, soothing and comforting. He is her kind of person, a person who believes that the truth between two people reduces the heartbreak and a lot of loneliness of living.

Vishal

Sahgal portrays Vishal as a contrast to Inder. Undoubtedly Vishal is the author’s own voice as Sahgal seems to support the issue of feminism through his character. He is introduced as a true counselor of Saroj. In Vishal’s company she feels much relieved and relaxed from the tension, suffocation and tiresome routine and repetition of life. He makes her aware about the new avenues of life. Whenever she feels herself trapped in the puzzles of life, Vishal’s words encourages her to take further step. Coming under the influence of Dubey, Saroj begins to protest against Inder’s authoritarian ways and consequently, she is manhandled and abused meanwhile. Saroj’s bold reply “I like to talk to him, [...]. He’s a good man” (SIC193) infuriates Inder who thrashes her not only with words but also with blows. Saroj’s turns a deaf ear to all her husband’s frantic admonitions. Soon the situation worsens and Saroj decides to leave Inder’s home forever asserting her individuality.

Ideal Relationship between a Man and a Woman

The ideal relationship between a man and a woman is exemplified by Vishal Dubey_ Saroj relationship in the novel. Through the character of Saroj, Sahgal evinces that women no longer would bear physical and mental cruelty and torture. Saroj, a mother of two and seven months pregnant, leaves her husband’s home when he beats her for no reason, at least for no fault of her own. She raised her consciousness against her husband’s tyranny, and protests, “That’s humiliating like being at the mercy of a tyrant” (Singh, Kaptan 3). Her friend Vishal Dubey raises her self confidence and reveals new avenues of life before her and she takes a timely decision to walk out of marriage.

Mara

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The next female protagonist, Sahgal's typical modern girl, Mara, has been portrayed as a contrast to Saroj. Mara, up to some extent exposes the characteristics of 'Newly Born Woman'. Jit and Mara also suffer from a similar dilemma. They are a childless couple who suffer from emotional void in their life. Mara and Jit stand in sharp contrast to Saroj and Inder.

Jit is always in a state of readiness to dance to her tune. In spite of all his sincere efforts, Mara fails to have emotional satisfaction with Jit. She is torn between marriage and passion. Mara's problem is not physical but psychological. The search for communication makes Mara come towards Inder. In the initial period of their affair, both Inder and Mara experience fulfillment and happiness. For the first time, Inder realizes that love does not just mean sex rather it means involvement.

On the other hand, Mara in spite of having a loving and considerate husband in the being of Jit, gets drifted towards Inder because she wanted, best of both the worlds- the hardness of Inder and softness of Jit. Her arguments with Inder are really considerable. Their relationship comes to an end when the understanding dawns on Mara that there is some part of Inder which she could never fully know inspite of her best efforts. She makes Inder realize a bitter truth, "She is your wife all right and she has borne your children, but she is not your woman and you are not her man: she flies from you apparently in search of comfort you cannot give her" (SIC 109). By that time, Jit also realizes that there is something lacking in their relationship and makes an attempt to come closer to her. Jit helped Mara to come out of the emotional jungle by talking to her of an unhappy experience of his own. The realization makes them be reconciled and remain true to each other.

New Found Courage

In the end, Saroj emerges with a new found courage and plans to go with her children to New Delhi for her confinement at the suggestion of Dubey. Saroj leaves home with extreme reluctance when riots break out in Chandigarh. It is only for saving her children and the third expected child in the womb that Saroj decides to move to Delhi. By moving out of Inder's house, she moves out of the virtuous stereotype which consigns a woman to perpetual humiliation and denies her self-expression. Saroj leaves Inder apparently to start life afresh with Dubey who

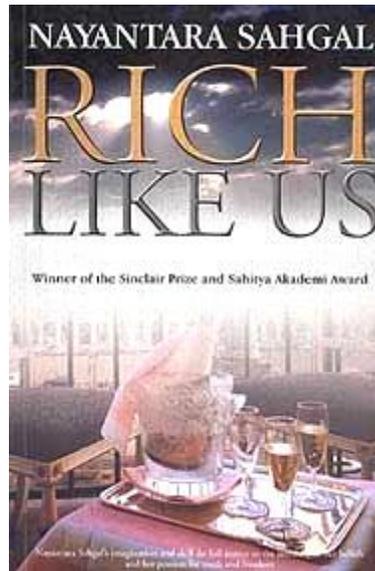
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understands her delicate sentiments and emotional needs. Saroj stands for the emerging woman of India who refuses to remain silent and submissive like conventional 'Pativratas' in marriage.

Rich Like Us



In *Rich Like Us*, Nayantara Sahgal renders a living picture of the oppressed, depressed and suppressed life of women in India. In this novel, there is also a juxtaposition of two worlds, the personal world of man-woman relationship and the impersonal world of politics. In this novel, she reflects the tension between the predicament of the contemporary Indian woman and the traditional Hindu culture. She studies the social forces working on the psychology of the Indian woman.

In *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal tries to make the narrative look more than merely a story of a woman by referring to Hinduism and Christianity and contemporary political scene. There are three women characters who dominate the plot of the novel. They are Rose, Mona and Sonali. These three women were of different nature and upbringing. However they were similar in one aspect, that is, their courage to face things. Sahgal presents man-woman relationship between Sonali and Ravi, Ram and Mona, Ram and Rose, Mona and Rose, Ram and Marcella, and Dev and Rose. Actually, love-hate relationship proposes human beings towards the doors of shameless compromise with the vigilant consciousness and severe compulsion.

Ram

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Ram is one of the chief characters, who take pride in possessing fanciful goods like European finery and imported goods. This taste has a symbolic reference to his character. He is extravagant even in possessing wives; in the place of one he has three. One from India (Mona), another from U.K (Rose), and another one from Europe (Marcella). When Rose seeks for a Divorce, he says that the Hindu marriage is sacred and it does not permit a divorce. It is ironical that despite his name being Ram, he violates the sanctity of the marriage by not being loyal to his wife. He lacks values and morals and has very trivial and superficial perceptions of things. He is not able to apply his discretion for good and bad.

Ram belongs to an orthodox Indian family. He has a wife Mona, who is a pious orthodox and purely Indian traditional and cultured lady. Mona is a wife to her husband. Here too the devotion of a wife towards her husband is that which keeps the family bond intact. She observes prayers, bhajans and fasting for the welfare and long life of Ram. Mona is the example of a typical Hindu woman who dares not raise a voice against any action of her husband. When Ram brings home his second wife, Rose, she does not utter a single word against his action but weeps in silence. In spite of raising her voice, she keeps a fast and holds prayers to thank God for his safe return:

Rose and Mona

The first one Rose remembered was the elaborate prayer chanted in thanks giving by Mona's priest for Ram's sake. And then Mona's voice instructing servants hurrying between kitchen and backyard, directing the feeding of beggar once a week, the voice of the mistress of the house, whoever else might be in it. The week had another day when the mistress fasted for her husband's long life and prosperity. And apart from Mona's fasts and prayers, there were Mona's loud insistent tears. (Chander 80)

Mona had delivered a male baby. When Dev was born, Ram was in England for business purpose. There he came in contact with a cockney English girl Rose. He brought her home and Rose lived in upstairs. Rose and Mona never met each other. Rose never interfered with Mona, though she ascertained her rights over Ram, as his wife. Rose could understand the feelings of Mona and felt pity for her and sometimes even guilty, for which she was not wholly responsible.

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She realized that, Ram had done a great mistake by marrying her, when Mona was already his wife and his son's mother. The only thing that she could not bear with was, Ram living with her as well as Mona. However, these two ladies kept going on a critical balance.

Mona and Rose are the co-wives of Ram. The two ladies, Mona and Rose become puppets in the hands of a man called, Ram. Ram, already married and with a newborn child in India, is found free to court Rose in England. Only when he is assured of her deep love for him, he announces that he is already married. He later goes to the extent of marrying Rose even though Mona, her first wife, is in the same house. In the license of husband, he played with their feelings and emotions according to his whims and fancies, unmindful of their self. However, they remain his wives, keeping the culture and at the same time guarding their individuality and dignity.

Mona, the legal wife of Ram, and the lady of the household was badly humiliated and hurt by her husband, a heartless male. Mona was very much shattered by the arrival of Ram with a second wife. Mona, for him is meant for looking after his son and house while Rose is to shower love and attention on him. The war between Rose and Mona is the reflection of India's trouble and turmoil that India went through during Quit India Movement and Partition.

Rose was an intruder, a usurper in Mona's home. She feels that Rose has taken her husband away from her. And the cold war goes between Rose and Mona. Rose could understand it as: "a natural enough reaction to an intruder, a usurper" (Gupta 178). When the conflict between Rose and Mona was at a high degree, there came Marcella like sprinkle of cold water on a hot glass. Ram spent more time with Marcella. He returned home late at nights. There was no communication between Ram and Rose for weeks, leave alone Mona.

Ram, Mona and Rose

Earlier Ram shows consideration to Mona though he had a second wife Rose, living upstairs. But now he was not even aware of Mona's existence. This type of treatment by a man was too much for a soft natured submissive wife like Mona. Mona, a victim of bigamy feels wretched and could not bear the sight of Rose in her home. Although initially Rose and Mona

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could not accept each other and Rose in her heart of hearts wished Mona dead, later we find that they accept each other as sisters and Rose saved her life when she tried to commit suicide:

Mona sat cross-legged, her eyes closed, a band of flame advancing up her cotton sari, consuming it soundlessly while she submitted to the inevitable like a woman in disciplined child birth, her short agonized gasps barely audible. Rose dragged the cover off her bed with Kumar's help, wrapped it round Mona's struggling body and got her out of the room. (Chander 84)

After this incident Rose does not hate Mona, rather she sits "in front of her long delayed breakfast telling herself she was carrying fancy too far, only there was no denying that houses breathe in and out, sighs sink into the walls and walls exhale them" (RLU 175). This incident also changes Mona's attitude towards Rose. She starts appreciating her and welcomes her with her heart saying: "We are sisters" (RLU 175). They become good friends and mutually run the house and are living examples of two women being agonized by one man. Rose considers Dev, Mona's son, as her own and Dev too calls Mona Mama, and Rose Mummy.

Now Rose understands Mona and Mona understand Rose. The wall between them broke and they realize that they are two boats sailing but on the same river. Rose could feel what would have been Mona's feelings, when she came with Ram. Now Rose was on the position of Mona, due to Marcella's arrival in her life.

Mona was affected by cancer and she was awaiting death shortly. Ram never paid heed to Mona's sufferings in his 'Marcella fever'. Rose was the only agent of solace to Mona. When it was her last minutes of life, Mona deliberately passed on the anxieties of her motherliness on Dev, to Rose. She vested all her wishes and feelings into Rose. Mona now confides everything with Rose. While dying of cancer she asks Rose to take care of her son and daughter-in-law. Until her death she remained a devoted wife to Ram, though her heart made hardened into a stone by the treachery of Ram. To M.L. Malhotra: "If Nayantara's women characters have any passion, it is the longing to be free, freedom from all restraints in word and deed, being their

monomania. One and all they want to be fully alive and themselves.... No taboos or inhibitions!” (Singh 68).

Relationship IS Bilateral

Nayantara Sahgal expresses her views that any relationship cannot be maintained by one person alone and that women need not make continuous sacrifices in order to please men or rather husbands. She admonishes that this is the high time for women to realize their rightful place in marriage and that both the partners stand on equal level in marriage. She also believes that if honesty and sincerity is significant in marriage, this is utmost important for a person to be true to oneself.

Thus, in Sahgal’s novels, as the women’s quest for identity and social conventions are at cross-roads, they have to face many problems, conflicts, frustrations and inner stress in their married lives through which the individuals mature and eventually find a stable identity of their own. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* strives hard for constructive and meaningful relationship with their men demanding mutual understanding and involvement. Having failed in her attempts, as a liberated woman she flees from her bitter survival to better survival. Mona is a symbol of docile woman who remains suppressed till the end of her life. She never has the attitude to question if anything happens against her. She accepts whatever life has offered her. She never protests against her oppressor.

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